SPACE TO GROW:





indoor/outdoor settings

Guidance for creating high-quality experiences and opportunities for children in indoor/outdoor settings



We worked closely with the children and staff of many settings to develop this document. The children of Nethermains Primary School Nursery in Falkirk, shared some of their thoughts about being involved:

"When we were outside we were building an ice cream shop. We had visitors who came to see us and we told the visitor that she could come back for an ice cream when the shop was built. We had to get some wood and used a saw to cut it and we had to use a hammer and a nail to build up the ice cream shop. One of the other visitors was taking pictures probably to show her mummy what nursery is like. We hope the visitor comes back when it is sunny for ice cream. She said she would come back. Sometimes our ice cream shop changes and it is another shop or a café. We will make it an ice cream shop again when the visitor comes back so she can get ice cream."

Leigha Penman and Orla Grimes of Nethermains Primary School Nursery suggested the name of the document should be – Catching Rainbows. The children thought this would be a good name as the rainbow is important to them as it means everything is within reach if you give it your best. The rainbow is part of the nursery motto which is "Inside every child is a rainbow waiting to shine".





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FOREWORD

by Care Inspectorate Chief Executive Peter MacLeod



The Care Inspectorate has developed this improvement support resource on behalf of the Scottish Government. It is important to try and ensure that providers and other stakeholders understand the criteria of an indoor/outdoor setting to help with expansion plans and for those who are looking to make improvements in their setting. The resource is a tool to be used in conjunction with Space to Grow, Out to Play, My World Outdoors and the Practice Note: Early Learning and Childcare: Delivering High Quality Play and Learning Environments Outdoors. It aims to provide additional detail and support for those considering developing indoor/outdoor settings.

In keeping with our values of being inclusive and collaborative, I am particularly delighted that children have been involved in developing this improvement resource. Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) entitlement in Scotland has almost doubled to 1,140 hours per year, which is one of the most significant and transformative changes for the sector, the expansion of early learning and childcare plays a vital role in delivering national outcomes and in making Scotland the best place to grow up.

Space to Grow: indoor/outdoor settings provides good examples of effective practice in all aspects of the environment, both indoors and outdoors. Some settings have been registered to take account of the outdoor space to increase the number of places for children. In these settings, we have taken account of the quality of the environment, children's use of indoor and outdoor space, the skills, experience and qualifications of staff as well as the quality of opportunities and experiences for children. We refer to these as indoor/outdoor settings. This improvement resource is available for everyone to use. It will inform our scrutiny and improvement support activities and will be a helpful source of good practice for providers to identify what is working well and where they may require to improve.



INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Space to Grow: indoor/outdoor settings aims to maximise the positive experiences for children by encouraging providers to think innovatively and flexibly about design and about the impact the environment can have on the quality of a child's care, development, learning, health and wellbeing. Some settings, have been registered to take account of the outdoor space to increase the number of places for children. In these settings account has been taken of the quality of the environment, children's use of indoor and outdoor space and the quality of opportunities and experiences for children. These settings are known as indoor/outdoor settings as described in **Early Learning and Childcare: Delivering High Quality Play and Learning Environments Outdoors Practice Note**.

For expansion planning purposes, providers and planners requested that the Scottish Government provide some parameters on the outdoor space to support registration of an increased number of children within an indoor/outdoor setting. Space to Grow describes good-quality outdoor space and sets out additional information to support the provision of indoor/outdoor settings with a focus on high-quality outcomes for children. However, those using the guidance told us that further explanation around indoor/outdoor settings and some case studies would be extremely useful to assist with their expansion plans. The document provides additional detail and support to stakeholders when considering high-quality environments for children.

This document focuses on the outdoor space and will act as a tool to be used in conjunction with Space to Grow, **Out to Play** and the Practice Note: Early Learning and Childcare: Delivering High Quality Play and Learning Environments Outdoors.

WHAT IS AN INDOOR/OUTDOOR SETTING?

An indoor/outdoor setting is a premises-based setting where the scale and quality of the outdoor space is appropriate for enhancing the child's quality of play and learning experiences. High-quality natural outdoor space combined with high-quality indoor space and quality opportunities and experiences for children are all taken into account when considering the number of children the setting is registered for. Both the indoor and the outdoor area must be accessible to the children 100% of the operational times. An indoor/outdoor setting will take account of the practices of a solely outdoor or satellite setting.

The guidance Out to Play and My World Outdoors will be useful tools to use.

When thinking about an indoor/outdoor setting there are a number of elements that need to be considered as described in Space to Grow. Firstly, the provider or applicant must be clear on the reasons why this type of setting would enhance the outcomes for children. As with all settings, the quality of children's experiences and outcomes are and will remain of paramount importance.

Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the setting should clearly reflect both indoor and outdoor experiences. This will allow parents to choose the right setting for their child, give them the opportunity to ask questions about what this means for their child and allows both children and parents to be actively involved.

"Parents and children have been influential in leading the direction of the environmental change to support our expansion plans, being actively involved in building and creating our Musical Wall, Mud Kitchen and sensory garden together as a family". Rainbow Nursery Paisley.

Parents may be concerned that their child can choose to be outside particularly in adverse weather. It would be helpful for staff to share the positive effects on health and wellbeing of children being outdoors. When parents are involved at an early stage this enables them to experience the opportunities available to their children. Showing parents, the sheltered area and explaining about the all-weather clothing can help alleviate some concerns.

"We have supported our parents by inviting the local authority ELC outdoors expansion officer to deliver the Scottish Government directives, and explain some of the research on the multiple benefits of outdoor learning". Kidstore Childcare

Children may take time to have the confidence to move from area to area. However, if this is embedded in the ethos of the setting and children have been fully involved in developing the environment, they can quickly take ownership and make great use of both areas.

"We clearly see the positive impact on children, our less confident children are now enjoying our natural, free and open-ended play opportunities and it is so rewarding to see their confidence grow".

Kirktonholme@Newton Mearns.







The outdoor environment: Why is it important?

There is strong evidence that playing and learning outdoors benefits children in many ways. It improves physical health, improves wellbeing, enhances child development, improves learning for sustainability but most of all it is FUN. Being outdoors offers children the opportunity to explore the natural environment, provides a sense of freedom, offers different exciting opportunities for challenge and to take risks. Particularly with the expansion in early learning and childcare many children may spend longer in settings, therefore it is vitally important they can play and learn outside when they choose to.

The Scottish Government's **Health and Social Care Standards** focus on a child's right to play outdoors every day and when they choose to:

'As a child, I play outdoors every day and regularly explore a natural environment' (Standard 1.32)'.

I can choose to have an active life and participate in a range of recreational, social, creative, physical and learning activities every day both indoors and outdoors (Standard 1.25).

In Scotland over 90 organisations and academics have come together to agree a national position statement on outdoor play and learning. **Scotland's Outdoor Play and Learning Coalition Position Statement** promotes the benefits of outdoor play and commits to a number of actions to embed outdoor play based learning as everyday activities for children. The Care Inspectorate is one of the organisations that has agreed to the position statement and supports children to have greater access to outdoor settings.

What makes a good-quality indoor/outdoor play and learning environment?

One of the main factors when thinking about your outdoor area is what opportunities and experiences will the space offer the children. There are many documents to support this in addition to the tools previously referenced:

Pre Birth to three
Curriculum for Excellence
Building the Ambition
Getting It Right For Every Child
Learning for Sustainability
How good is our early learning and childcare?



The outdoor space is not an extension of what the indoors has to offer. Children's opportunities and experiences outdoors should be different to and compliment indoor experiences. Both the indoor and outdoor areas must be of a high-quality.

A natural environment

A natural outdoor environment has many benefits to child development, learning and fun. What the outdoor space should offer is not prescriptive however children should have space to run, use wheeled toys, explore nature and wildlife, dig, plant, play in natural material such as mud, sand and water.

Natural outdoor space with a mix of surfaces and textures gives children more opportunity and space to experience nature, to feel the grass, to dig for worms, experiment with mud, stones, to climb trees and to enjoy getting dirty. Different spaces will enable children to explore, to create space to hide, to spend time with others, have space to be on their own to play or relax and to have high-quality experiences outdoors.









The environment should be stimulating and safe but should also offer challenges and encourage children to take risks, giving them a sense of achievement (https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/wellbeing-indicators-SHANARRI). Although the space should be risk assessed, children should not feel over protected.

The Care Inspectorate's position statement: a positive approach to risk in play

Embracing a risk-benefit approach is part of changing our regulatory culture. For example, when we inspect we now assess the experience of the children attending and try to help services to improve. The position statement supports services that take a positive approach to risk, by setting out its position on regulating for risk in play. "The Care Inspectorate supports care service providers taking a positive approach to risk in order to achieve the best outcomes for children. This means moving away from a traditional deficit model that takes a risk-averse approach, which can unnecessarily restrict children's experiences attending registered services, to a more holistic risk-benefit model. For example, we encourage services to use risk assessment to support children to enjoy potentially hazardous activities such as woodwork using real tools, exploring nature and playing in the mud and rain. We do not expect written risk assessments to be carried out for daily play activities."







In some urban areas, providing a natural outdoor environment can be challenging. Providing areas of different surfaces and keeping the surface as natural as possible helps. This along with imagination, innovation and making good use of natural resources and **loose parts** can transform an urban space and does not need to cost a lot.

Although the area should be as natural as possible, you will need to consider how children can stay outdoors when it is dark. Some outdoor lighting will help the children to feel safe, allow them to enjoy different experiences outdoors and being outside in the dark can be exciting in itself. The use of headlamps allows children to explore and the creative use of lights can make the area quite magical.



















Space and capacity

As a minimum standard, all settings should have a suitable outdoor space adjacent to their premises Space to Grow Appendix 1. The space should be large enough to enable all children, if they choose, to be outside at the same time and should support varied and high-quality play and learning.

There is no minimum environment space standard for outdoors. To support the expansion and enhance the quality of children's experiences settings may consider increasing their capacity by taking into account the outdoor space. Consideration will be given to UP TO 20% of the overall registered places of the children who have access to the outdoors. This is to reduce the impact of additional places on the quality of experiences and opportunities for all children. This maximum percentage was in recognition of the fact that all children may be outdoors or indoors at any one time and should enable the focus to remain on the quality of outcomes for children. The increased capacity may be considered in relation to the number of children who can independently choose to be either indoors or outdoors.

Any increase in numbers taking account of the outdoor space will only be based on the number of children aged two years and over. This is based on observations and experience that due to their developmental stage, it is difficult for children under the age of two to independently choose to be indoors or outdoors

The increase in capacity would usually relate to children over two or three years old where the ethos of indoor outdoor experiences is embedded in practice. For example; if the setting is registered for nine children under two years, 10 children aged two to under three years and 20 children aged three not attending school, the setting may have an increase of either four (up to 20% of 20) or six (up to 20% of 30). This would be considered if all other elements were supportive of high-quality outcomes for children.

In practice, if a setting has increased it's capacity by using the outdoor space it is not necessary for that number of children to be outdoors at any one time. Taking the above example there would be an additional four or six children. Four or six children do not need to be outside all of the time unless they choose to be. This would be contradictory to the practice, which should be that children can choose independently when to be outside or inside.

When planning a setting, the indoor space should comply with the minimum environment input standards:

For children under two years – a minimum of 3.7 square meters, per child For children aged two to under three years – a minimum of 2.8 square metres per child For children three and over – a minimum of 2.3 square metres per child.











Access

Children need to be able to move freely and independently between both indoors and outdoors, sometimes known as free flow. This encourages children's independence and provides them with different opportunities and experiences. How easy it is for children to access both areas independently depends to a large extent on the design of the environment. How easy would this be for children, without any assistance from staff? How accessible is the door handle is to get both outdoors and back indoors, taking into account their age, stage of development and individual needs? Children need to be able to move outdoors from the indoor playroom without having to go through a corridor or another internal space and should be able to see the outdoor area from inside.

Where access is through a door designated as a fire exit you need to discuss this with Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Some settings have installed push buttons that are accessible to children inside and out.

Where the plan is to keep a playroom door open you need to consider the indoor temperature and how children will get back inside should the door close. Some settings have considered the use of heavy plastic curtains sometimes referred to as 'butchers curtains'. Where this is your preferred option you will need to discuss with your environmental health department.

Some settings have two different ways of accessing outdoors. One, where the door can remain open apart from in adverse weather conditions. In this situation, the second option is for children to go through the 'boot room' to get outside. This is not considered the same as children having to go

through an internal space to access outdoors as there are two points of access. Practice would highlight if this was a barrier to children accessing outdoors.

The City of Edinburgh Council is considering some options:



Shelter

A shelter outdoors will enable children to continue to enjoy the experiences a natural environment offers even when the weather is extreme. The shelter can be fixed or temporary but must be suitable for children to stay outside should they wish. The type of shelter you provide is a decision for each setting. Careful consideration should be given to the positioning of the outdoor area, the premises and where the shelter will be sited. Some structures may be suitable on some sites but not on others. Some shelters are substantial and have heating or are made of a material that keeps it warm, others do not have these features. Children not only enjoy using a shelter when it is raining, windy,

sunny or warm but often just use it as part of their outdoor experience. How the structure is used is usually decided on by the children and often changes.















Storage

For children and staff to enjoy being outdoors in adverse weather or when it is too hot they need to be dressed appropriately. Outdoor clothing must be suitable to enable children to take an active part in outdoor play and learning and should not be restrictive. Outdoor suits and wellies should be available as should sun hats, however that does not mean that every time a child goes outdoors they need to change their clothing. When there are puddles to jump in or mud to play with all-weather suits and wellies are invaluable.

How accessible outdoor clothing is to the children is very important as is where the clothing is stored and dried. It can take a young child a long time to get an outdoor suit on and off. A boot room usually allows children and staff to get changed without disturbing indoor activities. Some are heated to enable wet clothes to be dried. Some settings have a cloakroom area beside access to the outdoor space and use the laundry for drying and cleaning.







Toilets

Children need to have easy access to suitable toilets, changing facilities and to hand hygiene. In outdoor and outdoor satellite settings these facilities are mainly provided outdoors. However, in an indoor/outdoor setting you do not have to have outdoor facilities unless you wish to or unless the indoor facilities are not easily accessible to children. You need to consider how long it will take children, when they are outdoors, to get to the toilet or to wash their hands. Particularly, when they are engrossed in play and if they have their all-weather suits on.

It may be that if you are increasing capacity, the number of toilets and changing facilities, may need to be increased. The environment input standards and details about changing facilities and hand hygiene are detailed in **Space to Grow**, the **Hand hygiene guidance**, and **Infection Prevention and Control in Childcare Settings (Daycare and Childminding)**. Some settings have improved the access to toilets by adding an external door so that children can access from either indoors or outdoors.







Resources

Although some settings make use of some resources indoors and out, it should not be that resources from indoors are automatically moved outside. Children's opportunities and experiences outdoors should be different to and complement indoor experiences. Resources should be as natural as possible using materials suitable to an outdoor learning environment and to encourage active play.

"The outdoor focus has led to Loose Parts now being developed in our primary school. Primary and ELC staff attended joint training around 'Loose Parts', which highlighted the benefits and opportunities from these experiences. Staff recently attended training on managing fire to support the development of some forest school practice outdoors". Aboyne Pre School Nursery Class.









THE IMPORTANCE OF STAFF

Suitably skilled, qualified and experienced staff are fundamental to high-quality experiences and outcomes for children in early learning and childcare and out of school care settings. Many staff fully embrace outdoor play and learning and understand the different range of experiences and opportunities children can have to complement indoor experiences. Staff would be expected to have experience and training in outdoor play and learning and to confidently put this into practice. Many training providers support continuous professional development for outdoor play and learning and many large providers offer this internally to staff. The ethos of outdoor play and learning should be embedded in staff practice. Staff need to be motivated and enthusiastic about the concept of an indoor/outdoor setting. They need to help enable children to make independent choices about where they want to be and what they want to do and learn.

"Or team have recently undergone a really inspirational outdoor training course, covering literacy and numeracy. We would like to include our parents by doing another outdoor training course to consolidate our outdoor policy". Kidstore Childcare Limited.







"Our staff also enjoy the outdoors, it adds another dimension to their role, they say that they feel the children are more engaged, have better experiences, display more independence, relish the space and noise dissipates. They witness children participating in lots of open-ended play". Kidspace Childcare Limited.

How staff are deployed is particularly important. Children need to see staff both outdoors and indoors to help give them confidence to move between both areas. Staff should be both indoors and outdoors to effectively support children's play and learning appropriately. As the movement of children will be fluid between both areas it is not always necessary for the adult to child ratio as detailed in **Guidance on adult to child ratios in early learning and childcare settings** to be met at all times both indoors and outdoors. For example, if there are 18 children outdoors it is not necessary for three staff members to be outdoors. However, this needs to be risk assessed to take account of the needs of individual children.

"Rainbow Nursery Paisley has been exploring the Froebelian pedagogy of Play as a rich and meaningful characteristic of learning for some years. Outdoor play is naturally embedded within our approach to Curriculum for Excellence it is no longer an optional choice driven by the views of adults. The knowledge and experience we have gained as a team will continue to be used as a transformational tool for reflective practice and to inform improvements in the quality of experiences explored by the children".

Rainbow Nursery Paisley



If you are considering an indoor/outdoor setting:

Think About

- Why would your setting be a good indoor/outdoor play and learning environment?
- How will you involve and consult children to get their ideas about the environment? What do you plan to do with these ideas?
- How will you involve parents and carers in developing the setting?
- What will you include in the aims and objectives of the setting to reflect an indoor/outdoor setting?
- How will you make sure the indoor and outdoor space can be used by children all the time?
- What will you do to ensure the staff team understand the value and ethos of outdoor play and learning?
- How motivated and enthusiastic are staff to provide children with a range of appropriate play and learning experiences indoors and outdoors?
- How will staff be deployed effectively?
- What plans do you have in place to ensure children can always access the indoor and outdoor space?
- What do you need to do to improve the outdoor area so that the space is natural, provides challenges and risks and supports high-quality play and learning experiences for children?
- How suitable are your resources and loose parts and how will you make use of natural materials?
- What type of clothing will you expect children and staff to wear? Who will provide this? Where will it be stored dried and cleaned?



What should you do next?

Early consultation with the Care Inspectorate about your proposed plans is recommended. The Care Inspectorate has a strong desire to support innovative models of early learning and childcare, and out of school care settings. Each local authority and large provider has a relationship manager. Along with this, each local authority has a link registration inspector who would be the first point of contact for any proposed early learning and childcare expansion plans. The link inspectors meet with and discuss expansion plans with authorities on a regular basis and this has proven to be very effective. The Care Inspectorate's registration team provide pre application advice and visits for those where this support would be helpful. However, in relation to indoor/outdoor settings providers or applicants must be clear about the reasons why this type of setting would provide high-quality opportunities and experiences for children. It is expected that the guidance Space to Grow has been taken account of and Out to Play and My World Outdoors have been used as a reference

Where a provider or applicant is confident, that this is the model they propose they must make an application to the Care Inspectorate. If you are a provider looking to vary the conditions of an existing setting to provide an indoor/outdoor setting you should apply for a variation through the eform system. For existing settings there will be an assessment of current practice. Inspectors will spend time in the setting observing practice and speaking with children, staff and parents. If you are a new applicant or an existing provider looking to provide a new indoor/outdoor setting you should submit a registration application. For further information on registration visit the Care Inspectorate **website**. An assessment will be carried out and a recommendation will be made to grant or refuse the application. The quality of children's experiences and outcomes are of paramount importance when assessing applications.



CASE STUDIES

Nethermains Primary School Nursery - Falkirk Council

"Within Nethermains ELC we were always aware of the benefits of learning out with the four walls of the ELC setting. Our vast and stimulating outdoor area allows us to ensure that our wee people have access to rich learning experiences in a natural environment".









Overcoming challenges

"It was vital to be proactive in how we addressed staffing the outdoors area to ensure that there were meaningful learning experiences taking place. As a result of the introduction of our daily huddles and peer observations, it became obvious that some staff were more comfortable than others in delivering high-quality outdoor learning. A team meeting was then held with all staff which addressed further training that staff feel would support their confidence which in turn will provide better outcomes for our wee people".

"One of the barriers we faced was ensuring that our heavy fire doors did not impede children being able to free flow from indoors to outdoors learning experiences. If we left the fire doors open the food for lunch cooled down very quickly and was not suitable for our children. We contacted property services at Falkirk Council who were very quick to ensure that a child friendly push button system at the child's level was installed. Ensuring children knew how to operate the buttons was part of the learning about safety. This system now works very well".

Inverarity Pre School Class - Angus council

"The outdoor setting was developed as part of a pilot to provide an extension of available play space in a quality learning environment. Through successfully engaging in the variation process, there is now capacity for 24 children".









Overcoming challenges

"Maintaining the outdoor environment has been challenging. We held a 'Gardening and Eco Week' where families came together to help maintain and develop the school grounds. Staff have built good relationships with the janitor and have created a system to report areas that require to be repaired or updated".

"Through the outdoor pilot in 2018-19, valuable lessons were learned about adapting the type of clothing provided for staff and for the children. It is important for children to have at least two pairs of gloves, at least one of these being waterproof. Wellington boots are the obvious choice for being outdoors however, feet can become cold. Children wear warm socks over their socks in colder seasons. We have purchased riding boots for staff which are suitable for being outdoors in winter weather and jackets that are warm and breathable'.

Rainbow Nursery, Paisley - Childcare First Limited

"The use of outdoor play space known as the Children's Garden rich in sensory and seasonal learning inspired us provide an indoor outdoor setting. As a Froebelian inspired service we valued the importance of using our outdoor environment to engage children naturally in learning through play. Enabling our children to transition freely between playrooms, in and outdoors created a seamless approach to free flow play for all. Children are confident in the wholeness of their environment and have developed skills for life and learning through child led first-hand experiences"

Overcoming challenges

"Accessibility of the outdoors for our children. We tried and tested many different approaches. Most of which were driven by children, such as access to outdoor clothing and footwear, to find a solution that worked for everyone".













Kirktonholme @ Newton Mearns - Charlotte and Edward Kelly, a partnership

"We used Space to Grow in order to maximise the potential of our outdoor environment. We are surrounded by a beautiful woodland and natural space that screams out for our children to have a woodland experience, when looking at Space to Grow our woodland space offered that little bit more and something special. Having this capacity to open up more opportunities to explore the curriculum in different ways has made it far more exciting for our children".







Overcoming challenges

"We had to invest highly in our staff training in order to ensure that the opportunities they were able to provide within the new environment reflected the fantastic space that we had to use. Training included risk assessing, risky play and also staff taking the time to read up on space to grow, out to play and forest kindergarten information for best practice".

"At present our challenge is the distance between our woodland space and toilet facilities. We are working with Stramash looking at outdoor toileting. We plan to have something like a toilet tent surrounded by pallet walls for privacy along with a table with a hand washing station".



Kidstore Childcare Limited

"The provision of an indoor outdoor setting was prompted due to the demand for spaces due to 1140. We have strong ethos of children learning through play and the myriad of opportunities the outdoor enables them to experience is never ending. We find children are much more engaged outdoors freed from the lack of boundaries. We love the sense of total independence our children are able to experience in the vastness of the space which conversely encourages group interaction as well, in an enabling environment".







Overcoming challenges.

"Scottish weather is challenging but we overcome this with lots of warm waterproof clothing and drying facilities, complimented by hot drinks and cosy socks. Kidstore has a boot room which is accessed from both inside and outside to store all- weather clothing for staff and children".









"Kidstore will be erecting two outdoor wooden cabins for shelter. We hope to access an interest free loan, which could allow us to install a ground source heating pump to not only the cabins but to the internal space to allow great energy cost savings. We can also use this facility to change the existing lighting to LED. The toilet facilities were not sufficient to support an increase in capacity therefore additional indoor toilets were installed".



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge all those who contributed to this document. In particular we would like to thank the children, staff and parents of the settings detailed below. Thank you to the providers, managers, head teachers and staff who provided the information for the case studies, and to parents and carers for allowing us to use photographs of their children. A very special thank you to the children who welcomed us into their settings and enthusiastically showed us all of the great experiences they have. Thank you to The City of Edinburgh Council for sharing some of the proposals. Included in the document:

Aboyne Primary School Nursery, Aboyne.

Auchinairn Early Learning and Childcare Centre, Bishopbriggs.

Carousel Childcare, Falkirk.

Dingwall (English) Nursery, Dingwall.

Inverarity Pre School Class, Inverarity.

Kelvinside Academy Nursery, Glasgow.

Kidstore Childcare Limited, Kilsyth.

Kilcoy Kindergarten, Kilcoy.

Kirktonholme @ Newton Mearns, Newton Mearns.

Little Seeds Woodland Nursery, Paisley.

Mayfield Nursery School, Midlothian.

Nethermains Primary School Nursery, Falkirk.

Rainbow Nursery - Paisley, Paisley

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