

# New report calls for action on EYFS children's entitlement to outdoor play <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Many early years providers are struggling with inadequate outdoor space, according to a new report.

The survey by Learning through Landscapes and the Early Childhood Forum found strong support for outdoor play, but a wide variation in what children are offered and a need for more staff training.

The report calls for Government and Ofsted to strengthen the statutory requirement for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, which currently stipulates that 'providers must provide access to an outdoor play area or, if that is not possible, ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis.'

However, the survey found that many providers with inadequate or insufficient space to provide high-quality outdoor learning, and a small minority were not getting this entitlement at all.

The increase in numbers of two-year-olds needing lots of space and the doubling of free hours for three- and four-year-olds were cited as factors likely to put pressure on outdoor space.

Most practitioners believed that opportunities for outdoor play and learning are improving in their provision, however.

The survey asked what gets in the way of spending as much time as possible outdoors. Reasons included:

- Health and safety concerns
- Inadequate quality of resources
- Negative parental attitudes
- Lack of sufficient outdoor space
- Lack of appropriate training and development
- Education and care policies and regulation that take focus away from outdoors

LTL and ECF said they would lobby the Government for statutory guidance and appropriate funding to ensure any capital developments will not have a further impact on restricting access to outdoor space.

Juno Hollyhock, Chief Executive of Learning through Landscapes said, 'There is plenty of well-documented research about the benefits of play and learning outdoors for young children, including their physical development, which is an area of current concern for public health in the UK. So why are so many children in early years settings still not getting enough outdoor time?'

Melian Mansfield, chair of ECF said, 'We are keen to work with the Government and with Ofsted to ensure that outdoor play and learning is high on the agenda, and that the guidance is clear – particularly as childcare services are expanded. There is strong evidence that time spent learning and playing outdoors in the early years can help prevent obesity, help with mental health and even address rising myopia in early childhood. There is historically a good understanding of the importance of learning outdoors in the UK, which has led with examples of excellent early years practice outdoors in the UK and internationally – but, as this report shows, it is far from being available to all young children here.'

Melanie Pilcher, Policy & Standards Manager at the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said, 'We welcome this report and the attention it brings to the importance of outdoor play in early years education. Every child should have the opportunity to enjoy high quality and meaningful outdoor experiences, no matter what kind of setting they attend.'

'It is unsurprising that some parents and practitioners have concerns over outside play, including bad weather, health and safety, and children getting dirty, so any resource that can be shared to increase their awareness of the value of learning outdoors is to be embraced.

'Although there is already a lot of high quality outdoor play and learning happening across the sector, there is undoubtedly a need to empower and encourage practitioners to make the best use of the outdoor areas that they have.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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