

# Starting a school grounds project

A study found that 24% of the infant school day and 21% of the junior school day was taken up by break times. Your school grounds offer a wealth of learning opportunities because they can serve so many functions. Firstly, the grounds provide a recreational space for pupils, where they can play, socially interact and exercise. Secondly, the grounds also serve as a dynamic environment for curriculum-based teaching and learning. If planned carefully, school grounds can be positive for staff, pupils and wildlife.



## The big picture

It is important to consider your school grounds as a whole before targeting specific areas. Draw up a vision plan showing what sort of features you might like developed in the grounds over the next few years.

## Consultation

Schools should involve as many people as possible in the development of the grounds. In particular, pupils should be given plenty of opportunity to say what they think the grounds should contain and how they should be developed and managed. Pupils should be consulted and observed in how they use the grounds currently; for example it would be bad planning to put in a quiet area where children normally play ball games. The *Consulting with pupils* PDF makes some suggestions about how to do this. Giving pupils a sense of ownership of the grounds, and responsibility for the future of the site, is an important step towards making sure both pupils and grounds are developed to their full potential. All staff (teaching and non-teaching), the governing body, parents and the wider school community also have a part to play.

## Recreation and exercise space

School grounds can offer pupils a safe environment in which to play and have fun. Some of the options to consider are: quiet areas with seating, shade and shelter; space for playground games; field for sports; areas and props for role-play and creative activities and climbing equipment for coordination (you can choose natural options such as low branched trees or large logs to walk along).

## Teaching and learning

The outdoor classroom can bring a range of topics to life that would be difficult to achieve in the classroom. A variety of habitats to explore would be an exciting science resource, but with some creative thinking and teaching, the school grounds can be an exciting stimulus for all areas of the curriculum. Consider this in your vision plan by including areas such as storytelling circles, growing areas and creative features.



### Areas for wildlife

Wildlife areas are a great asset to both the school community and the wealth of creatures who will soon make the area their home. You could undertake a large scale project such as creating a pond or planting a hedgerow. Alternatively you could start small by leaving log and leaf piles and letting patches of grass grow long.



### Maintaining wildlife areas

It is wise to consider the future maintenance of the wildlife area in the initial planning stages of a project.

There are 3 main options for maintenance:

- Maintain it yourself through volunteer labour.
- Put it into your grounds' contract with specific maintenance instructions.
- Do some of the jobs yourself and pay for the rest contractually.

Many schools pay to get grass cutting done as part of the school grounds' maintenance contract, but look after some areas (such as a pond or butterfly garden) themselves through a gardening or wildlife club, or occasional work parties of parents.

### Funding grounds projects

The initial creation of an area within your grounds may require some capital, as will the maintenance of areas if tended by contractors. There are various pots of money around that schools can tap into to fund such projects.

#### FACT

Research by the National Association of Field Studies Officers has found that pupils are often highly motivated when they are in different surroundings out of doors, so get outside!

