



Blackwater Outdoor Learning Strategy 2023-2024

Statement of Intent

At Blackwater we have amazing outdoor spaces. Our Wild area is a special place that our children, and adults, are incredibly lucky to have as one of our learning spaces. Through our outdoor learning, Wild Time, the children have countless opportunities to experiment, discover, learn and experience the natural world. It creates a sense of belonging as they are actively involved in the constant development of our wild area.

Wild Time incorporates a Trauma Informed approach, providing set activities whilst valuing the importance of free play, viewing each child as unique in their needs, interests and motivations, supporting them with their learning and to be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

Children learn and develop in different ways, not all children find being in the classroom easy. These sessions support children to be curious, determined, resilient, imaginative, inventive, making connections in their learning and to think critically which are all important parts of their learning journey.

Statement of Implementation

How play helps children's development

More and more research confirms that **play is the best way for children to learn and communicate**. Free play allows children to practice decision-making skills, learn to work in groups, share, resolve conflicts and advocate for themselves. It also allows them to discover what they enjoy at their own pace.

Play can and should be part of our everyday lives. Play is fun, relaxing and enjoyable but it's also important. Play is so important that it's even part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1996). Article 31 states that children have the right "to engage in play and recreational activities." [The Importance of Play — Encourage Play](#)

Playing is a natural and enjoyable way for children to keep active, stay well and be happy. Freely chosen play helps children and young people's healthy development. To have good physical and mental health and to learn life skills, they need various unstructured play opportunities from birth until they're teenagers. Play improves the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and young people. [How play helps children's development | nidirect](#)

Risky play has been shown to be beneficial to children's development by helping them cope with stressful situations, allow them to assess situations and surroundings, learn how to follow-through, improve social interaction skills, increase creativity, assist in understanding their own limitations, recognize areas for improvement, and help form positive, pro-active 'give it a go' attitudes.

Our children at Blackwater are involved in conversations about risk, how to minimise those risks and keep ourselves and others safe, therefore opening up further opportunities for development, exploration and discovery.

How the Trauma Informed Approach through Outdoor Learning helps development

Our outdoor learning at Blackwater school, Wild Time, combines the benefits of both a trauma informed practice and an enriching environment to support children's social and emotional well-being through their school journey and beyond. This approach helps children to feel safe, supported and regulated within school and to find ways to understand their own needs and to be able to regulate themselves.

With routines and predictable expectations, safe limits and boundaries we provide a sense of protection, coming together as a group to share thoughts, food and fun, celebrating triumphs, supporting struggles and frustration, scaffolding social interactions and boosting self-esteem. The natural power of the outdoors is calming to both bodies and brains.

It is widely recognised that a child's emotional health and wellbeing influences their cognitive development and learning (1,2) as well as their physical and social health and their mental wellbeing in adulthood (3,4,5). [Promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/612122/promoting-children-and-young-people-s-mental-health-and-wellbeing.pdf)

A trauma informed approach is based on knowledge and understanding of how trauma affects people's lives. COVID-19 dramatically affected the everyday lives of children, and their families, with many experiencing isolation, worry, loneliness and uncertainty.

Through attuned and responsive, trauma informed, interactions, children's window of tolerance can be expanded to enable them to not only manage, but to thrive in everyday life. (Siegel 1999; Treisman 2018) It is increasingly recognised that interactions with natural spaces helps to soothe or regulate the body's stress response system.

Connection with the natural world supports children's sense of security and trust and is associated with higher levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-expression (Bento and Costa 2018; Berger 2008; Richardson and Murray 2017).

It has been suggested that outdoor environments support both learning and emotional regulation through the dynamic interaction between the child, others, and space (Waite and Pratt 2017).

In relation to the child, the parts of the brain responsible for self-regulation are developed through the physical movement of outdoor learning (White 2014), whilst emotional development is supported through risk-taking, impulse control, and behavioural self-management (Thomas and Harding 2011; McNair 2012). With respect to others, outdoor learning supports the development of empathy, cooperation, problem-solving, and leadership skills (McArdle, Harrison, and Harrison 2013), which enables children to contribute to the wellbeing of their peers. Finally, the space, full of open-ended elements and multiple loose parts, encourages effective child-initiated interactions (Waters and Maynard 2010; Nicholson 1971) and offers a safe environment for children to navigate their challenges (Passy 2014).

[Full article: When it matters most: a trauma-informed, outdoor learning programme to support children's wellbeing during COVID-19 and beyond \(tandfonline.com\)](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17445019.2020.1811111)

Wild Time Progression

Each child in each year group will be encouraged to develop their knowledge, skills and independence as they learn and practice outdoor leaning throughout their school journey, whilst constantly considering the Wild Expectations:

- To be safe
- To listen
- To be kind and respectful to humans and wildlife
- To be responsible for their own behaviour and belongings.

The learning will be fluid, incorporating, amongst others, play, creativity, social skills, fire skills, tool skills and den making.

The children will be experiencing the outdoors in a variety of seasons and weathers and will all have access to a minimum of 2 sessions each term as well as being able to continue their experiences at lunch time play, interventions and after school clubs.

Our overarching umbrella of skills that we want the children to learn and embed throughout the age groups.
This is:

Being Wild

Promoting imagination, personal and social skills, play skills, regulation, navigating and nature appreciation

- ✓ *I can remember, listen to and follow rules and boundaries of the wild area.*
- ✓ *I can be responsible and safe*
- ✓ *I can work as a team to look after myself, others and my surroundings*
- ✓ *I can freely and independently explore my natural surroundings noticing rough terrain and being aware of risks.*
- ✓ *I can lie down quietly and watch the trees and the clouds.*
- ✓ *I can talk about how being outside makes me feel.*
- ✓ *I can understand the seasons*
- ✓ *I can listen and follow instructions on how to use tools safely.*
- ✓ *I can listen and follow instructions on how to be safe around the fire pit.*

Skills Progression

	<i>Using tools</i>	<i>Fire and Cooking</i>	<i>Growing and Cooking</i>	<i>Dens, shelters and habitats</i>	<i>Being wildly creative</i>
Wheal Friendly	<i>I can safely use palm drills and hammers.</i>	<i>I understand what to do when smoke goes in my eyes.</i> <i>I can enjoy a fire-cooked snack.</i>	<i>I can talk about what we need to grow.</i> <i>I can understand what plants need to grow.</i>	<i>I can learn about the homes of bugs, birds and creatures living in our local area.</i> <i>I can enjoy a den with my friends.</i>	<i>I can create my own piece of 2D art work using found objects such as leaves, sticks, stones and flowers.</i>
Wheal Harmony	<i>I can safely use peelers and hand drill.</i>	<i>I know the elements a fire needs to ignite and burn.</i> <i>I can use a steel and flint to make a spark.</i> <i>I can toast a marshmallow on the fire.</i>	<i>I can recognise the plants growing and identify those that bring benefits or bring harm.</i> <i>I can discuss the differences and identify deciduous and evergreen trees.</i>	<i>I can create a mini shelter for a bug/animal or magical creature.</i>	<i>I can create rain sticks out of found objects and then use manmade objects to decorate (e.g. ribbons).</i>
Wheal Busy	<i>I can safely use secateurs.</i>	<i>I know how to safely extinguish a fire.</i>	<i>I can safely be part of a group cooking on a fire.</i>	<i>I can work as a team to build a shelter with no or minimal support.</i>	<i>I can make and decorate an amulet using wood rounds,</i>

	<i>I can use tools to create an outcome. .</i>	<i>I can use a steel and flint to ignite a cotton wool/ steel wool.</i>		<i>I can learn and practice to tie knots.</i>	<i>drilling tools and threading skills.</i>
Wheal Luna	<i>I can safely use saws. I can use saws to create an outcome.</i>	<i>I can make, light and extinguish a small fire.</i>	<i>I can contribute to making a soup on the fire: peeling, cutting, cooking and cleaning up.</i>	<i>I can independently design and build a shelter considering the elements.</i>	<i>I can make a wind chime / mobile using found objects and manmade objects. I use tools to help me.</i>

Statement of Impact

We want our children at Blackwater to learn by first hand experiences using all of their senses to enable them to play freely whilst learning new skills.

Being outdoors provides children with opportunities to investigate and explore different types of materials, and seasonal changes, in a meaningful way. Only outdoors can children properly experience, first hand, the natural world. It enables a better understanding of life cycles – plants and animals.

Natural resources develop imagination and creativity as they are completely open-ended, enabling the development of critical thinking. Playing outside creates a sense of well-being and helps to develop positive attitudes such as perseverance and self-confidence.

In this current climate with the wide use of technology and increase in mental health struggles, we aspire to promote a love of nature and the outdoors. We want to enable children to become responsible, independent and invested citizens in the world that they will grow up in.

Our aim is to support children to be able to take risks in a safe environment so then they can grow become well-rounded individuals in society. Individuals, who can manage social situations with ease, challenge others on their beliefs and strive to live a healthy and harmonious lifestyle. We want our children to foster a love of the environment to take a responsibility in the community from a young age.