



# Outdoor Learning Skills Progression

## from Nursery to Year 2

**Purpose:** This document maps how children explore the school grounds, woods and natural environment, develop practical outdoor skills and apply learning from across the curriculum. It shows age-appropriate progression from Nursery to Year 2 and supports planning alongside subject progression documents and activity risk assessments.

### How outdoor learning works at Cecil Gowing

**Every day.** Nursery and Reception use planned indoor and outdoor continuous provision, with adult interactions that build language, movement, curiosity and independence. Year 1 provision offers further practical application linked to taught learning; Year 2 uses outdoor enquiry and purposeful tasks across subjects.

**Weekly spring and summer session.** Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 learn in mixed-age groups in a designated whole-school outdoor learning session. A shared theme has different outcomes and levels of responsibility: children observe, practise, explain, lead and teach one another as appropriate. Nursery has its own developmentally appropriate outdoor experiences.

**Whole-curriculum connections.** Sessions deliberately bring English, mathematics, science, geography, art, design and technology, physical development and personal development into real places and experiences. Adults name the subject knowledge being applied and check what children understand, not just which activity they completed.

**Health and wellbeing.** Time outdoors provides movement, sensory experience, fresh air, social connection and chances to manage challenge. Predictable routines, choice and calm spaces support regulation and belonging; children learn to care for themselves, one another and the environment.

### The progression at a glance

| Skill                | Nursery                                                                                 | Reception                                                                            | Year 1                                                                   | Year 2                                                                                  |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Explore              | Investigate with the senses, move safely and join familiar routines with adult support. | Observe closely, name features, ask questions and practise simple safety routines.   | Use taught knowledge and tools to investigate, make, record and explain. | Plan a task, choose methods, compare evidence and help younger pupils participate.      |
| Care and collaborate | Notice living things, share resources and follow simple boundaries.                     | Take turns, help care for spaces and describe a safe choice.                         | Cooperate, use resources responsibly and explain why habitats need care. | Take greater responsibility for group roles, evaluate choices and suggest improvements. |
| Create and apply     | Build, collect, mix and represent ideas through play.                                   | Test simple ideas, use new words and represent discoveries through pictures or talk. | Design, measure, record and improve a product or explanation.            | Connect subjects, justify decisions and communicate findings to others.                 |

**Reading the tables.** Progression describes the teaching ambition, not permission to work without an adult. Access to woods, tools, roads and any fire experience is governed by supervision and the relevant school risk assessment.

Exploration and practical outdoor skills

| Skill                              | Nursery                                                                                                       | Reception                                                                                            | Year 1                                                                                                     | Year 2                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exploring woods and natural spaces | Use senses to notice trees, textures, sounds and paths; stay with an adult and recognise familiar boundaries. | Follow a known route, notice changes and describe where things are using positional words.           | Use simple maps, landmarks and fieldwork to observe and compare parts of the school grounds or local area. | Plan and describe a route, collect observations and explain how natural and human features connect.                  |
| Den building                       | Move and combine loose parts; make a simple shelter with adult help and test whether it stays up.             | Choose suitable materials, work with a partner and explain which parts make a den stable.            | Design for a purpose, build and test a structure; improve its strength, stiffness or stability.            | Agree roles, measure or compare materials, explain design choices and evaluate how well the den works.               |
| Road safety and routes             | Notice paths, gates, vehicles and adult instructions; stop and stay close during supervised movement.         | Practise stop, look, listen and think with an adult; identify safer places and follow a known route. | Explain hazards on a local route, use simple directional language and follow supervised crossing routines. | Compare routes, justify safer choices and model agreed rules while travelling with a supervised group.               |
| Weather and seasons                | Feel sun, wind and rain; choose suitable clothing with support and notice changes outside.                    | Observe weather across days and seasons; talk about how it affects plants, play and clothing.        | Keep a simple weather record; identify seasonal changes and explain practical choices.                     | Compare records, describe patterns, use simple measuring tools and link weather to habitats and human activity.      |
| Fire awareness                     | Learn that heat and flame can hurt; follow adult directions and recognise a safe boundary.                    | Discuss uses and dangers of fire; observe adult demonstrations only when planned and approved.       | Explain fire safety rules, identify fuel and describe changes seen in a closely supervised activity.       | Explain safe choices, observe and record changes, and reflect on responsible behaviour around an adult-managed fire. |

Safety through learning

**Adult-led challenge.** Children learn to notice a hazard, follow a boundary, ask for help, use a tool appropriately and reflect on a decision. Adults remain responsible for supervision. Fire activities and supervised walks take place only when the activity, site and staffing have been assessed and approved.

## Nature, gardening and imaginative learning

| Skill                 | Nursery                                                                                     | Reception                                                                                           | Year 1                                                                                                 | Year 2                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Habitats and wildlife | Look closely at minibeasts, leaves and plants; handle living things gently with guidance.   | Name familiar plants and animals, compare where they are found and begin to ask why.                | Identify common plants and animals, notice seasonal change and describe simple habitat needs.          | Compare habitats and microhabitats; explain how living things depend on places and food sources.                      |
| Gardening and growing | Explore soil, seeds, watering and plant care through hands-on routines.                     | Plant seeds, name basic parts, observe growth and explain what plants need in simple terms.         | Identify plants and their basic parts; compare growth conditions and care for a shared growing area.   | Observe germination and growth over time, record changes and explain why water, light and suitable conditions matter. |
| Natural art           | Collect fallen materials responsibly; arrange colour, shape and texture to express an idea. | Make patterns and pictures from natural materials; describe choices and notice artists or images.   | Explore line, colour, texture and pattern in transient art; choose and combine materials purposefully. | Refine a composition, photograph or sketch it, explain choices and evaluate the effect on a viewer.                   |
| Mud kitchen           | Fill, pour, scoop, mix and pretend to cook; use descriptive and quantity words during play. | Follow or invent a simple recipe, compare quantities, negotiate roles and describe changes.         | Read or write a recipe, measure amounts, combine materials and explain the sequence.                   | Design a recipe for an audience, compare measures, adapt a method and evaluate the result.                            |
| Potion making         | Choose natural materials, mix safely and describe colours, smells and textures.             | Predict what might happen when safe materials are mixed; count, pour and tell an imaginative story. | Follow and record a method, compare quantities and observe which changes can be reversed.              | Plan a fair comparison where appropriate, measure consistently and use precise language to report findings.           |

### A shared task in a mixed-age group

**Example: build a habitat-friendly den.** Reception children collect suitable fallen materials, name them and follow group safety routines. Year 1 children draw a simple design, compare lengths and test stability. Year 2 children plan roles, justify material choices, record observations and explain how the group can avoid disturbing a habitat. Every child contributes; adults adapt the task to individual needs.

### Why outdoor learning matters for health and wellbeing

- Physical health.** Walking, climbing, balancing, carrying and using tools offer regular, varied movement that helps children develop strength, coordination and body awareness.
- Emotional wellbeing.** Predictable access to natural spaces gives children room to notice sensations, regulate emotions, experience calm and grow confident through manageable challenges.
- Social connection.** Shared practical tasks create reasons to communicate, cooperate, negotiate and celebrate each other’s contribution, especially across the Reception-to-Year-2 mixed groups.
- Connection with nature.** Returning to the same spaces through changing seasons helps children notice change, develop care for living things and feel that these places belong to everyone.

Curriculum connections outdoors

| Skill                             | Nursery                                                                             | Reception                                                                    | Year 1                                                                                 | Year 2                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Science and EYFS natural world    | Notice weather, plants, animals and material changes through first-hand experience. | Observe, compare and talk about living things and seasonal change.           | Identify plants, animals and seasonal changes; ask questions and observe closely.      | Investigate habitats, growth and materials; classify, record and use observations to answer questions. |
| Geography and fieldwork           | Know places in the setting and use everyday position words.                         | Explore familiar routes and simple maps; notice natural and built features.  | Use a map and directional language to study the school grounds and nearby environment. | Use simple compass directions and fieldwork records to compare features and explain routes.            |
| English and mathematics           | Name, describe, count, sort and tell stories in play.                               | Rehearse explanations; use number, shape and measures in practical contexts. | Write labels and instructions; measure, tally, compare and explain a method.           | Write reports and reflections; use data and measure to justify conclusions.                            |
| Art, design and technology        | Make, build, arrange and describe what was created.                                 | Select materials and tools and explain what worked.                          | Design, build and evaluate a structure or natural composition.                         | Improve a design for purpose, stability and appearance; explain why changes helped.                    |
| Physical and personal development | Move, balance, carry, cooperate and begin to notice feelings.                       | Negotiate space, manage tools and practise turn-taking and self-regulation.  | Use coordination, teamwork and agreed safety routines; manage a challenge.             | Take responsibility, support others and reflect on wellbeing, effort and care for places.              |

Our values and wellbeing

**Kindness.** Include younger children in mixed groups, listen to different ideas, care for living things and leave natural spaces as we found them.

**Resilience.** Keep trying when a den falls, adapt to the weather, use a calming outdoor routine and learn from a test that did not work.

**Creativity.** Invent a mud-kitchen recipe or potion story, make art from natural forms and find different ways to solve a practical problem.

Planning, inclusion and assessment

- Start with the subject knowledge or skill and choose a place and experience that helps children notice, practise or apply it. Revisit ideas across seasons.
- Plan mixed-age roles and varied ways to participate: sensory exploration, movement, gesture, talk, photographs, drawing, measuring and written recording. Use the class inclusion file and agreed support strategies.
- Check learning through children’s talk, practical choices, observations, sketches, photographs and later recall. Look for growing independence and transfer, not simply completion of an activity.
- Use current activity-specific risk assessments, site checks, supervision and appropriate hygiene; review fire, tools, woodland and road activities before delivery.

Source framework and evidence

Department for Education, EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers, effective September 2026: [gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2](https://gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2)

Department for Education, National curriculum in England: science, geography and design and technology programmes of study: [gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum](https://gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum)

Natural England, Children and Nature Programme: [naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2022/07/25/celebrating-the-children-and-nature-programme-how-learning-in-nature-supports-childrens-mental-and-physical-health-social-skills-and-attainment/](https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2022/07/25/celebrating-the-children-and-nature-programme-how-learning-in-nature-supports-childrens-mental-and-physical-health-social-skills-and-attainment/)

Cecil Gowing, Whole School Curriculum and Provision Map, Nursery to Year 2 (school document).