

## Taking children into a world of possibilities: Courthouse Green Primary School

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### Brief description

At Courthouse Green Primary School, the outdoor area was designed specifically to provide high-quality learning experiences for purposeful, imaginative and creative play in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

### Overview – the school’s message

‘The new school building brought with it the challenge to develop, from scratch, an effective outdoor learning environment to support children’s learning across the Early Years Foundation Stage. We wanted to design activities for learning that were distinctly different to those inside. For the first time, Nursery and Reception children would be sharing the same space so opportunities to build progression in learning were essential. We set out to create a learning environment to take children into a world of open-ended possibilities; a place where they learn to imagine, set themselves challenges, discover new things and realise that there is more than one way of doing things. It was both exciting and daunting to be faced with a vast area to fill. We were mindful how easy it is to get carried away and tempted by attractive resources in glossy brochures. To make sure that our purchases gave excellent value for money in terms of learning outcomes, we revisited and examined our philosophy about how young children learn best. We wanted high-quality resources to stimulate children’s creativity and fire their imagination so that they learnt through investigation and exploration. Maximising flexibility for learning underpinned decisions for the purchase of all resources’.



*Jenny Tegerdine, Early Years Foundation Stage Leader and Sarah Malam, Headteacher*

## The good practice in detail

Exemplary leadership is the driving force behind this excellent provision. Less than a year after the school moved into a new building, inspectors judged the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage as outstanding.



'Doing our best to be our best' is the school motto and to drive this ambition, school leaders aim to provide pupils with the best possible resources and teaching that they can. Pupils are encouraged to be responsible for their own learning and challenge themselves. 'Our Early Years provision is the foundation for the realisation of this expectation,' says Sarah. 'Children leave Reception as confident learners, excited by learning and keen to move on.' One child put forward the views of many in Nursery and Reception: 'My favourite place is outside...working in a team.' Year on

year, children are making rapid progress; outcomes are outstanding.

Jenny Tegerdine leads the team of four teachers and five teaching assistants in the Early Years Foundation Stage, with volunteers and students boosting the ratio of adults to pupils. 'As a team we examined the purpose of the space and identified what skills children should be learning. We considered carefully how the area should be used and how we could integrate children of Nursery and Reception ages. The promotion of independence is one of our key objectives; resources had to be made accessible so that children could retrieve them and put them away easily. We decided what the areas of continuous provision should be, including sand, water, games, the digging area and the potting shed.'

The team focuses relentlessly on learning and reduces the time spent setting up activities so that the adults are able to spend more time interacting with the children. Some resources such as plastic crates, tyres and drainpipes stay out all the time. Large apparatus for games is kept in baskets screwed to the walls under the canopies at child-height for easy access. A row of brightly coloured beach huts stores larger equipment and the potting shed which opens daily.'



Provision is planned as a team. The leader provides high-quality staff development, which ensures that there is a shared understanding of expectations for different children and how to support their learning. The team appreciates the importance of outdoor play especially as



many children have limited outdoor experiences at weekends or in the holidays. The adult role has developed through a focus on moving children on through interaction. All staff know what the learning focus is for every activity on offer and what children's next steps are. The environment constantly changes and challenges. Permanent structures are simple to adapt – wooden three-sided structures are easily transformed. For example, following a farm visit, one structure became a henhouse where children searched for eggs in the straw to make up boxes of six. String

and fabric turned wooden poles cemented into the ground into a temporary theatre where children enjoyed practising their well-known farmer rhymes and songs. Children invented big structures for play using tyres, crates and boxes such as a tractor and trailer that they saw at the farm. The flexibility of the resources enables easy adaptation. They do not lose their magic because they are frequently turned into different environments and contexts for play. Children's ideas are incorporated wherever possible and they help to make new areas for imaginative play.

At the heart of the team's success in boosting children's progress and raising standards of attainment lies rigorous and continuous monitoring and evaluation of provision and outcomes. Through these processes, staff have identified the reasons for their goals being realised so quickly. 'Keep tightly focused on the underlying philosophy and check that the activities are promoting it. Make sure that everyone knows what the learning is and that they respond to children's interests and preferences. Don't make things complicated when they don't have to be...children like variety, choices and options. If it doesn't work, change it!'



## The school's background

[Courthouse Green Primary School](#) is an above average size school for children aged between four and 11 years located in Coventry. Up to 39 children attend the nursery part time in the morning or afternoon. There are three Reception classes.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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