Early Years

Outdoor Learning Policy

Staff Responsible:	Mrs S Cartwright & Miss Y Starkie
Date of Issue:	September 2026
Review Date:	September 2029

Outdoor Learning in the Early Years

Our Vision for Outdoor Learning

At Ribbon Academy Early Years, we believe the outdoor environment is a powerful and essential space for learning, exploration and development. Outdoor learning forms a core part of our Early Years provision and complements the indoor learning environment, offering children opportunities that cannot be replicated inside. Our children access the outdoors in all weathers, as we recognise the importance of natural, sensory, physical and exploratory experiences in every season. We aim to develop confident, resilient and curious learners who are equipped to make sense of the world around them through varied outdoor opportunities. Parents and carers are encouraged to support their child's outdoor learning experiences by ensuring they arrive with appropriate clothing for all weather conditions and a change of clothes, where possible, enabling them to participate fully and safely in outdoor learning.

Outdoor learning at Ribbon Academy Early Years is guided by the belief that children are naturally curious and learn best through hands-on exploration. Opportunities to interact with nature fosters imagination, creativity and critical thinking, and these experiences contribute to a child's understanding of themselves, others and the wider world. We believe that children thrive when they have space to move, take risks safely and develop physical confidence. Therefore, we aim to create outdoor environments that are safe, meaningful, challenging and inspiring.

Our Outdoor Learning Pedagogy

Our outdoor pedagogy mirrors the values of our wider Early Years approach:

A Child-centred/led Approach

Children's interests, questions and fascinations guide our outdoor planning. Practitioners observe, follow lines of enquiry and extend learning through thoughtful interactions.

Enabling Environments

Our outdoor spaces are carefully designed to:

- ✓ spark imagination and engage curiosity
- ✓ promote problem-solving and investigative thinking
- ✓ develop early literacy and mathematical understanding
- ✓ support physical development, coordination and risk management
- ✓ provide sensory-rich experiences through natural materials, weather and terrain

Practitioners ensure the environment is cared for, respected and safely maintained, enabling children to explore confidently.

Positive Relationships

Adults outdoors act as facilitators, co-explorers and role models. They observe, scaffold, challenge and celebrate children's discoveries, ensuring every child feels valued, safe and supported.

Access to the Outdoors

Outdoor learning is integral to our curriculum and daily routine. Children access outdoor provision every day, in all weather conditions. All-weather access promotes resilience, independence and a positive attitude towards active learning. Both nursery and reception children share the outdoor environment to support transitions, confidence-building and continuity across the Early Years.

To keep children comfortable and safe, parents and carers are encouraged to provide:

- ✓ a change of clothes
- ✓ waterproof coat and/or waterproof suit
- ✓ hats, gloves and scarves in cold weather
- ✓ sun hats and appropriate sun protection in warm weather
- ✓ sturdy shoes suitable for mud, grass, climbing and running

Spare clothing will be used if needed, but parents are encouraged to ensure their child is equipped daily.

Curriculum & Learning Outdoors

Outdoor learning supports the EYFS 2025 curriculum and contributes to the development of all prime and specific areas. Children learn through:

- ✓ imaginative role play
- ✓ environmental exploration
- ✓ physical challenges
- ✓ collaborative problem-solving
- ✓ hands-on gardening and nature activities
- ✓ mathematical and scientific investigation
- ✓ storytelling, mark making and early writing
- ✓ sensory experiences with water, mud, sand and natural materials

Outdoor play strengthens the 'Characteristics of Effective Learning' by promoting exploration, persistence and critical thinking.

Wellbeing and Inclusion

The outdoors is a nurturing space where children build confidence. It also supports self-regulation and emotional wellbeing for children. We ensure outdoor learning is inclusive by providing sensory-friendly areas, flexible approaches and accessible areas to ensure all children can engage in the nurturing experiences of learning outside.

Health, Safety and Risk Management

We prioritise safeguarding and wellbeing in our outdoor spaces by:

- ✓ completing regular and dynamic risk assessments
- ✓ maintaining safe boundaries and supervision
- ✓ teaching children to recognise and manage risks
- ✓ ensuring all equipment and areas are checked and well maintained
- ✓ promoting hygiene, including handwashing after outdoor play
- ✓ following the school's safeguarding and health & safety policies

Children learn how to navigate risks safely, developing independence and responsible behaviour.

Parental Partnership

Outdoor learning thrives when school and families work together. At Ribbon Academy Early Years, parents and carers are key partners in supporting their child's readiness for daily outdoor exploration. Therefore, we communicate expectations to parents/carers and children for appropriate outdoor clothing and equipment. Families are encouraged to share outdoor experiences from home which supports the facilitation of meaningful learning experiences and high-quality interaction for the children.