

Location of outdoor learning and play area for two year old children Primrose Hill Primary School

1. The principles of play for two year olds

Expert advice on the key principles of play for two year olds is encapsulated in the following quotes:

“The exploration and engagement of two-year-olds, as they experience the world with their whole bodies, emphasises the vital role of leaders in ensuring that the indoor and outdoor learning environment/learning space is appropriate and convenient for the age and stage of the children using it on a daily basis ... Children may remain in the learning space for extended time, encompassing the beginning and the end of each day and including a range of transitions during that time. [It is important to] recognise this variation and support teams in planning for children’s needs at different times during the day and also for new experiences to be available so that children are both stimulated in their learning and nurtured in their daily routines.”¹

“...research ... shows that very young children need access to a learning space that enables them to experience running, jumping, stretching, climbing, pulling, pushing, crawling, sliding, turning, bending, touching, rolling, squeezing and tumbling. Equally, very young children need regular experience of being held, wrapped, stroked, squeezed and also being involved in rough and tumble play. She suggests that proprioceptive stimulation can be encouraged if resources provided within (and the layout of) the indoor and outdoor learning environment enables lifting and carrying activities, opportunities to push objects around, to sweep with brushes (often aspects of children’s early imaginative and creative play) and activities that involve a child’s muscles in heavy work as indicated above.”²

2. The location

The ‘best practice’ principles for outdoor learning and play in (1) above are best met by providing children with an outdoor learning area that is directly connected to their main indoor learning and play space. This provides easy access between the two spaces, and supports the children by providing ease of transition between indoor and outdoor spaces – a fundamental principle for early years’ childcare. It is also important to take into account that there is a greater probability that the children who are entitled to the free early education offer, for whom this provision is being created, will not have access to an outdoor area at home and may not even be regularly taken to parks or other outdoor spaces. The freedom to explore outdoors at will become even more important in this context.

The investment by London Borough of Camden in buildings to create two year old early education places has at its heart the creation of high quality provision that will give the children who attend the best start in life and the opportunity to overcome any disadvantages that arise from their social background or family circumstances. At the centre of that, therefore, must be ensuring that the provision is suitable to best meet the established early education needs of two year olds.

¹ National College for Teaching and Leadership, ‘Being and becoming’: under threes in focus Leadership in the early years, 2013

² National College for Teaching and Leadership, ‘Being and becoming’: under threes in focus Leadership in the early years, 2013 quoting Jean Ayres in *Sensory Integration and the Child: Understanding Hidden Sensory Challenges (revised edition 2005)*

In 2014, the London Borough of Camden (in consultation with Primrose Hill Primary School) commissioned a feasibility study for the provision of new learning and play facilities for two year old children, including possible locations on the school site. These included:

1. New-build rooms on the existing playground
2. Refurbishment of the Caretaker's House (ground floor and first floor)

On review, Option 2 emerged as the preferred option. Considerations included:

- Loss of playground space
- Secure and safe access at mornings/lunchtime/afternoon
- 'home' feel;
- Potential to expand by use of upper floors, at minimal cost.

Access to outdoor learning and play is required, as explained above. Creation of new play space on the playground was considered, however this would require children to access via a new external staircase. This did not fully support the principles for this age group, for the following reasons:

- Children would need supervision when entering and leaving the internal play area, placing additional pressures on staffing ratios;
- Children would be limited in their freedom to independently access the external learning and play and another important principle of pedagogy, particularly for two year olds, is early years practitioners giving freedom to the children to choose when and what they do

3. Acoustics and amenity

We recognise the concerns with the location of the learning and play deck, expressed by planning officers and the conservation Area Advisory Committee, and hope the following gives assurance that the amenity impact will be minimal:

- The number of children will vary at any point in the day there should be a free flow between the indoor and outdoor space in accordance with early learning best practice. The maximum number of children who could be in the outdoor space at any one given time during the 2016/17 school year would be 12 (expected to increase to its full capacity of 20 from September 2017), but it is unlikely that all children would, in reality, be outside together for any prolonged period, if at all.
- Sessions will run each morning from 9am to 12 noon; and from 1pm to 4pm. Any periods of outdoor play will be limited to these times; Outdoor play will involve the activities described above, these being running, jumping, stretching, climbing, pulling, pushing, crawling, sliding, turning, bending, touching, rolling, squeezing and tumbling and rough and tumble play. There are times when the area might simply be used for outdoors story telling. The decking is not intended for use for large-scale games, or by older cohorts of children who typically create large amounts of noise.

We have taken the following actions to further reduce the potential impact on neighbours:

- Additional full-height glazing to the terrace canopy, to act as a physical noise barrier;
- 1.8-2m high screening to the remaining boundary between the decking and Waterside Place, to prevent direct overlooking;

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