

# Play & Learn Outdoors

from the canopy experts



Issue 3.9  
December 2025

*Fun Ideas to Expand a Safe Learning Environment for Your School*

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# WELCOME TO THE WINTER EDITION OF PLAY & LEARN OUTDOORS

Hello and welcome to the December edition of P&LO.

The summer seemed to whiz by and I'm not quite sure where autumn went. However, we're knee deep in the middle of winter which means there's lots to plan, and plenty of opportunities to take lessons outside and hold fundraising events.

We've been busy since the last edition of P&LO installing canopies at schools across the UK and have

lots of inspiration for you in this edition.

You will find fundraising ideas along with ways you can take lessons outside this winter, playground and outdoor dining inspiration and top tips for your treasurers.

If you enjoy reading P&LO, we'd love you to pass a copy onto your colleagues to also enjoy. If they would like to receive their own copies, email us at:

[marketing@ablecanopies.co.uk](mailto:marketing@ablecanopies.co.uk) and we'll add them to the list.

Enjoy the winter and the festive season, and we'll be back in the spring with more ideas and inspiration.

Best Wishes

**Tracy Meakins**  
Managing Director

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## Become Part of the P&LO Facebook Group



It's so helpful to be part of a community of like-minded people who talk about something that interests you and supports your profession. However, being a teacher doesn't leave you with much time to go to regular meets outside of your career and personal life. That's why we have created a Facebook group where you can meet

like-minded teachers and education specialists online to discuss any ideas and tips you have for outdoor play and learning ideas, all from the comfort of your home or staff room.

The idea of this online group is so you can gather and share ideas, discuss what has worked for you enabling you to hold outdoor sessions that work out perfectly for both you and your pupils.

We'll also be sharing weekly posts with lots of outdoor play and learning ideas.

**How can you join the group?** If you have a Facebook profile, it's really simple, search **Outdoor Play & Learning Ideas for Schools UK** in Facebook, click the join button, answer the questions, hit submit, and you're in!

Alternatively, scan the QR code here:





# OUTDOOR DINING CANOPY STILL LOOKS BRAND NEW ONE YEAR LATER



One of my favourite things is when we return to the site a few months or so after installing a canopy, and we get to see it in use and well-loved by the pupils and teachers.

Last month, our Northern Area Sales Manager visited Ercall Wood Academy in Shropshire to discuss a new project. However, exactly one year ago to the day, we installed an outdoor dining canopy at the school. This was therefore a prime opportunity to find out how they were getting on with the canopy and take some photos.

The academy, which first opened in the 1940's and was rebuilt as an academy in 2014, was in the process of renovations including a new science block, dining hall extension and internal refurbishments.

As part of the dining hall extension, they required

a commercial canopy to further extend their dining capacity and offer their students the choice to dine inside or outside with full weather protection.

Their structure of choice was a Coniston Wall Mounted Canopy with polycarbonate side and front panels, for additional weather protection.

The canopy's aluminium frame was finished in Anthracite Grey (RAL 7016), which is an extremely popular colour that looks fantastic in contemporary, new-build settings.

As you can see in the photos, even though the canopy was installed 12 months ago, it still looks brand-new, which is a testament to our canopies and their quality and longevity. So much so that we can offer a guarantee of up to 10 years for the Coniston and an impressive



life expectancy of up to 25 years.

Now an integral part of school life, the canopy provides a welcoming space where pupils enjoy their meals beneath it each day, making it a much-loved feature of the school.

If you'd like to extend your dining room capacity and have an outdoor area that you'd like to maximise the use of – an outdoor dining canopy could be the perfect, cost-effective solution.

Call us on 0800 389 9072, or send us an email to [sales@ablecanopies.co.uk](mailto:sales@ablecanopies.co.uk) to find out how we can help you.



# THE IDEAL OUTDOOR AREA FOR EARLY YEARS

## INSPIRING OUTDOOR LEARNING ALL YEAR ROUND

Creating the ideal outdoor area for early years means designing a space where children can explore, imagine, and learn safely in every season. With thoughtful planning and the right mix of features, your outdoor environment can become an engaging extension of the classroom, encouraging creativity, physical activity, and social development.

At Able Canopies, we've helped schools and nurseries across the UK transform their outdoor spaces with high-quality, weatherproof canopies and play area features. Here are some of the best ideas to make your early years outdoor area truly outstanding.

### Messy Play Zones

Messy play is a key part of early childhood development, encouraging experimentation, imagination, and sensory exploration. Here are a few popular ideas to bring this area to life:

- Water play areas
- Gravel construction pits
- Mud kitchens

With outdoor school canopies, messy play can continue whatever the weather, keeping children sheltered while making clean-up easier for staff.

### Nature Play

Nature play connects children with the world around them, teaching

them to care for living things while developing curiosity and confidence.

- Create a **mini jungle garden** with tunnels
- Build **bug hotels** for biodiversity and insect life cycle lessons
- Add **vegetable-growing areas** to watch plants grow
- Install **living willow structures** that can change with the seasons

A canopy covered planting area helps keep these activities accessible all year long, even during unpredictable weather.

### Risk and Personality Play

Encouraging safe risk-taking and self-expression is vital for confidence and coordination.

- **Balance beams** help children test their limits and improve coordination.
- **Music and tactile panels** encourage sensory play and creativity.
- **Cycle tracks** create safe designated riding areas.
- A **performance area** with seating and a small stage invites imagination.
- **Climbing and jungle zones** allow children explore safely while developing physical strength and independence.

### Dedicated Baby Area

Your youngest learners need a space designed for their needs too. A covered baby area connected to the building allows under-twos to crawl safely between indoor and outdoor spaces, protected from the elements and separated from older children's active play areas.

### The Benefits of a Well-Designed Early Years Outdoor Area

By incorporating a variety of learning and play zones which are each tailored to different ages and activities, your outdoor space will:

- Support physical, emotional, and cognitive development
- Allow safe, structured exploration through play
- Create a positive, welcoming environment
- Ensure year-round use with weather protection from durable canopies

An inspiring outdoor area isn't just an investment in your setting, it's an investment in every child's future growth and wellbeing.

### Ready to Create Your Ideal Outdoor Space?

At Able Canopies, we specialise in designing, manufacturing, and installing canopies for schools and nurseries that make outdoor learning safe, engaging, and accessible in every season.



# CASE STUDY: ST BENEDICT'S CATHOLIC COLLEGE

## ALL-WEATHER OUTDOOR DINING AREA

**Product:** Coniston Apex Freestanding Canopy with Side & Front Panels

**Size:** 16.5 m x 9m

**Frame Colour:** Signal Blue RAL 5005

**Installation Date:** March 2025

**Intended Use:** All-weather Outdoor Space

### Brief

In November 2024, St Benedict's Catholic College in Colchester, Essex, reached out to us in search of a modern canopy solution to enhance the area outside their entrances and exits of the building. Their goal was to create a durable, all-weather structure that would provide reliable shelter for students and staff during break times, as well as create a dedicated outdoor learning space.

With outdoor learning widely recognised for its numerous benefits to young adults' development, the school wanted a high-quality, long-lasting canopy that would encourage more time spent outdoors without compromising comfort or productivity. We were delighted to offer a tailored solution that met their specific needs.

As a school that caters to 898 pupils aged 11-16, St Benedict's Catholic College is committed to striving for the highest standards in everything they do. To ensure minimal disruption to students, they requested that the installation take place during the school holidays; a request we were more than happy to accommodate.



### Proposal

Following a detailed site survey in December 2024, our team recommended the installation of a Coniston Apex Freestanding Canopy which is two Coniston Freestanding Canopies, positioned back-to-back to form a spacious 16.5m x 9m covered area, totalling 148.5 square metres. To enhance accessibility and weather protection between the building and the new canopied space, we also installed a 5m x 3m Coniston Wall Mounted Canopy.

For added comfort, we incorporated 12 canopy side fills to shield the area from wind and rain. To complete the transformation, our partners at Lonsdale Landscapes Ltd installed 270 square metres of artificial grass, creating a practical, visually appealing outdoor space.

### Installation Timeline

The full installation was completed within a four-week period across two phases:

Phase One: Lonsdale Landscapes began with groundwork preparation, followed by our team installing the canopy structure, polycarbonate roof panels, and

weather-protective side fills.

Phase Two: Landscaping was completed and final canopy adjustments, including remaining side infills, were installed by our team.

Thanks to meticulous planning and our stringent health and safety measures, all work was carried out safely during term time, avoiding disruption to the school day.

The completed installation has provided St Benedict's Catholic College with a versatile, attractive outdoor environment that is usable all year round. From outdoor lessons and sheltered seating to social gatherings, the new canopies support a broad range of daily school activities.

### Client Feedback

We were delighted to receive the following feedback from the school:

*"Super easy to work with Able Canopies. Install team were spot on. End result – Fab. Highly recommend."*

Another successful project from Able Canopies – delivering functional, long-lasting shelter solutions tailored to the needs of UK schools.



# FUNDRAISING WITH FOOD

Fundraising with food is one of the most effective and enjoyable ways for schools, PTAs, and voluntary groups to raise vital funds. Food-based events are easy to organise, encourage strong community involvement, and work brilliantly across every season.

Below are some creative and practical ideas to help you maximise your fundraising potential throughout the year, including winter-focused food events.

## Winter Warming Food Events

Winter offers fantastic opportunities for fundraising with food, as people are naturally drawn to warm, comforting treats during colder months.

Some popular winter food fundraising ideas include:

- Hot chocolate stations with flavoured syrups and toppings
- Soup and roll lunches
- Mince pie and mulled apple juice stalls
- Christmas cake sales
- Festive bake-off competitions

- Pancake flipping competitions for Shrove Tuesday

These events can be held indoors or under a covered outdoor area, making them ideal for winter fundraising.

## School Food Markets and Street Food Events

Food markets continue to grow in popularity and work exceptionally well as school fundraising events. By inviting local businesses, parents, or community groups to host stalls, you can offer a wide range of cuisines and treats.

Holding your event in a street-market-style layout creates an authentic and exciting atmosphere, encouraging visitors to stay longer and return year after year.

## Christmas and Festive Food Fairs

Festive food fairs are among the most successful winter fundraising events. You could include:

- Gingerbread decorating stations
- Christmas cookie

decorating workshops

- Festive afternoon tea
- Hot roast chestnut stands
- Seasonal waffle or crêpe stalls

These experiences not only raise funds but also build strong community engagement.

## Summer BBQs and School Fun Days

During warmer months, fundraising with food works perfectly alongside outdoor activities. Summer BBQs, family fun days, and picnic-style events are extremely popular.

You can sell burgers, hot dogs, vegetarian options, cold drinks, ice cream, and fruit pots while combining the event with games, raffles, and entertainment for maximum fundraising impact.

## Plan Ahead for Greater Fundraising Success

By planning a calendar of food-themed events throughout the year, schools and PTAs can maintain a steady stream of fundraising activity.



# FUNDRAISING EVENTS FOR CHILDREN: FUN WAYS TO RAISE MONEY AND MAKE LASTING MEMORIES

When it comes to fundraising, some of the most rewarding events are those you organise for children. Their enthusiasm is contagious. When one child starts having fun, the excitement spreads quickly, creating an uplifting atmosphere for everyone involved.

Planning fundraising events for children not only supports your school or organisation's next big project, but also creates moments of joy that make the effort worthwhile. Here are a few creative ideas to get you started.

## Themed Disco

A themed disco is a timeless favourite. Simple to organise and guaranteed to get children moving and laughing. Adding a theme makes the event extra special and helps everyone feel involved, including teachers and volunteers.

Try fun, low-cost ideas such as:

**Shorts and Shades** – Children wear any shorts, a top of their choice, and a pair of sunglasses.

**Princesses and Princes** – Many already have a costume at home, or can easily create one using everyday clothes.

Keep the theme flexible so that no child feels left out. Charge a small entry fee, sell drinks or snacks, and decorate the hall with lights or bunting to create a fun, affordable party atmosphere.

## Children's Bingo

Hosting a children's bingo event is a fun and educational way to raise funds. Instead of cash prizes, offer small donated items, stationery, or sweets. You could charge £1 for two games and make use of donated prizes to increase your profit.

Bingo is great for improving number recognition, listening skills, and patience, all while keeping things light-hearted and inclusive.

## School Talent Show

A school talent show is a fantastic way for children to showcase their unique abilities, from singing and dancing to gymnastics, football tricks, or even magic shows. Family and friends love to attend, and the event can generate excellent funds through ticket sales and refreshments.

### To make the evening memorable:

- Charge a small entry fee for spectators.
- Offer drinks and snacks for sale.
- Consider having the event professionally filmed and sell copies to proud parents afterwards.

Remember to set a "no personal filming" policy to keep the event safe and organised.

## Outdoor Fundraising Under a Canopy

If your school or nursery has a canopy installed, make use of it by hosting fundraising activities throughout the year, whatever the weather! From craft stalls and bake sales to mini fairs and garden parties, a covered outdoor space provides flexibility and comfort for both children and families.

A well-placed school canopy not only extends learning and play areas but also opens up new opportunities for community fundraising events in all seasons.

## Combine Learning and Fun

The best fundraising events for children inspire creativity while teaching valuable lessons about teamwork, community, and giving. Whether your pupils are performing on stage, selling crafts they've made, or helping with setup, every small task builds confidence and a sense of achievement.

## Final Thoughts

Fundraising doesn't just raise money, it builds connections, develops skills, and brings joy to pupils, parents, and staff alike. With a little imagination (and maybe some weather protection from a canopy!), you can host events that children will remember for years to come.

# TOP TIPS FOR TREASURERS

If you've recently become, or are thinking about applying to become, the treasurer of your school's PTA, congratulations! It's an incredibly rewarding role that plays a key part in helping your school raise funds.

To help you get started with confidence, we've put together our top tips for treasurers, covering everything from record-keeping to event management and reporting.



## Build on Experience and Knowledge

A background in finance, accounting, or bookkeeping can be a huge advantage when taking on the treasurer role. However, even if you're new to managing money, don't worry, organisation and attention to detail are the most important qualities. Many PTA's also offer handovers and training sessions to help new treasurers settle in quickly.

## Review the Books Before Taking Over

Before formally accepting the position, check the PTA's financial records carefully. Make sure everything is up to date and that there are no discrepancies or missing information. If you notice anything unusual, raise it with the outgoing treasurer or the committee so that all records are accurate and transparent before you take responsibility.

## Manage Event Funds Securely

For events that raise larger amounts of money, such as summer fairs or Christmas markets, always ensure two people count the funds together (for example, the chair and the treasurer). Deposit the money into the PTA's bank account as soon as possible rather than keeping it at home. This protects you and keeps the process professional and secure.

## Keep Accurate Records

Good record-keeping is essential for any treasurer. Keep cash receipts for at least 7 years, bank statements for at least 10 years and petty cash vouchers for at least 3 years.

These documents are invaluable if you ever need to reference them for audits, tax purposes, or general enquiries. Digital copies are acceptable, provided they're stored securely.



## Conduct Annual Audits

At the end of each financial year, arrange an independent audit of the PTA accounts. Share the audit report at your Annual General Meeting (AGM) so all members can review the financial position of the group. Ensure copies of the audit and minutes are filed safely with the secretary for future reference.

## Attend Meetings and Communicate Clearly

As treasurer, attending PTA meetings regularly helps keep everyone informed. Provide short verbal or written reports on the current financial situation and offer insight on how funds can be best managed for future events and projects. Transparency builds trust and strengthens your PTA community.

## Work as a Team

Remember, being a treasurer isn't a solo role. The PTA thrives on teamwork, so share ideas, ask questions, and support one another. Your efforts help provide better learning resources, playground improvements, and exciting experiences for pupils.





# CHRISTMAS OUTDOOR LEARNING IDEAS FOR SCHOOLS

Outdoor learning is an essential part of a well-rounded education, supporting children's wellbeing, engagement, and development. During the festive season, schools can combine curriculum learning with Christmas-themed outdoor activities to create memorable and meaningful experiences for pupils.

With the addition of a school canopy, many of these activities can take place comfortably outdoors, regardless of cold, wind, or rain, allowing uninterrupted learning throughout the winter months.

## Christmas Nature Crafts in Outdoor School Spaces

Festive crafting using natural materials is a popular outdoor classroom activity. Pupils can collect items such as pinecones, twigs, and leaves to create:

- Christmas wreaths
- Tree decorations
- Festive table displays

These hands-on activities support creativity and fine motor skills. When carried out under a covered school canopy, pupils remain sheltered while still benefiting from fresh air and outdoor learning.

## Festive Outdoor Reading and Storytelling

Schools can create a calm and engaging Christmas reading area outdoors using soft seating, blankets, and seasonal decorations. Activities may include:

- Group reading of festive stories
- Creative storytelling sessions
- Christmas-themed creative writing

A school canopy structure ensures the space stays usable in all weather, creating a protected yet open learning environment.

## Outdoor Christmas Maths Activities

Festive-themed math activities can be brought outdoors using practical challenges such as:

- Counting trails using Christmas symbols
- Measuring festive shapes and decorations
- Sorting and pattern-making with seasonal items

Using a covered outdoor learning area allows pupils to move freely without lessons being disrupted by poor weather.

## Winter Science Experiments Outdoors

Winter provides excellent learning opportunities for hands-on science. Christmas-themed outdoor science activities can include:

- Ice and frost observations
- Weather monitoring
- Material testing in cold conditions

A school canopy provides shelter while still allowing safe exposure to outdoor elements, making it ideal for practical winter science lessons.

## Outdoor Christmas Performances and Role Play

Covered playground areas can become performance spaces for:

- Christmas plays
- Nativity scenes
- Carol singing
- Festive drama workshops

A canopy-covered outdoor stage helps ensure events can proceed even in wet or windy conditions.

## Christmas Fundraising Activities for Pupils

Older pupils benefit from running Christmas-themed outdoor enterprise projects, such as:

- Mini festive markets
- Charity fundraising stalls
- Handmade gift tables

A commercial-grade school canopy provides a safe, dry structure for these activities to run smoothly.

## Benefits of School Canopies for Outdoor Learning

Installing a school canopy or shelter allows schools to:

- Deliver outdoor learning all year round
- Protect pupils from rain, wind and harsh winter weather
- Create safe, defined learning zones
- Reduce timetable disruption

Canopies make outdoor education accessible, practical and comfortable throughout the festive season and beyond.

## Enhancing Christmas Learning Through Outdoor Education

By combining festive themes with outdoor learning, schools can encourage creativity, teamwork and confidence while maintaining curriculum focus. With the support of a well-designed school canopy, outdoor Christmas learning becomes more accessible, safer and effective for both pupils and staff.

# HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR CANOPY IN COLDER WEATHER

As temperatures drop, it can be tempting to move all activities indoors. However, with the right preparation, outdoor spaces can still play an important role during winter. Looking after your canopies in the colder months ensures they remain safe, functional, and ready to use, helping schools and organisations continue to benefit from fresh air and outdoor learning throughout the colder season.

By taking simple steps to maintain your canopy and adapting how the space is used, you can create a protected, comfortable environment that works all year round.

## Early Years: Fun and Learning Under the Canopy

Outdoor spaces remain essential for early years development, even during colder months. Canopies help create a sheltered area where children can safely play and explore.

### Practical activity ideas include:

- Relocating outdoor play equipment beneath the canopy to keep it usable in wet or frosty conditions
- Collecting seasonal natural materials such as leaves, twigs and pinecones for creative art projects
- Encouraging children to practise fastening coats, zips, buttons, hats and gloves, supporting fine motor skills and independence

A quick daily safety check helps

ensure the space remains suitable for use during winter weather.

## Primary and Secondary: Learning and Social Spaces Outdoors

Canopies create valuable covered spaces for older pupils, allowing outdoor areas to remain active even in colder conditions.

### Outdoor learning ideas include:

- Creating temporary wildlife observation areas to study birds, insects and seasonal changes
- Running “weather watch” activities to track rainfall, frost and temperature changes
- Teaching curriculum-linked topics such as hibernation, migration and tree life cycles in a practical, engaging way

These experiences support wellbeing, concentration and curriculum enrichment.

## Use Your Canopy for Winter Events

Well-designed canopies provide excellent shelter for seasonal events, helping schools host activities with confidence, whatever the weather.

- Popular winter event ideas include:
- Christmas fairs and festive markets
- Fireworks and Bonfire Night gatherings
- Outdoor carol singing

- Winter food stalls serving soup, hot chocolate and seasonal treats

Covered outdoor areas help keep guests comfortable and encourage higher attendance.

## Create Comfortable Outdoor Seating Areas

Adding picnic tables or benches beneath your canopy creates a practical, sheltered seating area. This provides pupils and staff with access to fresh air during breaks or lunchtime, even in light rain or colder conditions, supporting wellbeing and social interaction.

## Enhance Protection with Canopy Accessories

To maximise usability during winter, canopies can be upgraded with additional features such as:

- Side-fill panels
- Roller shutters
- Safety barriers and balustrades

These additions help reduce wind exposure and improve weather protection, creating a more enclosed and comfortable environment.

## Plan Ahead for Year-Round Use

With the right care and planning, your canopy can become a valuable year-round asset. Looking After Your Canopies in the Colder Months allows you to protect your investment while continuing to use outdoor spaces in a safe, practical way.



# SCHOOL CANOPY HIGHLIGHTS

Below is a selection of our canopy installations since our last newsletter in September, to provide you with inspiration for your school grounds.





# Able Canopies: The Canopy Experts



The Coniston Wall Mounted Canopy installed at Brackenfield SEND School in Nottinghamshire

Canopies & Covered Walkways

Cycle & Waiting Shelters

Shade Sails & Tensile Structures

Awnings & Playground Accessories

External Works: Surfacing, Fencing etc.

Able Canopies are the canopy experts. We provide safe and stylish weather protection that transforms outside spaces.

- Every year we complete hundreds of successful school canopy installations across the UK
- These canopies provide schools with effective shelter & areas for outdoor learning and dining
- We also work with universities and the retail, leisure & hospitality sectors to effectively transform outside space
- Our team of canopy experts work with schools, architects & contractors to ensure on time, on budget, project completion
- To ensure consistent high quality we control the design, manufacture & installation process of our canopies

***"Very happy with the service and installation. On time and no issues."***

- Burnt Ash Primary School,  
Installed October 2025

If you would like a canopy, shelter or shade sail quotation, contact us today:

**Call:** 0800 389 9072 | **Email:** [sales@ablecanopies.co.uk](mailto:sales@ablecanopies.co.uk)



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