

Play & Learn Outdoors

from the canopy experts



Issue 4.1
June 2026

Fun Ideas to Expand a Safe Learning Environment for Your School

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Don't Miss Out!

Sign up to receive a **FREE** quarterly copy of Play & Learn Outdoors, plus monthly outdoor play, learning and fundraising inspiration in your inbox.

Scan the QR code below:



WELCOME TO THE SUMMER EDITION OF PLAY & LEARN OUTDOORS

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

As we head into the first official month of summer, and say goodbye to spring, we have a bumper edition of Play & Learn Outdoors for you including a whole host of inspiration for your outdoor area.

You will also discover fundraisers that you can implement in the coming seasons, and lot's of outdoor

lesson and play ideas you can takeaway into these warmer, brighter days of summer.

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 and we'll add them to the list.

Enjoy these warmer months and

spending time outdoors, and we'll be back in the autumn 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 lot's 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:



HOW THENational
Education
Nature Park**WORKS**

A Step-by-Step Approach to Greener School Grounds

Schools across the UK are increasingly looking for ways to connect pupils with nature while improving their outdoor environments.

One initiative helping to support this is the National Education Nature Park, a programme encouraging schools, nurseries and colleges to transform their grounds for both people and wildlife.

The programme helps pupils explore biodiversity, understand their local environment and take practical action to improve their outdoor spaces.

Through hands-on learning and environmental projects, pupils develop valuable skills while contributing to wider nature recovery efforts.

The Nature Park follows a simple five-step cycle that can be revisited year after year:

Explore the Space

Pupils investigate their school grounds, observe habitats and record wildlife.

Identify Opportunities

Learners discuss how outdoor areas could be improved for biodiversity and wellbeing.

Make Decisions

Pupils work together to plan achievable environmental improvements.

Create Change

Schools may introduce planting areas, wildlife habitats or greener learning spaces.

Record Progress

Pupils monitor changes and track the positive impact on their environment.

Initiatives like the National Education Nature Park highlight the growing importance of outdoor learning within schools. Access to well-designed outdoor spaces encourages creativity, exploration and practical education beyond the classroom.

Features such as school canopies can further support these activities by creating sheltered outdoor areas that can be used throughout the year.

Covered spaces allow pupils to continue outdoor learning, environmental projects and nature observation in all weather conditions, helping schools maximise the use of their grounds while supporting pupil wellbeing and engagement with nature.

To find out more visit: www.educationnaturepark.org.uk

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CANOPIES

Choosing the right canopy for your school can feel overwhelming, especially with so many options available. From outdoor learning spaces to covered dining areas, different canopy styles offer different benefits depending on your requirements, budget, and available space.

Wall Mounted Canopies

Wall mounted canopies are fixed directly to a building, making them a cost-effective solution as they require fewer support posts. They are ideal for creating sheltered walkways, outdoor classrooms, and dining areas while also helping to reduce solar glare and overheating inside classrooms.



Freestanding Canopies

Freestanding canopies are perfect for areas where there isn't a suitable wall for installation. They can cover both small and large outdoor spaces and are commonly used for playgrounds, dining areas, and sports facilities.

Timber Canopies

Timber canopies combine practicality with natural aesthetics, making them ideal for both traditional and modern school environments. Their warm appearance creates inviting outdoor spaces for pupils while still providing reliable all-weather protection.





Commercial Umbrellas

For smaller outdoor areas, commercial umbrellas provide a flexible and stylish shelter solution. Designed for year-round use, they are ideal for picnic tables, seating areas, and outdoor dining spaces.

Waterproof Tensile Canopies

These fabric canopies offer a contemporary appearance while providing protection from both rain and sun. They are excellent for larger play and dining areas where a modern design is desired.



Shade Sails

Shade sails are popular in schools and nurseries due to their bright, eye-catching appearance. They provide excellent UV protection and create fun outdoor environments for pupils to enjoy during warmer weather.

Cantilevered Wall Mounted Canopies

Entrance canopies help create safer and more welcoming entrances by protecting doorways from rain and reducing slip hazards. They also improve the appearance of school entrances for visitors, parents, and pupils.



No matter the size or style of your outdoor space, there is a canopy solution to suit your school's needs. The right canopy can help schools create more usable outdoor areas all year round while supporting outdoor learning, dining, and play.

WHY CANOPY PLACEMENT MATTERS

MAXIMISING SHELTER AND SOLAR GAIN FOR SCHOOLS



When schools invest in a canopy, the focus is often on creating shelter from the rain and shade from the sun. However, one of the most important factors to consider is where the canopy is placed. The right positioning can make a significant difference to how effective and beneficial the canopy becomes throughout the year.

A well-positioned canopy can transform outdoor spaces into practical all-weather areas for learning, dining, play, and social interaction. Installing canopies in busy areas such as playgrounds, courtyards, or between buildings helps encourage pupils to spend more time

outdoors while remaining protected from the elements.

Placement is also important when considering sunlight and warmth. South-facing and west-facing canopies often receive more natural light, helping create brighter, more inviting outdoor areas. When installed outside classrooms, canopies can also support solar gain by helping regulate indoor temperatures.

During warmer months, the canopy provides shade that helps reduce glare and overheating inside classrooms. In cooler weather, translucent canopy roofs can still allow natural light and warmth to reach classroom

windows, creating a more comfortable learning environment.

Canopies positioned close to classrooms can also make outdoor learning more accessible, allowing teachers to move lessons outside quickly and easily. This helps schools create more engaging and flexible learning experiences for pupils.

Every school site is different, which is why careful planning is essential. By considering factors such as building orientation, sunlight, and intended use, schools can ensure their canopy delivers maximum value all year round.

ALL-WEATHER PROTECTION WITH WATERPROOF SHADE SAILS



Over recent years, we have seen a growing demand for shade solutions that offer more than just UV protection. While traditional shade sails are excellent for reducing sun exposure, many customers were seeking a product that could also provide cover during wet weather. Our new waterproof shade sails have been developed in direct response to this need, offering year-round usability in a wide range of environments.

Dual Protection, All Year Round

Our Waterproof Shade Sails are engineered using high-quality, durable materials that are specifically designed to repel water while maintaining strength and performance. This means your outdoor space can remain functional and comfortable, whether shielding users from intense sunlight or providing a dry

area during rainfall.

This dual-purpose functionality makes them an ideal solution for schools, hospitality settings, healthcare environments, and commercial spaces where outdoor usability is essential throughout the year.

Stylish and Versatile Design

In addition to their practical benefits, our Waterproof Shade Sails are available in a wide selection of 50 vibrant and contemporary colours.

Whether you are looking to blend the structure seamlessly into its surroundings or create a bold visual statement, there is a design option to suit every project.

Their modern aesthetic, combined with flexible design configurations, allows for truly bespoke installations that enhance both the functionality and visual appeal

of any outdoor area.

Expert Support from Start to Finish

As with all Able Canopies products, our team of experts are on hand to guide you through every stage of your project. From initial enquiry and design through to manufacture and installation.

We also offer free site surveys to help determine the most suitable solution for your space.

Upgrade Your Outdoor Space Today

If you are looking to maximise the usability of your outdoor areas, our new Waterproof Shade Sails offer the perfect combination of protection, durability, and style.

Get in touch with our team today to find out more or to see if you qualify for a Free Site Survey, call us on **0800 389 9072** or email: **sales@ablecanopies.co.uk**

HOW TO EXTEND A SCHOOL DINING ROOM COST EFFECTIVELY

WE HAVE A SOLUTION FOR WHEN BUDGETS ARE TIGHT

When it comes to upgrading your school facilities, it's important to be mindful not to spend too much of your budget on just one upgrade. So, if you're in need of more room, whether that be for teaching space or dining space, it's best to look at all the options available before committing.

One of the most cost-effective ways you can extend your school dining room without blowing your budget on a building extension is to invest in a school dining canopy. Whilst school canopies may seem to be a big outlay, they are a fraction of the

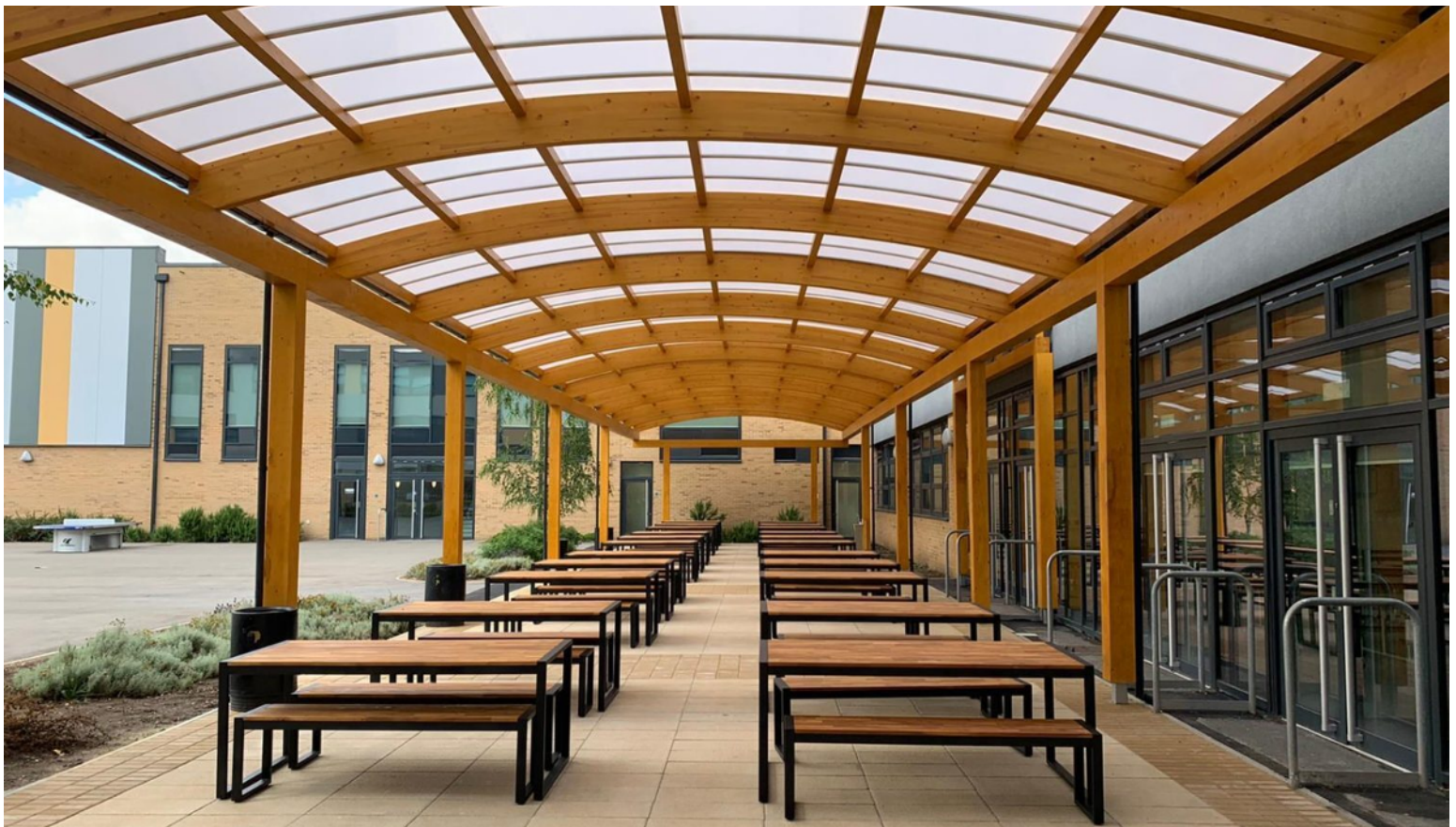
cost of an extension and will leave you with lots of leftover cash to spend on all the other much needed school supplies.

Our outdoor dining canopies can be supplied as standard canopies with open sides, or you can add side panels and doors to enclose the structure*, blocking driving wind and rain. This creates an enclosed structure which is almost perfectly protected by the weather, whilst ensuring the longevity and durability of the canopy.

Our most popular canopies that our customers use as alfresco

dining canopies are the Coniston Wall Mounted Canopy, the Welford Dome Free Standing Canopy and the Tarnhow Dome Free Standing Timber Canopy as shown above and below.

In 2020, we supplied and installed a 33.1m x 7m Tarnhow Dome Free Standing Timber Canopy at Eastbrook School in Dagenham (pictured below). The canopy allowed them to extend their dining space by 270 seats which is a dramatic increase in the useable space for their pupils.





FUNDRAISING IDEAS

for the Summer



Raising funds for school improvements, whether it's new IT equipment, outdoor resources or a school canopy, can feel challenging, particularly when many families are managing tighter budgets. However, with the right approach, there are plenty of fundraising ideas for the summer that can generate valuable income while remaining accessible and inclusive for your school community.

One effective approach is to explore local sponsorship opportunities. Partnering with nearby businesses can provide a reliable source of funding without placing additional pressure on parents. In return, schools can offer visibility through signage, newsletters or website mentions, helping to

build strong community relationships while securing a consistent contribution towards school projects.

Another option to consider is affiliate marketing, which can be easily integrated into school websites or email communications. By recommending relevant products such as educational books, revision materials or learning tools, schools can earn a small commission on purchases made through referral links. While this method may not provide a guaranteed income stream, it offers flexibility and allows schools to align promotions with their curriculum and pupil needs.

Schools may also benefit from introducing branded merchandise, such as clothing,

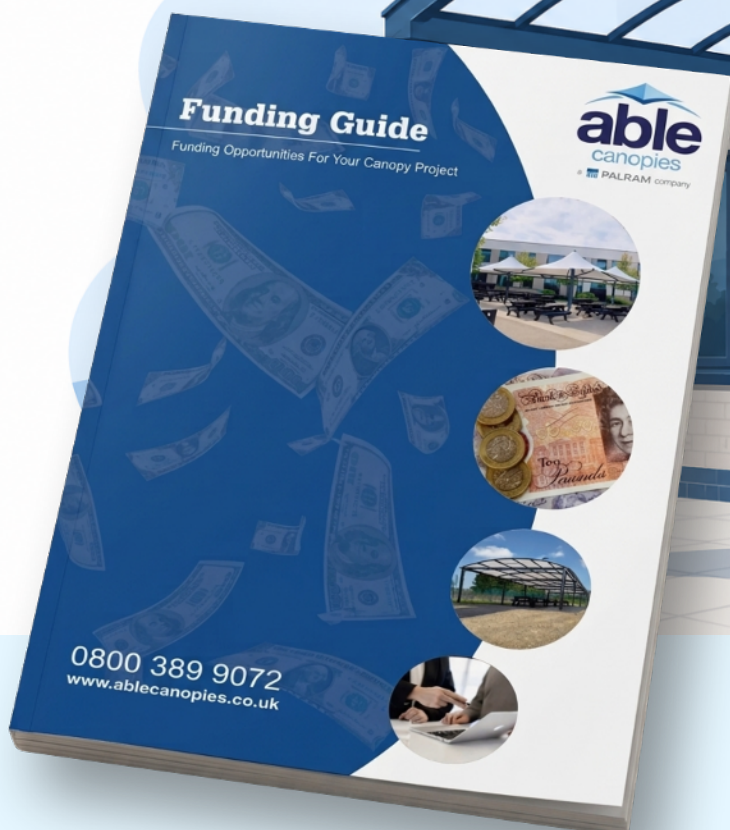
accessories or everyday items featuring the school logo. Using print-on-demand services can simplify the process, removing the need for upfront stock or storage. With the right promotion, merchandise can become a steady supplementary income stream while also strengthening school identity and community pride.

Ultimately, successful fundraising ideas for the summer focus on creativity, accessibility and long-term value. By combining different approaches and engaging both local businesses and the wider school community, schools can raise funds in a way that is both effective and considerate, supporting future projects without placing unnecessary strain on families.

ATTENTION: SCHOOL LEADERS AND BUSINESS MANAGERS

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NEW IDEAS FOR YOUR SUMMER FETE

Fresh ideas. More fun.
Better fundraising.

-  Engaging activities for all ages
-  Raise more money for your school
-  Create a memorable day for your community



School summer fetes remain a staple in fundraising calendars, and for good reason. When planned effectively, they bring communities together, create memorable experiences for pupils and families, and generate valuable funds for schools. However, with many events following a similar format year after year, introducing new ideas for your summer fete can help increase engagement, attract more visitors and ultimately maximise fundraising potential.

One way to refresh your event is by incorporating interactive and hands-on activities that appeal to all age groups. A popular option is 'Panning for Gold', where children sift through sand and water to uncover hidden 'gold nuggets', small stones painted gold. This activity is not only fun and engaging but also encourages repeat participation. To increase

excitement, you could introduce a reward system, such as offering a prize when a certain number of nuggets are found. While there may be a small initial setup cost, this type of activity often delivers strong returns due to its popularity.

Another creative addition is the "Human Fruit Machine", a simple yet highly entertaining game that can be adapted to suit your event. Three participants act as the 'machine', each selecting a piece of fruit from identical sets hidden in boxes. If all three fruits match, the player wins a prize. This activity is easy to organise, visually engaging and encourages audience participation. To ensure its success, it is advisable to prepare prizes in advance and consider offering a range of options to appeal to different age groups.

When planning your fete, it's also important to consider the overall

layout and comfort of your event. Providing sheltered areas can help ensure activities run smoothly regardless of the weather, keeping visitors on site for longer and increasing opportunities for fundraising. Creating clearly defined zones for games, refreshments and seating can further enhance the visitor experience and improve the flow of the event.

Ultimately, introducing new ideas for your summer fete doesn't require a complete overhaul—small, thoughtful additions can make a significant difference. By combining traditional favourites with fresh, interactive activities, schools can create a vibrant and successful event that delivers both enjoyment and strong fundraising results.

7 WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR SCHOOL'S CARBON FOOTPRINT

If you are looking for ways to save money and reduce your school's carbon footprint here are some simple tips which can help:

1. Compost all non-animal based organic materials

By composting non-animal based waste from your school kitchen you can create good quality compost which can be used on your school garden, or you could even bag it up and sell it to parents. Compost bins are easy to make or you can purchase them from good garden centres. The composting process can also be observed by students making an ideal real-life learning aid for Science lessons.

2. Recycle everything

Install recycling bins around the playground and in classrooms – or have a recycling area. Put up posters explain what can go in each bin and help younger pupils if they are unsure. Old school furniture can be donated or taken apart and used to build new furniture. Electronic devices can also be recycled. To find out what you can recycle and where your nearest recycling bank is for various types of waste visit: www.recyclenow.com/

3. Reduce energy waste

Consider improving your schools building's insulation to reduce the amount of heating needed. Motion sensor lighting can effectively reduce the electricity used especially if lights are often left on in unused classrooms.

7. Make the school run more eco-friendly

Encourage pupils and staff to walk or cycle to school as much as possible. According to Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (www.walkwheelcycletrust.org.uk) one in five cars on the road during the morning peak are doing the school run. By cycling or walking to school children gain more independence, and learn about their local area. By encouraging pupils to walk or cycle you can reduce congestion and pollution and help children increase their physical activity and become healthier.

Safety should always be the most important consideration. Parents or volunteers may be able to accompany children who decide to walk to school. Walking bus is often a popular way to encourage children to walk to school whilst reassuring parents and guardians that the children are as safe as possible. For those who cycle, consider introducing cycling proficiency and road safety lessons to help children learn about the dangers on the road and how to behave in these situations. Bikeability offer cycle safety training for schools – for more information please visit: <https://www.bikeability.org.uk/>

If you find a lot of students and staff are cycling to school you may wish to install a cycle shelter or compound to ensure bikes are kept secure and safely out of the way during the school day. To find out more about the cycle parking options we offer, visit our website: www.ablecanopies.co.uk



4. Switch to renewable power

Many schools now install solar panels to replace or reduce their current power source. This can save the schools lots of money – with the added bonus of selling any unused energy – such as in school holidays, back to the National grid.

5. Source local food for school dinners

This can reduce freight emissions and also helps you to support your local economy

6. Change your buying habits

Review what the school buys and see if there is a greener alternative. Consider using recycled paper and IT equipment which uses less energy. You could also look to using more environmentally conscious suppliers who use energy efficient vehicles.

TEN REASONS WHY OUTDOOR PLAY AND LEARNING IS SO IMPORTANT

Wellbeing



Creativity



Learning

Quick Facts About Outdoor Learning & Play

1. Children who regularly spend time learning outdoors often show improved concentration levels when returning to the classroom.
2. Outdoor play helps children develop important life skills including teamwork, communication, confidence and problem-solving.
3. Fresh air and natural daylight can help support pupil wellbeing and create a calmer learning environment.
4. Outdoor learning can support a wide range of subjects, including maths, science, geography, art, literacy and PE.
5. Active outdoor learning encourages children to move more throughout the school day, helping to support healthy lifestyles.
6. Studies have shown that hands-on learning experiences can improve pupil engagement and information retention.
7. Outdoor spaces such as areas covered with school canopies can be used for far more than break times, including outdoor dining, reading sessions, group work, performances and wellbeing activities.
8. Providing shaded and sheltered outdoor areas can help schools continue outdoor learning activities throughout the year.
9. Outdoor environments can help spark creativity and imagination by encouraging exploration and discovery.
10. Even small outdoor improvements can make a big difference to how schools use and enjoy their outside spaces.

Bonus: Outdoor Learning Inspiration

Here's 8 simple outdoor activities you can try this school term:

1. Nature scavenger hunts
2. Outdoor storytelling sessions
3. Playground maths trails
4. Weather observation activities
5. Outdoor reading corners
6. Gardening and planting projects
7. Team-building games
8. Outdoor art and sketching

Outdoor learning gives children the opportunity to learn, explore and grow beyond the classroom walls.





LET YOUR LESSONS BREATHE

As the weather improves, with more sunshine and warmer temperatures, you are likely going to be planning more learning sessions outside of the classroom.

Numerous lessons can be taught outdoors, e.g. lifecycles, the water cycle and personal development sessions. However, do you really need to restrict these lessons to only the spring and summer terms?

During the autumn and winter months, when there is a lot of wind, rain and snow, these vital lessons are still relevant.

The Forest School Concept

Outdoor play at any time of the year helps children to blossom and develop skills. The benefits were evident when a group of nursery nurses at Bridgewater College, Somerset, visited a Danish pre-school. They noticed how their open-air culture was central to the early years education system. When implementing this back at their college nursery, they noticed the difference in the children.

Since then, Forest School has become a major part of many schools and preschools in the UK.

Even those that don't have access to a forest can undertake outside lessons with planted areas and climbing apparatus. If you don't have access to an outside space, Forest School can be held indoors with seeds being grown in containers, for example.

Learning in an outdoor setting can help children keep active, encouraging personal growth, and increase their confidence in their abilities and social skills.

The Risks

The major barrier to this being universally adopted is the perceived risks that teachers and parents may have, e.g. slipping, or falling. A risk assessment can identify areas that are potentially hazardous, and you can put plans in place to minimise risk, for example, placing a shelter to keep an area dry.

Another problem is that some parents don't like their children getting cold or dirty. But this is more a case of children going to play wearing inappropriate clothing. Instead, ensure children wear suitable clothes and footwear for outdoor activities.

Conclusion

Learning and playing outdoors is important for young children as they grow. Outside playtime and teaching sessions can help develop their personal skills and self-esteem, as well as keep them active which is important for their health. To ensure fun for all, though, you must do a risk assessment and check all children have suitable clothing.

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Able Canopies: The Canopy Experts



A Coniston Wall Mounted Canopy installed at Kingsfleet Primary School in Flintshire

Canopies & Covered Walkways

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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

"From the very contact through to completion, I have been extremely impressed with the level of service provided. The team was consistently friendly and professional, and all necessary health and safety information was supplied proactively without the need for me to request it. The installation team was faultless in both their conduct and workmanship. They worked efficiently and left the site in immaculate condition – it was as though they had never been there."

- Kingsfleet Primary School (above)
Installed March 2026

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

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