

Play & Learn Outdoors

from the canopy experts

able
canopies
& outdoor projects

Issue 3.6

March 2025

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WELCOME TO THE SPRING EDITION OF PLAY & LEARN OUTDOORS

Hello and welcome to the March edition of P&LO. The sun has been shining all week, so what better time is there to grab a hot drink and read your favorite newsletter?

This months edition is packed with everything you love including funding advice, fundraising ideas and lot's of inspiration for your outdoor play and learning area.

Plus, as we've entered 2025, we have started our 20th anniversary celebrations and are keeping you

along for the ride.

So, when you get a chance, take a break, sit back, relax with your favorite drink and have a flick through Hopefully you'll be able to take some ideas back to the classroom to enable you and your pupils to enjoy the great outdoors in the fresh air.

If you enjoy reading P&LO, why not pass a copy to your colleagues to also enjoy? If they would like to receive their own copies, email us

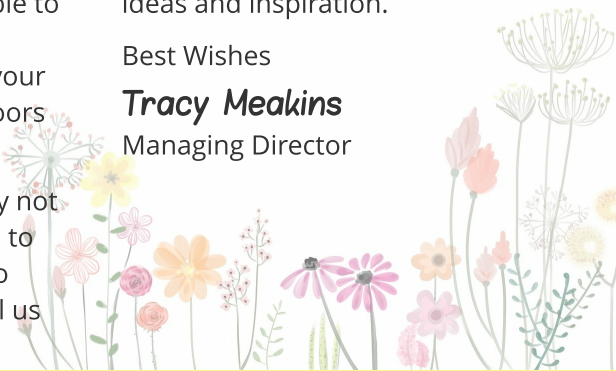
at: marketing@ablecanopies.co.uk and we'll add them to the list.

Enjoy the glorious spring, and we'll be back in the summer for 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:



ALUMINIUM FENCING - A DURABLE, LOW-MAINTENANCE SOLUTION FOR SCHOOLS



Able Canopies is excited to introduce our latest product, Aluminium Fencing, a modern and long-lasting fencing solution designed to enhance outdoor spaces in schools and various commercial settings.

When it comes to outdoor safety and security, fencing plays a crucial role. Schools require a reliable boundary system that is not only functional but also visually appealing and easy to maintain. Our new Aluminium Fencing ticks all these boxes, offering an attractive, durable, and rust-resistant alternative to traditional fencing materials.

Unlike timber, which can rot over time, or steel, which can rust if not properly maintained, aluminium is a naturally weather-resistant material. It does not warp, crack, or corrode, making it the perfect low-maintenance fencing solution for busy environments.

Here are some of the key benefits of our Aluminium Fencing:

Long-Lasting & Rust-Resistant:

Crafted from high-quality aluminium, our fencing is built to withstand the elements without deteriorating. This makes it an excellent choice for schools that require long-term reliability.

Low Maintenance:

Say goodbye to constant repainting, repairs, and costly upkeep. Aluminium fencing only requires occasional cleaning with warm, soapy water to keep it looking fresh. This makes it a cost-effective solution for schools and businesses looking to reduce maintenance efforts.

Versatile & Adaptable:

With a maximum height of 1.8m and an unlimited length, our fencing can be installed to suit the specific needs of your

outdoor area. If you're looking to create a secure play area for children, or a designated outdoor learning or dining area, our aluminium fencing delivers.

Request a Free Sample Visit:

At Able Canopies, we believe in offering our customers the best possible experience when choosing outdoor solutions. That's why we offer free sample visits, allowing you to see and feel the quality of our aluminium fencing before making a decision. Contact us on **0800 389 9072**, or **sales@ablecanopies.co.uk**

If you'd like to find out more about our aluminium fencing, scan the QR code below to visit our website:



HOW TO CREATE YOUR IDEAL PLAYGROUND

Creating an engaging and enjoyable playground is essential for encouraging children to spend time outdoors. A thoughtfully designed playground not only allows kids to release energy but also helps develop their sensory skills, creativity, and

imagination. Moreover, such outdoor spaces promote physical activity, which can foster a lifelong interest in outdoor play and exercise as children grow into adults.

If you are considering redesigning or building a new

playground from scratch, the task can seem overwhelming due to the numerous options available. To help streamline the process, we've compiled these practical tips for planning the ideal playground for your school.



1 Involve the Community in the Design

When redesigning a playground, consider asking for input from the children, teachers, and parents. Including their ideas can create a space that resonates with everyone and becomes a cherished feature of the school. This involvement not only promotes a sense of ownership but also enhances the school's appeal to prospective families.

2

Promote Physical Activity

Incorporating equipment that encourages movement is key to enhancing children's health and well-being. Physical activity helps expend energy, enabling children to return to class more focused and ready to learn. Simple additions such as hopscotch grids or playground games painted onto the tarmac can engage kids in active play. Climbing frames, skipping ropes, and obstacle courses can also add variety and excitement.

3

Create a Fun Environment

Adding vibrant colours and engaging equipment can make the playground inviting, especially for younger children. Choose colourful play structures, and consider adding bunting or flags to brighten the area. Interactive play panels can provide educational and entertaining activities that develop communication and teamwork skills among students.

4

Deter Bullying by Maintaining Visibility

Ensure your playground design has clear sightlines so that teachers can easily monitor all areas. Minimising hidden corners helps prevent bullying and creates a safer play environment for everyone.

5

Foster Creativity

Chalkboards can be a fantastic addition to encourage children's artistic expression and creative thinking. We offer large, durable outdoor chalkboards that are perfect for nurturing creativity in your playground.

7

Provide Shade and Weather Protection

Make sure your playground includes areas of shade and shelter to protect children from the elements, particularly during hot summer days. While trees provide some shade, a canopy offers more comprehensive protection from UV rays and rain, making the playground usable throughout the year.

6

Think Beyond the Basics

Incorporate unique elements like sand pits, water play areas, and sensory gardens to enhance the playground experience. Musical playground equipment can be a wonderful addition, especially for younger children, as it allows them to explore sound and develop musical confidence without fear of playing the wrong note.

OUR 2024 CANOPY INSTALLATIONS

At Able Canopies, we take pride in delivering high-quality commercial canopies across the UK, providing essential shelter solutions for schools, hospitals, retail spaces, and other commercial sectors. As we reflect on 2024, we're excited to share some insights into the areas where we installed our school canopies and all commercial canopies throughout the year.

Last year, we installed canopies in 35 counties across the UK from a total of 63 counties as shown on the map below, this means we covered an impressive 56% of the country with our expert canopy installations.

The Top Three Canopy Installation Locations

From bustling cities to rural communities, our team worked tirelessly to provide custom canopy solutions tailored to the needs of our clients. The top three counties where we installed the most canopies in 2024 were:

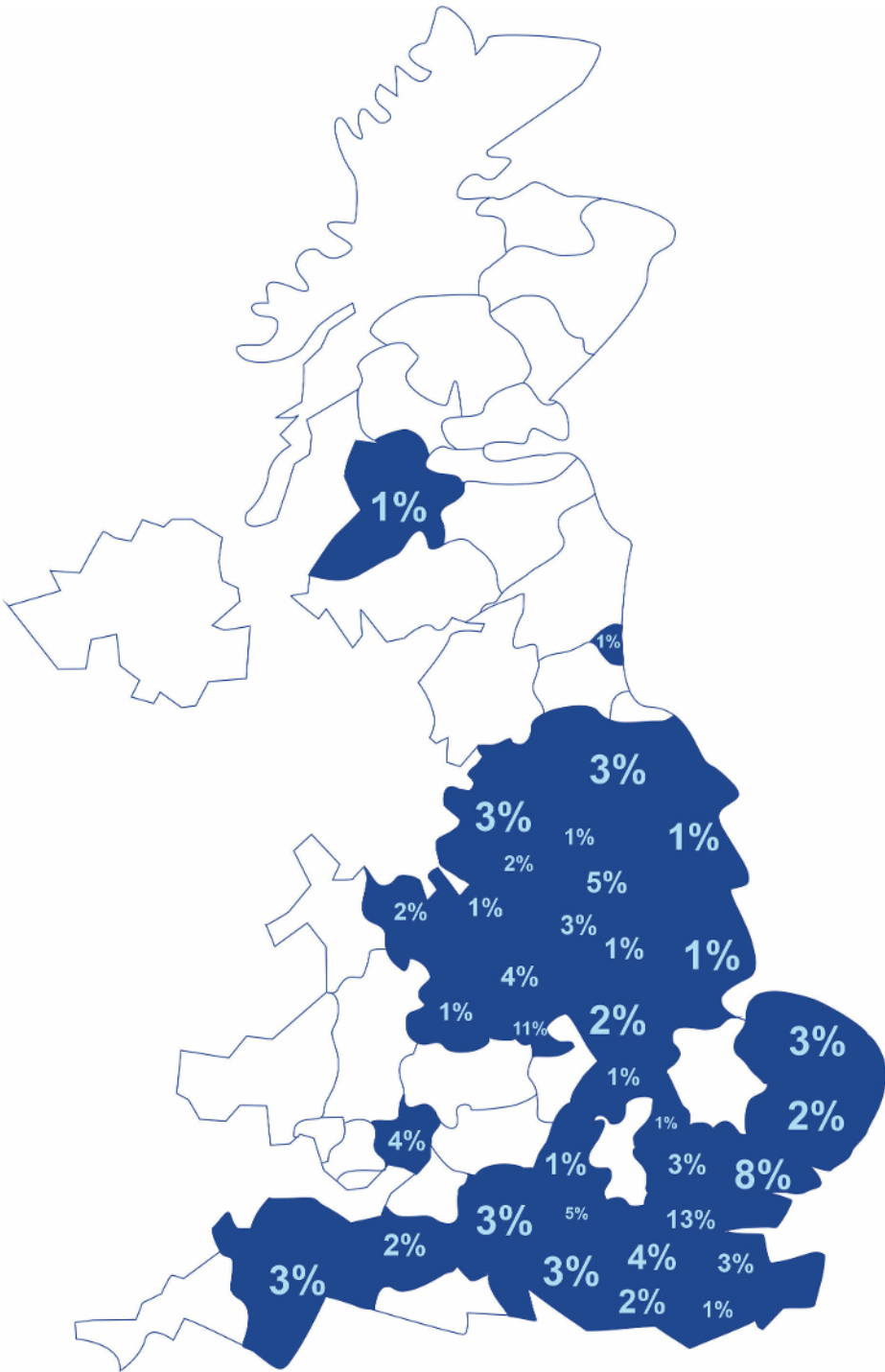
London – As the capital of the UK, London saw the highest number of canopy installations with 13% of total orders received.

West Midlands – Coming in second, the West Midlands demonstrated a strong need for durable commercial canopies, particularly in schools. We installed 11% of our total canopies installed in the West Midlands in 2024.

Essex – 8% of our total orders coming from our home county, making Essex the third most popular location for our canopy installations.

A Nationwide Effort

While London, the West Midlands, and Essex topped the list, our installations spanned the UK, helping schools and businesses create more usable outdoor spaces.



THE MOST COMMON CANOPY QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If you're thinking about installing a wall mounted or freestanding canopy system on your premises, you might have some questions before making your decision. To help, we've compiled answers to five of the most common questions schools ask when choosing a canopy.

1. How long does it take to install a canopy?

The installation time varies depending on the size of your canopy. Smaller commercial canopies can be installed within as little as one or two days, ensuring minimal disruption to your daily activities.

2. Can a canopy be attached to my existing building

Yes! As long as your building has a suitable external wall, a canopy can be securely fixed to it. If wall-mounted canopies are not an option or you prefer an alternative, freestanding canopies are also available to suit your needs.

3. How much does canopy installation cost?

Reputable suppliers typically include installation costs in your quotation. The price will



depend on factors like the size of the canopy and the time required for installation. Be sure to ask your chosen supplier for a detailed breakdown of costs.

4. Are grants available to fund canopies?

Yes, there are many organisations and charities that provide funding to pre-schools, schools, and colleges for canopies and shelters. For more information, visit www.ablecanopies.co.uk/funding to explore available options.

5. How often should I clean my canopy?

Most canopies require minimal maintenance, but it's recommended to perform a

yearly clean using a non-abrasive cleaner and warm water (check with your supplier for specific cleaning advice). Additionally, an annual maintenance check is advised to ensure the long-term safety and performance of your canopy. If you don't have the facilities to do this yourself, you can hire professionals to handle the cleaning and safety checks.

More Questions?

If we haven't covered your concerns, feel free to contact us, we'll be happy to provide you with expert advice and guidance to help you choose the perfect canopy for your school!

HOW TO WRITE A SUCCESSFUL FUNDING



At Able Canopies, we understand that many of our customers often face budget constraints when planning to purchase our products, such as a school canopy. One effective way to supplement your budget is by applying for funding grants. However, writing a strong funding application can feel overwhelming, so we've put together our top 10 tips to help you maximise your chances of success:

Engage Your Community

Involve your whole school or organisation in your plans. Share your vision, explain how you intend to achieve it, and be open about your funding application process. You might discover that someone has experience with grant applications and can offer valuable assistance.

Allow Ample Time

Grant applications can take several months to process. Start early to avoid last-minute stress and ensure you meet the deadlines.

Get Accurate Project Costs

Create a comprehensive budget covering all aspects of your project. Be realistic and ensure no hidden costs are

overlooked. At Able Canopies, we're happy to provide a site survey and a detailed quotation, giving you clarity on the costs associated with our products and services.

Verify Eligibility First

Before you begin filling out an application, double-check that your project meets the funder's criteria. A quick call or email can save you valuable time.

Follow the Instructions

Grant providers receive more applications than they can fund. Make sure your application meets all requirements as requested. Avoid automatic disqualification by adhering to the funder's guidelines.

Be Honest and Transparent

Provide a genuine and accurate account of your current situation and funding needs. Funders appreciate honesty and are more likely to support a sincere application.

Be Specific

Outline exactly how the funding will be used, including detailed cost calculations. Explain why the project is needed and the positive impact it will have.

Stay Persistent

Not every application will be successful, especially in the current economic climate. If you receive a rejection, don't be discouraged. Instead, learn from the experience, adjust your approach, and try again.

Explore Additional Opportunities

Beyond traditional funding organisations, consider reaching out to local businesses and community branches of national companies. If a parent, friend, or acquaintance works at a potential sponsor, ask for an introduction—a personal connection can make all the difference.

Final Thoughts

Applying for funding grants can be a challenging process, but with the right approach, it's possible to unlock additional resources to support your project goals. By following these 10 tips, you'll give your application the best chance of success, helping to bring your vision to life and provide lasting benefits to your community.

THE BENEFITS OF FREE FLOW PLAY



The EYFS framework strongly advocates for the use of outdoor spaces, recognising them as vital for early childhood development. A free flow environment, where children can move freely between indoor and outdoor spaces, offers a rich and stimulating learning experience. This approach promotes:

- **Greater independence** – Children set their own rules through play.
- **Learning at their own pace** – Outdoor play supports different learning styles, ensuring no child feels rushed.
- **Decision-making skills** – Choosing activities helps children develop confidence in their choices.
- **Physical and mental well-being** – Outdoor play encourages movement, fresh air, and social interaction.
- **Environmental awareness** – Children learn to differentiate between natural and man-made environments.

Outdoor Play in All Weather

Don't let changing seasons limit these valuable

experiences! Proper preparation ensures children can enjoy outdoor learning year-round:

- **Sunny days** – Provide shaded areas, encourage sun hats, and obtain parental permission for sun cream application.
- **Cold and wet weather** – Ensure access to warm, waterproof clothing and consider having a donation box for spare items.

A sheltered outdoor area, such as a canopy or shade sail, allows free flow play to continue rain or shine. Not only does it protect play equipment from becoming slippery, but if equipped with UV protection, it ensures children are shielded from harmful sun exposure while creating a light, and airy space.

Explore Shade & Shelter Solutions

Discover how canopies and shade sails can enhance outdoor learning and provide year-round Free Flow play opportunities by visiting our website: www.ablecanopies.co.uk



Able Canopies Celebrate 20 Years of Transforming Outdoor Spaces

2025 marks a huge milestone for Able Canopies—our 20th anniversary!

For two decades, we have been dedicated to providing high-quality, innovative canopy solutions to schools, healthcare facilities, hospitality venues, and commercial spaces across the UK.

As part of our 20th-anniversary celebrations, we invited our Managing Director, Tracy Meakins, to reflect on our journey, achievements, and vision for the future (overleaf).

From starting as a small

family-run business to becoming a leading provider of outdoor canopy solutions across the UK, our commitment to innovation, customer satisfaction, and sustainability has remained at the heart of everything we do.

Over the past two decades, we have proudly served schools, healthcare facilities, hospitality venues, and commercial spaces, providing high-quality, functional, and attractive outdoor solutions.

This year, we will be sharing special content, including throwback moments, customer

stories, and exciting offers, to commemorate 20 years of providing outstanding outdoor shelter solutions. We are excited for the next chapter, where we will continue to grow, innovate, and deliver exceptional service.

As we look ahead, we are excited for the new opportunities and challenges that the future holds. With a strong team, valued customers, and trusted partners by our side, we look forward to the next 20 years of growth, innovation, and success.



Above: Our Managing Director Tracy Meakins celebrating her own 20th work anniversary in February

celebrates 20 Years Outdoor Spaces



Throughout the year, we will be sharing an entire array of throwbacks to celebrate this huge milestone in the evolution of Able Canopies.

For now however, here's a

statement from our Manager Director, sharing insights into this incredible journey from the past two decades.

From our early beginnings to becoming a trusted name in the

industry, our MD reflects on the challenges, achievements, and milestones that have shaped the company into what it is today.

Here's what she had to say:

"This year marks a significant milestone for Able Canopies as we proudly celebrate 20 years of serving the education, healthcare, hospitality, and commercial sectors with dedication and passion. Reaching this milestone is a testament to the hard work of our talented team, the loyalty of our valued customers, and the trust of our partners who have supported us throughout this incredible journey.

From our humble beginnings in their spare room, when Mark Wood and David Wood started as a small family-run operation with a vision to provide 'cover from the weather,' we have grown into a leading provider of outdoor canopy solutions, trusted by clients across the UK.

Throughout these two decades, our commitment to innovation, customer satisfaction, and sustainability has remained at the heart of everything we do. We've embraced change, adapted to new challenges, and consistently strived to exceed expectations, all while staying true to our mission of providing attractive and functional shade and shelter solutions for all our customers, tailoring each installation to individual needs.

We are immensely proud of the relationships we've built with our customers and partners. Your support and collaboration have been instrumental to our success, and we extend our deepest gratitude for being part of our journey.

As we celebrate this remarkable anniversary, we are filled with excitement for what lies ahead. The future holds new opportunities for innovation, growth, and delivering even greater value to our customers. We are eager to continue pushing boundaries, embracing new challenges, and making a positive impact.

To our team, customers, and partners—thank you for being an essential part of our story. We look forward to the next 20 years of success and meaningful connections.

Here's to a bright future together!"

- Tracy Meakins—Managing Director



Client: New Vision Trust
Product: Tarnhow Curved Freestanding Canopy
Size: 13m x 5.5m
Timber Stain Colour: Nutwood
Installation Date: January 2025

CASE STUDY: NELSON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Brief

Nelson Primary School, located in East Ham, London, is one of the largest primary schools in the country, catering to children aged 3 to 11. The school's historic three-storey building, originally constructed in 1901, has seen multiple modern additions over the years to ensure that its facilities remain up to date and provide the best possible learning environment for its pupils.

To further enhance its learning environment, Nelson Primary School sought to install a large timber canopy adjacent to one of the classrooms in its Key Stage 1 building. The goal was to create a functional and friendly, pleasing, sheltered outdoor space.

The project was initiated by Spring (Cultivated) Ltd, specialists in school grounds development across East London. Having worked closely with the school on various

projects, they contacted us to request a quote for a bespoke timber canopy that would meet the school's needs. Following the enquiry, Able Canopies arranged a site survey in October 2024 to assess the outdoor space and determine the best canopy solution for the school.

Proposal

To meet the school's requirements, we recommended the Tarnhow Curved Freestanding Timber Canopy, designed to provide reliable weather protection for outdoor learning and play in the designated area.

In late October, we prepared and submitted a detailed proposal for a 13m x 5.5m timber canopy, finished in a Nutwood stain. This solution was designed to meet all the school's functional needs while complementing its existing aesthetic.

Installation

In December 2024, Nelson Primary School placed an order for a Tarnhow Curved Freestanding Timber Canopy to enhance their outdoor learning and play space. By January 2025, we successfully supplied and installed the canopy, complete with green post pads for added safety. Following the installation, Spring (Cultivated) Ltd fitted artificial grass beneath the canopy to complete the transformation.

With the new canopy in place, the staff and students at Nelson Primary School were delighted with the results. This weather-protected outdoor space will enable students to learn and play outside year-round, a proven benefit to both their education and overall well-being.

We are proud to have contributed to creating a more engaging and versatile learning environment for the school!

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR SPACE

Inclusivity is a vital focus for teachers in the classroom, but it's equally important to consider how outdoor spaces can accommodate all ages, abilities, and interests. A well-designed playground not only promotes enjoyment but also offers valuable learning experiences for every child, including those with physical, cognitive, and sensory needs.

Below are our top tips for ensuring your outdoor area is a welcoming and inclusive environment for all children:

TOP TIPS FOR PLAYGROUND INCLUSIVITY

- **Accessible Design:** Install ramps for wheelchair access and ensure play panels and activities are at a height suitable for younger children and those in wheelchairs, promoting active participation for all.
- **Quiet Zones:** Create a designated quiet space for children who prefer a calm environment, which is particularly beneficial for those with hearing impairments or who find busy spaces overwhelming.
- **Seating Arrangements:** Provide face-to-face seating options, such as benches or picnic tables, to support lip-reading, sign language, and the development of social skills through facial expressions and gestures.
- **Sensory Stimulation:** Introduce a variety of textures, light, and shaded areas to create a stimulating environment for children with cognitive or sensory impairments, promoting engagement and exploration.
- **Accessible Surfaces:** Include firm surfaces in your design to ensure easy movement for children in wheelchairs, enhancing mobility



and independence.

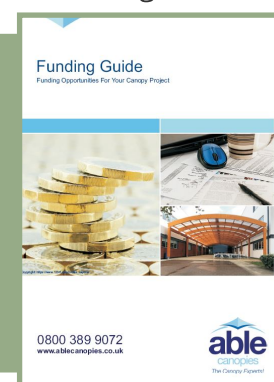
- **Shade and Shelter:** Incorporate shaded areas to provide a cooling space on hot days and shelter from rain, ensuring the outdoor space is usable all year round.
- **Sensory Gardens:** Plant a sensory garden with reachable flower beds, allowing all children to touch, smell, and experience nature, offering a natural contrast to man-made play equipment.
- **Musical Elements:** Add outdoor musical instruments, like large chime bells, which can be enjoyed by children with hearing impairments who can feel the vibrations, creating a multi-sensory experience.

WHY INSTALL A CANOPY?

An outdoor school canopy is a cost-effective solution to maximise the use of your outdoor space. It offers year-round protection, allowing children and staff to enjoy the outdoors regardless of the weather. Canopies can support child development through outdoor learning, making them an attractive option for grant funding.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Transforming your outdoor area into an inclusive space can often be funded through grants, as these projects provide developmental benefits to children. To explore available funding options for schools, nurseries, and community projects, download our Funding Guide by scanning the QR code or visiting: www.ablecanopies.co.uk/funding/



FUNDRAISING DO'S & DON'TS FOR MAKING YOUR EVENT A SUCCESS

Fundraising is a fun and rewarding way to support your school, but careful planning is key to ensuring a smooth and enjoyable experience for everyone involved—students, teachers, volunteers, parents, family, and friends. To help you run a successful event, here are some essential do's and don'ts to keep in mind!

The Do's:

- **Spread the Word!** – Make sure everyone knows about your event, including the date, time, and purpose. Get pupils involved by having them design flyers and posters to distribute around school and in newsletters.
- **Keep Parents & Pupils Engaged** – Track your progress with a fundraising chart in a high-traffic area like the school reception. Update it regularly to keep motivation high as you get closer to your goal!
- **Set Clear Rules** – Assign volunteers specific roles to prevent confusion and ensure smooth coordination throughout the event.
- **Sort the Legalities** – Research and secure any necessary licences and insurance well in advance. Never assume you're covered—always check!
- **Ask for Help** – If your PTA group is shrinking or you need more volunteers, don't hesitate to reach out. Parents' availability changes, so regularly inviting new members in newsletters or on the school website can bring in fresh support.



The Don'ts:

- **Poor Timing** – Avoid planning fundraisers when parents are already covering big expenses, such as school trips. Being considerate of their budgets will increase participation and donations.
- **Applying Pressure** – Never make parents, staff, or students feel obligated to contribute. Pressure can discourage participation in future events and impact enthusiasm.
- **Skiping Important Details** – Use a checklist to ensure everything is covered, including having Gift Aid declaration forms signed if fundraising for a registered charity—this helps reclaim tax on donations!
- **Overloading Yourself or Others** – Avoid organising too many events at once. Fundraising takes effort, and both volunteers and attendees can become overwhelmed. Focus on high-impact events that generate strong engagement and the best returns.
- **Underestimating Volunteer Needs** – Before choosing an event, ensure you have enough helpers. Overworking volunteers can lead to burnout and impact the success of future fundraisers.

By keeping these simple but crucial tips in mind, you can create successful, well-organised, and enjoyable fundraising events that bring people together and help achieve your goals!

DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE A-Z FUNDRAISING PACK

Scan the QR code to download your free copy of the A-Z Fundraising pack which is jammed packed with fundraising ideas from A right through to Z! Or visit:

www.ablecanopies.co.uk/guides/



SCHOOL CANOPY HIGHLIGHTS

Below is a selection of our school canopy installations since our last newsletter in December, to give you inspiration and ideas for your school grounds.



Disclaimer: We are not associated with any of the events listed on this page.

Able Canopies: The Canopy Experts



The Coniston Wall Mounted Canopy installed at Thomas Walling Primary School in Tyne & Wear

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

"The Able Canopies team from the initial contact to the installation and post installation support really do go the extra mile. Their customer service, understanding the customers requirements, installation and use of high quality products is outstanding. They are a great company to work with, and one of the best I have worked with in during my thirty five year career."

- Secondary School in London

Installed August 2024

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

Call: 0800 389 9072 | **Email:** sales@ablecanopies.co.uk



Unsubscribe: To opt out of receiving our newsletters and updates, please email: marketing@ablecanopies.co.uk
To read our privacy policy, please visit: www.ablecanopies.co.uk/privacy-policy/