

# Play & Learn Outdoors

from the canopy experts



& outdoor projects

Issue 3.5

December 2024

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

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# WELCOME TO THE DECEMBER EDITION OF PLAY & LEARN OUTDOORS

Hello and welcome to the December edition of P&LO. The wintery weather has settled in, so what better time is there to grab a hot drink and read your favorite newsletter?

This month's edition brings you a whole host of inspiration, ideas and tips for everything related to outdoor play, learning and funding.

First up, we've got big news about a grant that is available for school based nurseries, so if you haven't already, get applying for a chance to

be awarded up to £150,000.

We've also got news about a shade sail array we installed for none other than the BBC's hit show Waterloo Road.

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

Enjoy the winter and we'll be back in the spring 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 people, fellow 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 and what didn't, saving you time, and enabling you to hold outdoor sessions that work out perfectly for both you and your pupils.

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!

We'd absolutely love to have you join us and we'd love even more to turn this into a UK wide, bustling community for teachers and education professionals to engage and offer support and advice.



# **£15 MILLION FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR SCHOOL-BASED NURSERIES**

The government recently announced the launch of the first round of funding for 300 school-based nurseries. It is the first stage in a long-term commitment to expand school-based nurseries across England.

The funding of up to £150,000 per applicant is available to primary schools who already offer early years education and are looking to start up a new nursery or expand their existing nursery. It is part of government's opportunity mission to give every child the best start in life.

## **How Much Funding is Available?**

The total funds available is £15 million with each school being able to bid for up to £150,000 each to primary schools either planning to open new nurseries or expand their current nurseries.

## **Who Can Apply?**

State funded primary phase schools who already offer early years education such as reception classes are eligible. The project must make use of surplus space within the school building. You can read the full eligibility requirements here:

[www.ablecanopies.co.uk/grant](http://www.ablecanopies.co.uk/grant)

## **What Can the Funds be Used For?**

The grants can be used solely for capital expenditure, such as canopies, to convert surplus space within school buildings, so they are suitable for nursery provisions.

## **When Do I Need to Apply By?**

The deadline for applications is midday on 19th December.

## **How Can I Apply?**

You can apply online via the link here, which takes you to the governments website to apply:

[www.ablecanopies.co.uk/grant](http://www.ablecanopies.co.uk/grant)

## **Request a Canopy Quote**

If you plan to apply for the grant and would like a quote for a canopy which can be used as part of your grant expenditure, contact us today on:

**0800 389 9072**

[sales@ablecanopies.co.uk](mailto:sales@ablecanopies.co.uk)

# WATERLOO ROAD, BBC CASE STUDY

**Product Installed:** Shade Sail Array

**Sail Sizes:** 1no. Triangle Sail; 4m x 4m x 2m

**2no. Irregular Quadrilateral Sails;** 5.5m x 4m x 4.5m x 3m

**Sail Colours:** 2no. Yellow & 1no. Sky Blue

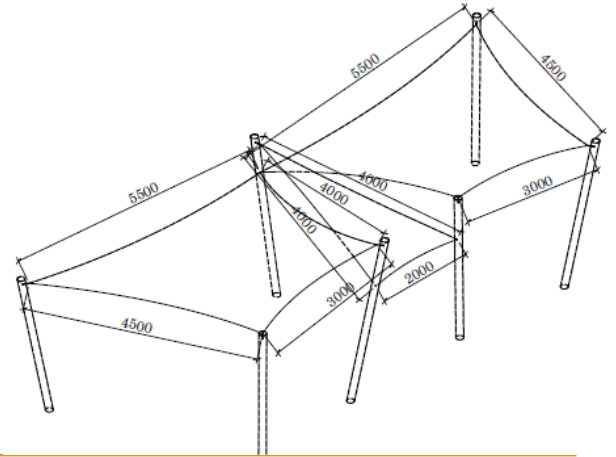
**Installation Dates:**

Posts – July 2023

Sails – August 202

**Installation Duration:** Five days over two phases

**Intended Use:** TV Set Shade Sail



## The Brief

Wall to Wall Media is a UK television production company that is part of Warner Bros. Television Studio UK. They are suppliers of hugely popular, award-winning programmes since the 1980's. One of which is Waterloo Road, a British television drama series set in a troubled comprehensive school in northern England.

Having recently moved the set of their hit show Waterloo Road, they were looking to add a shade sail array within part of the production filming area.

Shade sails are very popular within schools to provide shade and shelter from the sun including up to 96.5% protection from harmful UV rays. So, installing shade sails on set would add to the authenticity of the school setting.

Waterloo Road's Production Designer therefore got in touch with us, explaining their need for a shade sail array to be installed in the new

filming location for 'Waterloo Road', but they had to be installed before 1st September to fit in with the filming schedule. A free full site survey which was promptly booked. Conducting a full site survey enables us to create a firm quotation with no estimated or hidden costs.

## The Solution

Upon completion of a site survey, it was established that shade sails were indeed feasible in their chosen area. After discussing the size and design options. We provided a couple of scenarios for this product, and they opted for a shade sail array which consisted of; 7 No. post's with 2 No. irregular square sails and 1 No. Triangle Shade Sail.

Wall to Wall Media chose option A, the array of 3no. shade sails including one sky blue 4m x 4m x 2m triangular shade sail, and two yellow 5.5m x 4m x 4.5m x 3m irregular quadrilateral sails.



*Above: Superimposed image of what the shade sail would look like in situ*

## The Installation

The shade sails were installed over two phases, this is because we always install the posts first, this enables us to then measure for the sails to ensure they fit within the area where the posts were installed, and also importantly, the posts are left to set for four weeks. We then return to site to install the shade sails and tension them tight to avoid sagging.

There are a couple of reasons why we do not install the posts and sails on the same day. Firstly, if we have an issue where a post had to be moved due to unknown underground conditions, the sails would then not fit and would have to be re-made. Secondly, if the concrete had not cured in time, the tension from the shade sails could cause the posts to move and the sails to sag.

The posts were therefore installed over four days during the middle of July, and the sails were installed within one day during the middle of August. This schedule worked perfect for the production company as they required the installation to be completed before they began filming for their 14th series in September.

Although the shade sails were installed as prop for the TV show Waterloo Road, the actors and staff can all benefit from shade and shelter during their breaks under the shade sails.

You can catch the latest series of Waterloo Road which features our Shade Sails on BBC iPlayer now, along with series 1-13.

When asked how she felt about the product and service received from Able Canopies, Katy Tuxford, the Production Designer said *"Great job. Highly recommend."*



# WINTER FUNDRAISING IDEAS FOR INDOOR EVENTS

Many PTAs can experience a drop in motivation for winter fundraising events, often assuming that colder, darker days make fundraising less enjoyable or successful. However, this couldn't be further from the truth! There are plenty of indoor events that can be just as entertaining, and just as lucrative as those held in the summer. Which will help to achieve your fundraising goal like new sports equipment or new computers and even a school canopy. With proper planning, these events can become annual highlights. Below are just a few ideas for winter fundraising events that could become a staple for your PTA.

## **Bingo Nights**

Bingo may sometimes carry the misconception of being a bit dull or only for older generations, but that's not true! Bingo can be incredibly fun. A gambling licence may be required, but there are often ways to organise it without one—just be sure to check local regulations.

## **Comedy Nights**

Hosting a comedy night with locally well-known comedians can guarantee a night filled with laughter. These events can be a big draw, as people often follow popular comedians. The familiarity and positive word-of-mouth can help fill the venue, making it an excellent fundraiser full of fun and giggles for everyone involved.

## **Quiz Nights**

Quiz nights are always popular, particularly in pubs, but how about one in the school? You can also sell snacks and drinks for added profit. They offer a fun yet challenging experience, and whether the participants are competitive or just in it for a good time, quiz nights can be both serious and entertaining.

## **Film Nights**

Film nights provide families with an enjoyable evening while offering an affordable alternative to a trip to the cinema. Hosting a cosy movie night at your venue can be a great way for parents and children to bond. Just make sure you check if a screening licence is required.

## **Ladies Pampering Evenings**

A pampering evening is the perfect event for busy mums looking for some well-deserved relaxation. By reaching out to local businesses, you can create a relaxing event filled with massages and beauty treatments, remember to advertise well for a success event.

# WHY INVEST IN AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM?

Outdoor Classrooms are the best way to extend your teaching space on a budget whilst keeping a high-quality appearance. In fact, in recent years, schools across the UK have realised this and have been investing in outdoor classrooms, and given that you're reading this, I imagine you're thinking about it too.

## Here's 5 reasons why you should invest in an outdoor classroom.

### 1. Outdoor Classrooms for Small Budgets

Having that extra space to hold your classes can make all the difference when it comes to planning and holding your lessons however, finding the budget for an extension can be impossible with the current funding issues for schools. That's where outdoor classrooms come in; they are much more cost-effective than extensions and can often be purchased with your leftover budget at the end of the school year.

### 2. Quick to Install

Another benefit that Outdoor Classrooms have over extensions is that they are much quicker to construct. They can be installed in as little as a couple of days for smaller outdoor classrooms and a couple of weeks for the larger, more magnificent outdoor classrooms. Either way, it's much quicker than the months of building work involved with extensions. We're also able to install them during the holiday's, or term time, keeping disruption to your school to an absolute minimum and fencing the area off to keep all children safe.

### 3. Outdoor Lessons are Exciting

Moving lessons outside within your outdoor classroom can help to break up the day for your pupils and add a little excitement to lessons as its something a bit different with a change of scenery.

### 4. Fresh Air Is Good for Concentration

Studies have shown that fresh air can help with focus and concentration, as it can help to awaken us. Studies have also shown that when children are outdoors, their brains absorb more information which in turn makes your job as a teacher much easier and much more rewarding.

### 5. Extra Space and Storage

Outdoor Classrooms are perfect for adding more useable space to your school and they can be supplied with secure lockable doors so you can store equipment out of hours and lock it way securely. This frees up space within your classrooms and other areas to make way for more teaching space or equipment.

## How Can I Configure My Own Outdoor Classroom?

We have created a free configure your own modular outdoor classroom printable download, which you can download here:

[www.ablecanopies.co.uk/guides/](http://www.ablecanopies.co.uk/guides/)



# ALBERT PRITCHARD INFANT SCHOOL CASE STUDY

**Product Installed:** The Coniston Wall Mounted Canopy with Rear Brackets and Front Goalposts

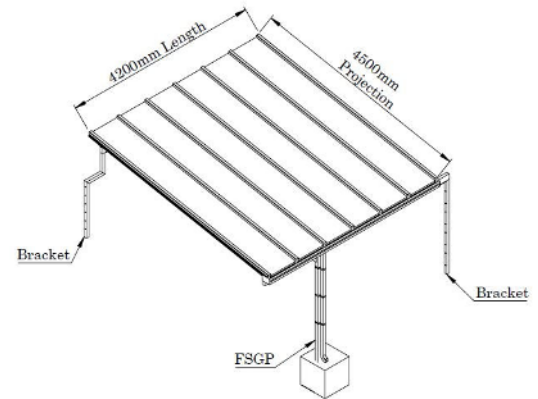
**Canopy Size:** 4.2m x 4.5m

**Frame Colour:** Gentian Blue, RAL 5010

**Installation Date:** August 2024

**Installation Duration:** Two days

**Intended Use:** Entrance Canopy & Parent Waiting Area



## The Brief

In July 2021, we supplied and installed a 23m x 5m Coniston Wall Mounted canopy at Albert Pritchard Infant School in Wednesbury, West Midlands. The canopy provides shade and shelter along a length of their classrooms, creating continuous weather protection from the inside to the outside

Three years later in 2024, we were pleased to hear from the school's Facilities Manager again, who explained that they were looking to have a school canopy installed over the entrance to their office.

Having installed at the school before, we discussed providing a quote for a Coniston Wall Mounted Canopy to match the one we installed in 2021. However, this was a complex area; the left side featured a wheelchair

ramp, and the right side featured an external stairwell into a basement boiler room. This meant that the placement of posts would be tricky, alongside the discovery of a waterpipe trench under the ground where the canopy posts would have been installed.

It was also discovered at the site survey, that we couldn't fit the canopy to the wall as we usually would, due to the placement of the windows and the stairwell. We had to avoid blocking any windows in the area with posts as they needed to be able to use all windows when required.

## The Solution

After discussions at Able Canopies HQ, we were able to find a solution to each obstacle, whilst still offering the preferred canopy of choice – the Coniston Canopy.

To overcome the issues with

the posts at the front of the canopy, we used a bracket to fix the front right side of the canopy to the wall over the stairwell, and a goalpost instead of a regular canopy post next to the ramp. Using a goalpost instead of a regular post meant that we could have a wider space between the post and bracket, and it provides more than enough support so that the left side of the canopy could be cantilevered over the ramp.

These solutions ensured both the ramp and stairwell, and windows were not obstructed, and we also safely avoided the underground waterpipe.

To overcome the fact that we couldn't mount the canopy to the wall at the rear as we usually would, we designed another two brackets that could be fixed to the side walls and overhang the canopy at the rear to block rainfall.



## The Installation

The installation was carried out on time over two days as planned during the school's summer holidays. This meant that upon the start of the new school year, parents, pupils

and teachers could make use of their new covered entrance which also doubles as a waiting area for parents when collecting their children in the rain.

The staff at the school were pleased with the new canopy

which was powder coated in Gentian Blue (RAL 5010) to match the canopy we installed in 2021, and the school branding colours, including the railings and gate underneath the canopy, ensuring it fitted in perfectly.



**When asked what she thought of the product and service provided, the Schools' Facilities Manager said:**

*"Phil (from the installation team) was very professional, adhered all health and safety procedures. He was very polite and extremely tidy. I was happy with the finished product and pleased from the telephone call, visit, survey and email conversations, then the final product, amazing transformation."*

# THE JOY AND BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PLAY FOR CHILDREN



There's something magical about outdoor play that fascinates children. Whether they're climbing frames, playing hopscotch, exploring interactive equipment, or getting creative with games like "What's the Time, Mr. Wolf?"—you'll always see the excitement on their faces. So why not encourage them to explore even more? Outdoor

play can be a powerful way to help children learn about the world around them, explore different textures and sounds, and enjoy the freedom that only nature can provide.

## Why Outdoor Play is Unique

The outdoor environment provides an experience that's

simply irreplaceable. The fresh air fills their lungs, giving them an energy boost that indoor settings can't match. Open spaces make them feel free and adventurous, while natural sounds like birds singing and leaves rustling create a calming atmosphere that helps them feel settled and relaxed.

Many indoor games can be taken outside and made even more fun with nature's "toys." Mud, sand, leaves, stones, clay, twigs—there's no end to the free resources children can use to fuel their creativity and learning.

### **Unleash Creativity with Nature's Toys**

Outdoor play is not only about fun; it also helps develop children's physical and sensory skills. There's something liberating about allowing kids to get muddy and explore the natural world without worrying about their clothes. Set up a table filled with clay, twigs, leaves, acorns, and shells, and watch their imaginations soar. Another table could have mud, sticks, water, pots, pans, spoons, and muffin tins—perfect for baking "mud pies." (Just remember, those pies aren't for eating!)

The best part? These natural materials are freely available in your own outdoor space or local woods. By offering these experiences, children can explore textures, shapes, and sensory skills with excitement and curiosity. Watch as they squeeze, squelch, squash, and

crunch their way through an afternoon of play, giggling and discovering until they're all tired out.

### **Creative Crafts with Nature**

Why not bring a bit of art into outdoor play? During the autumn months, gather leaves in various colours along with paper, glue, and flowers, and let the children create their natural masterpieces. You can laminate their artwork afterward, preserving it as a beautiful memory of their creativity.

Mud can also double as a paint palette. Encourage children to make finger paintings using mud, or give them sticks to use as paintbrushes. This allows them to experiment with different textures and tools, broadening their creative horizons.

### **Fun with Natural Building Blocks**

Mud can be even more versatile. For a fun twist on building blocks, place mud into ice cube trays and freeze them overnight (or leave them outside in winter). By

morning, the children will have a set of natural building blocks to create walls, castles, and whatever else their imaginations dream up!

### **Learning Through Sound and Math with Stones**

Stones can also provide endless entertainment. Have the children pour stones into plastic, metal, or wooden pots to hear the different sounds they make. This activity not only introduces them to the idea of sound variation but can also serve as a fun way to teach mathematical skills. Ask them to count, add, or subtract the stones, turning playtime into an educational adventure.

### **All-Weather Outdoor Fun**

All these activities can be enjoyed under a school canopy, allowing children to play outside regardless of the weather. Whether it's pouring rain or scorching sun, a canopy offers the perfect shelter, ensuring they're protected from both wet conditions and harmful UV rays.

For more ideas on outdoor play activities and fun outdoor lesson plans, download our free *How to get the Most out of your Canopy* guide: [www.ablecanopies.co.uk/guides](http://www.ablecanopies.co.uk/guides)

# FIVE OUTDOOR CRAFT IDEAS TO TRY THIS WINTER



It's getting colder by the day and feeling quite wintery, yet you may still be keen to keep your pupils active outside. Craft ideas can be a great way to get children moving and learning outside and if you have a covered canopy area, you can easily set up crafting stations.

Here we have 5 great ideas for winter crafting. If you're feeling ambitious you could set up all 5 at different tables and have the children move round each station and try each one!

## 1. Hedgehog Scrap Pictures

This one is a lovely classic. Produce a hedgehog template that children can trace onto a piece of card. Then create a collage for the spines. This could be made out of pre-cut card leaf shapes. Or, to encourage plenty of exercise and interacting with nature, ask the children to collect leaves from the school playing field.

As additional enrichment, you could learn about hibernation and leaf identification at the same time!

## 2. Pine Cone Ornaments

This one can really enable the children to be creative. Grab a pine cone, plenty of PVA glue and allow the children to express their inner creativity. Provide a variety of decorative items such as sequins, pom poms, coloured shapes etc.

A piece of string can be tied to the top and they can either be used to decorate the class tree and celebrate how different, yet special everyone is. Or let the children take them home as a gift for their family.

## 3. Paper Chains

Paper chains are best when worked on as a team. A simple craft activity, which can be set up quite easily but can be done in small groups working together to encourage teamwork.

## 4. Create Hibernating Places

As a more active craft activity, encourage the children to safely explore fallen wood sticks and leaves and to work together to create homes for hibernating animals. This is another great opportunity to get the children moving outdoors during cold weather.

Even if you only have a small area under your canopy, you could put out trays with leaves and sticks to create bug houses.

## 5. Christmas Cards

A classic craft for this season but Christmas cards are so much fun to make and the children will really enjoy this activity. Try focusing on a specific skill, such as paper cutting.

Perhaps the children can make a pop-up Christmas card, such as a tree. Provide an example and instructions. You could then ask the children to write out instructions for making a card and incorporate the activity with their English work.

## Conclusion

Being outside, even in the cold weather can be so beneficial to children's health and well-being and can really enhance their learning at school. Here are 5 great craft ideas to get your children creatively working together this winter.



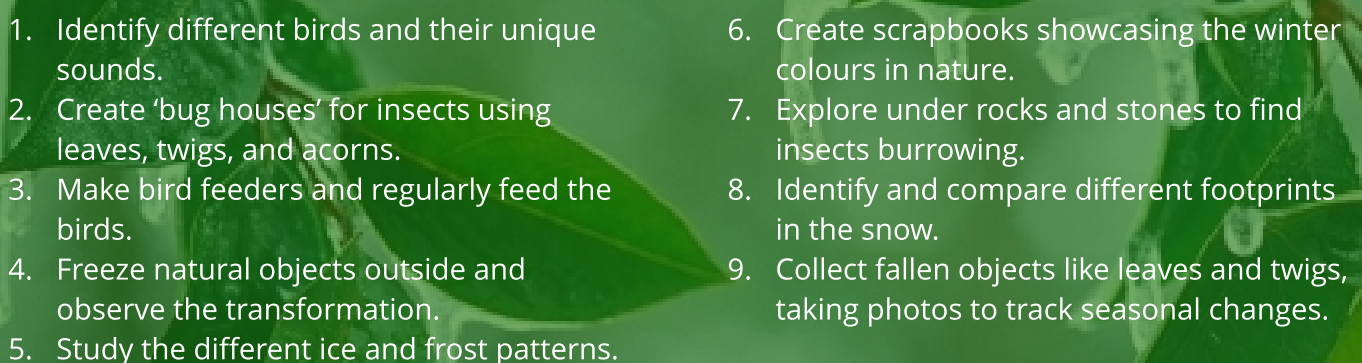
## **DON'T WISH THE WINTER AWAY, GET OUT THERE & PLAY!**

Winter outdoor play is a treasure trove of learning and fun for children. Contrary to the common misconception that winter restricts outdoor activities, it opens up plenty of opportunities due to the seasonal changes in nature.

As leaves fall, children can witness the transformation of trees, sparking discussions about the seasons and why such changes occur. The bare trees unveil bird nests, making it easier to spot our feathered friends in action—flying to their nests with food and leaves to stay warm.

The freezing temperatures add an extra layer of excitement for early years children. Experimenting with leaving items outdoors in water, only to find them frozen the next morning, becomes a thrilling winter activity. Observing various types of icicles and frost patterns further fuels their curiosity.

Encouraging outdoor exploration during the winter is virtually limitless. Here are some cool activities to get children's imaginations going and keep their love for the outdoors alive in the winter:

- 
1. Identify different birds and their unique sounds.
  2. Create 'bug houses' for insects using leaves, twigs, and acorns.
  3. Make bird feeders and regularly feed the birds.
  4. Freeze natural objects outside and observe the transformation.
  5. Study the different ice and frost patterns.
  6. Create scrapbooks showcasing the winter colours in nature.
  7. Explore under rocks and stones to find insects burrowing.
  8. Identify and compare different footprints in the snow.
  9. Collect fallen objects like leaves and twigs, taking photos to track seasonal changes.

Having a canopy installed adds another layer of joy to these activities, allowing children to enjoy them even during rain or snow. Staying dry and sheltered under the canopy while embracing the wonders of winter outdoor play!



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE YEAR AND BEYOND



As it's our last newsletter of the year, we'd like to take this chance to thank you for your support and custom throughout the year.

We want you to know how much we appreciate you, our customers and supporters, and how much we love transforming your outside spaces into areas where your pupils can enjoy the benefits of outdoor play and learning all year round.

#### **Our Festive Opening Hours Are:**

**24th Dec - 8am - 12pm**

**25th Dec - 1st Jan - Closed**

**2nd Jan - Open as usual**



We hope you have a fantastic Christmas and New Year and enjoy your well-deserved rest, before returning to school in January.

# DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



Don't miss out, make a note of these dates in your diary pronto!

Our dates for your diary feature is back! In each edition, we will bring you notable dates for your diary for the coming months, so you can integrate them into your lessons or add a little fun to the day.

## January

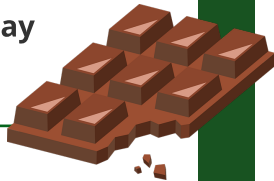


19th  
World Snow Day



19th  
National Popcorn Day

27th  
National Chocolate  
Cake Day



29th  
National Puzzle Day



31st  
National Hot  
Chocolate Day



## February

7th  
Safer Internet Day



10th  
Teddy Day



12th  
Hug Day



14th  
International Book  
Giving Day



17th  
Random Acts of  
Kindness Day

## March

1st  
World Music  
Therapy Day



7th  
National Cereal Day



19th  
International Read to  
Me Day



20th  
Spring Equinox  
(the start of spring)



21st  
World Poetry Day

*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 Maiden Erlegh School in Berkshire.

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; the workmanship was to a high standard. The lads on site were very professional and cleared up after they had finished. The canopy that was fitted at the school was excellent.”***

- Finham Park School

Installed September 2024

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)

