

The wonder of outdoors – Ravenscraig Outdoor Nursery, Fife

Dysart Outdoor Nursery is a pilot nursery based within Ravenscraig Park, Kirkcaldy. The dispersed provision, under the leadership of the Headteacher at Dysart Primary School, opened in August 2022 and is registered for 32 children aged 3-5-years old.

The nursery operates 9am-3pm term time, with a small team of highly experienced & passionate practitioners who ensure children have access to high-quality experiences and opportunities that support development and encourage individual interests to grow.

Outdoor early learning and childcare provision has been available to children and families in Fife since 2008; when the first fully outdoor nursery in the UK was registered.¹

The Care Inspectorate defines an outdoor based service as “one that describes itself as a specialist outdoor service and where children spend the majority of time outdoors”.²

There are now 47 registered fully outdoor nursery settings in Scotland.

The Dysart outdoor service was made possible following the asset transfer of the disused Ravenscraig bowling pavilion from Parks and Recreation Service to Education in 2021; enabling children from an urban environment to experience a fully door setting that many would have

anticipated would only be possible in more rural areas.

The pavilion, previously a target for wilful fire starting and anti-social behaviour, was restored by Fife Council; Including making the building secure, free from damp and the installation of telephone lines and to enable internet access, before reopening as functional nursery base for resources to be stored, a shelter in inclement weather, and as a drop off and collection point.

When considering how to establish a sustainable outdoor setting in a new environment, and despite the many different ELC options available, Education officials quickly recognised the alignment in the opportunities and experiences that should be available for children attending indoor and those of an outdoor setting. This allowed officials to utilise many existing policies and published guidance when considering key things such as physical and environmental risks. It also enabled constructive dialogue with the Care Inspectorate to ensure both parties were clear on what could be expected as planning progressed. The Council’s Play Practice Team were used to review how best to make use of the extensive space available to support learning and how to organise resources.

It was also important to establish a team of practitioners who would be based within Dysart early in the development of the provision. Careful consideration was given to essential requirements over and above those of an Early Years Officer based within a traditional setting. Updates were made to the existing Early Years Officer recruitment advert to reflect the unique outdoor

¹ The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery was established in the Howe of Fife in 2008 and was registered as Scotland and the UK’s first fully outdoor ELC provision.

² <https://hub.careinspectorate.com/media/1557/my-world-outdoors-sharing-good-practice-in-how-early-years-services-can.pdf>

responsibilities and to adjust the person specification to ensure that applicants were clear on what the outdoor aspect of these vacancies were.

Once these posts were filled, the team of EYOs undertook an extensive period of scoping and learning from other settings; identifying elements they liked or did not like to influence the design of the new provision at Dysart. This included visits to other similar settings both across and out-with the authority and was a pivotal part of creating the unique 'Dysart brand'.

These investigatory visits also provided the EYO team with an opportunity to consider the equipment and resources that would be required to operate effectively...Things such as trolleys to move equipment, toileting and handwashing facilities, warm and dry clothes, learning materials and mealtimes. But, most importantly, it was an opportunity for them to get to know each other and start to develop strong bonds and a sense of belonging before the provision opened to children.

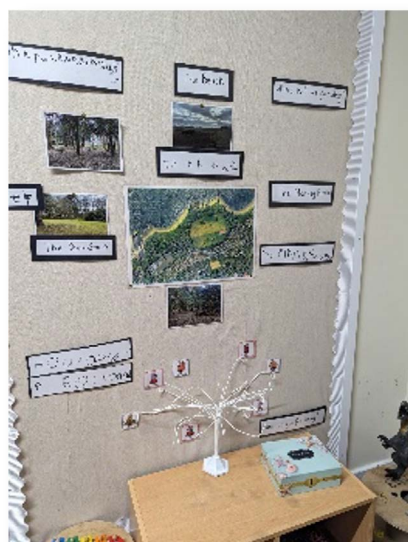
Resources are carefully and thoughtfully curated to ensure children access high-quality experiences at all times when attending the provision at Dysart. EYOs sought to find or create 'travel-friendly' versions of materials that contributed to key indicators as set out in frameworks such as [HGIOELC](#), [Up, up and away!](#), [Realising the Ambition](#), and the [SHANARRI indicators of wellbeing](#) that could be used by children in an outdoor environment.

Progress and the journey to becoming an operational specialist outdoor nursery was documented in a floor book resource, which the children also contributed to, and is displayed within the nursery base. This timeline of progress to date is not only an invaluable reflection of learning but, is also a solid foundation to build upon as the provision evolves.

The model at Dysart is unique; Children attend the setting alongside their main provision. Children from across the local area's four other nurseries can apply to attend Dysart outdoor service two days per week, typically on a Monday and Tuesday or, Thursday and Friday. This is not a blended placement model, nor can an eligible child's full entitlement be accessed here. All children who attend the provision are allocated a key worker who works closely with parents, but who also links in with the child's other ELC setting. These approaches ensure the needs of all children are met throughout their time in funded ELC.

The EYOs have a non-contact day every Wednesday. Staff use this time to update learning journals and undertake planning for both cohorts of children. Other activities undertaken by staff on 'non-contact' days include visiting the children's other settings and developing resources. When children are transitioning from Nursery to School, the EYO team contribute to the school transition report. This non-contact time also provides the EYO's with an opportunity to develop the provision via the Improvement Plan and Quality Indicators. It provides essential time to reflect as a team about how to continuously adapt and evolve to ensure the provision is sustainable, accessible and high quality. This has been a significant factor in supporting individual needs by providing targeted support within the satellite provision.

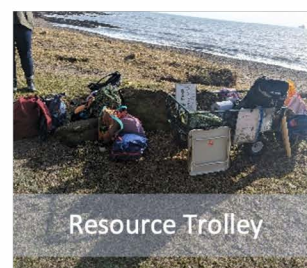
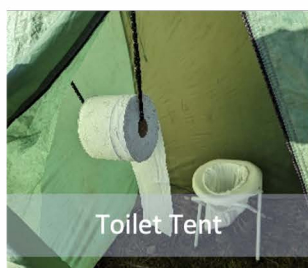
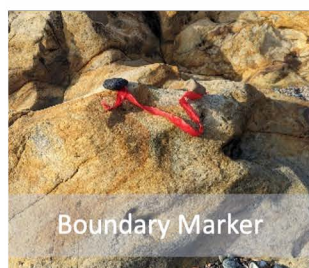
Children start and end their day at the nursery base. Upon arrival, children are encouraged to place their picture on the 'how do you feel today?' tree. This visual and tactile tool allows children to



independently express how they are feeling on any given day, and alerts staff to these feelings in a discreet way. The 'how do you feel today?' tree is situated next to the 'where will we go today?' display, this was created with input from the children, and includes photographs of the local environment and the areas within this where the children enjoy spending their time whilst attending the provision; including the Beach, the Open Space, and the Monkey Puzzle.

The setting has waterproof suits and wellies for the children to use when they attend Dysart, however parents are asked to ensure the children come to nursery appropriately dressed for the season and, with a spare set of clothes. Unless in the case of extreme inclement weather, the staff and children are typically away from the base between 09:30-14:30. Despite being away from the nursery base for most of the nursery day, the EYOs are always contactable on a dedicated nursery mobile phone. Parents can also contact the staff on this phone if they wish to make alternative arrangements for drop off or pick up. Walkie talkies are also used by the EYO team when at an outdoor location.

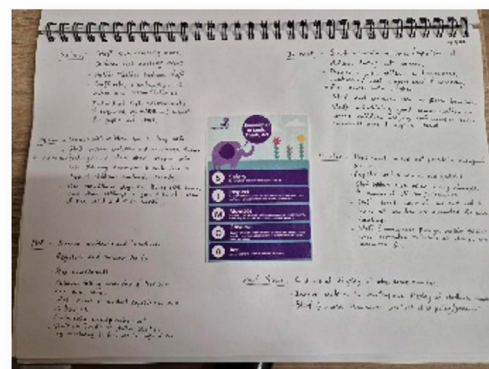
When staff and children arrive at an outdoor location, they split into smaller groups to set up for the day ahead in a coordinated approach. Each EYO is responsible for pre-allocated tasks, and where possible the children are involved in this process. For example, the children lead the risk assessment of the outdoor area by working through a safety checklist and marking a boundary line using red ribbon. Others assist in setting up the resources or snack table. A portable toilet and handwashing facilities are also set up as soon staff and children arrive at the outdoor location.



The children enjoy snack and lunch outside when attending Dysart and often take part in the preparation and cooking of food. Snacks are taken to the outdoor environment with the staff and children in the morning. However, a member of the EYO team returns to the nursery base ahead of lunch time to retrieve lunch items.

[SIMOA](#) principles are observed at all times and are strengthened through interactions and the involvement of the children during the nursery day. A SIMOA elephant toy is used to draw focus and ensure all the children participate in the discussion about being safe when exploring the environment.

Children and families benefit from tailored approaches from the time they transition into the outdoor nursery or when overcoming any barriers. The EYO team take time when children start to understand what support or interventions they should put in place. This may include an enhanced transition program. However, this has also included support for non-English speaking families – the setting introduced the Polish translation on signs and many resources within the setting. Families also can participate in 1-2-1 stay and play sessions during the nursery term.



In recognition of the unique opportunities and provision at Dysart the EYO team have established relationships with a few local childminders, this has encouraged the children to make connections with other local children within their community. The staff team now also work with school educators to deliver outdoor learning opportunities to primary school pupils across fife.



As a satellite provision, Dysart strive to make use of the diverse area that surrounds the setting, including the beach, woodlands, greenspace and local amenities such as the Harbour and Allotment. This provides the children with a sense of belonging and understanding of their local environment. Furthermore, the provision endeavours to develop an awareness of Learning for Sustainability woven through the planning and learning experiences. This influences the areas the staff and children visit seasonally and allows areas to regenerate and not become damaged by overuse.