

*“Outdoor Learning has to be in our children’s heart and soul.”*

Simon Cotterill, Headteacher of New Scotland Hill Primary School and Nursery, in a conversation with our school improvement coach, Steve Bassett, Autumn 2019, in my first term of headship.

*“We’re building our pupils’ understanding of the importance of protecting nature. We regularly hold outdoor learning days that enhance lessons, improve wellbeing and encourage pupils to learn about the environment in the school grounds. We hope they’re inspired to protect wild spaces and that it strengthens their connection with the world around them.”*

Wendy Hardy, Outdoor Learning Leader, when interviewed for the WWF magazine, August 2023

*“This is the best day ever!”*

Phoebe, Year 1, walking through the gate on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> March after her class had been out on the heath.

Please find below New Scotland Hill’s entry for the Soul competition to win an outdoor classroom:

Please see our school web-site: [Outdoor Learning | New Scotland Hill Primary School and Nursery](#)

and our Twitter (X) Feed: <https://twitter.com/newscotlandhill>

to see how we live and breathe outdoor learning.

## 1. How does your community currently utilize the outdoor space on your site?

We have expansive grounds at New Scotland Hill, and through developing a strong culture of embracing the outdoors and embedding outdoor learning within our curriculum, these are well-used and part of day-to-day school life. In addition to our playing field, our school site also has 'The Hill': a wooded area that rises up from the playground, offering space for children to play, build dens and bug-hotels and connect with nature.



We have also creatively developed other spaces for children to make that all-important connection with nature: 'The Enchanted Dell' – a small wooded area that children can climb trees, find a spot to perch or play games with sticks, stones, and naturally carved noughts and crosses boards on tree-stumps. The wooden sign, hand-crafted by one of our parents, welcomes children into this space at breaktimes. As part of our gardening club, children grow their own vegetables, seeing the spark of magic as seeds they have planted in the spring, grow and are harvested through the seasons.





A quiet area has been developed beneath a giant willow tree; children sit and read or play board games at breaktimes, or chat to friends sitting in the hand-made teepees created by our site controller and some of Year 6 children of a few years ago, who created this project as a way of giving back to their school community who had given them such a wonderful experience of primary school.



Our outdoor space does not stop at the gate and fences at the end of our field. This is a doorway onto Edgbarrow Woods, a site of Special Scientific Interest. It is second nature to our children to head out onto the Heath, to wander the woods on a visit to Eagle House (a local school who we have partnered with, and where our inspiration for creating our own outdoor classroom came from – we would love to have our own Soul classroom) to head over to Ambarrow Court, to explore the historical remains within the local area (linked to our bespoke History curriculum on local area study) or to explore and identify local flora and fauna linked to science topic research. Our children learn to navigate these areas through orienteering sessions, not only understanding how to read a map, but also developing a love of, and respect for their locality. We also visit Wellington College (a short walk through the woods) to use their ropes course, supporting our pupils with developing confidence and resilience, along with before school cross country and ‘wake up’ clubs; when the winter weather is frozen and cold we have watched the sun come up through the trees and spot frosted spider webs amongst the gorse, rather than our usual jogs through the tracks of paths of this beautiful area. A short walk from the gate is ‘yoga hill’. 4 years ago, in the depths of the pandemic, we held a well-being week, which became a well-being charter: a way of life for our school, getting outdoors, finding time to pause, reflect and be part of our outside world. We discovered a clearing that has now become a ‘classroom’ to our children; a space in a clearing, up high where they can see for miles or focus on the bug, plant or pattern on a tree-trunk right underneath their noses. Just last week, our Year 3’s paused to hold yoga poses for a minute or two, as the raindrops pitter-pattered on their waterproofs.

Every Thursday, one of our classes heads out for a 'woods walk' or ventures to Eagle House across the heath. Here, they use the Soul classroom and teambuilding games and zones.



Such is our commitment to enhancing our children's lives through the use of our outdoor space, New Scotland Hill has been awarded the Woodland Trust Gold Award.





We were also a pilot school for the Persil 'Dirt is Good' project, and last Autumn we featured in the global magazine for the World Wildlife Fund 'stewards of nature' school in the following article (p29):

[Action Autumn 23 Low res spreads.pdf \(wwf.org.uk\)](http://www.wwf.org.uk/ActionAutumn23Lowrespreads.pdf)



## 2. Are you looking to improve on a current space or create a new outdoor learning space – please explain?

Within our grounds, we have a wildlife area that has been in place for a number of years. This area had become overgrown and unused. Having cleared this last year, plans were put in place to fundraise for an outdoor classroom! Given our links to Eagle House, we enquired about theirs: 'Soul' had created and installed this, and taking inspiration, our wonderful PTA have fundraised towards such a project. However, with times being tough financially, this is a barrier to going ahead and transforming this space. We have a passion to do so and our PTA are determined to see this through. However, the opportunity to 'win' this resource for our children and families, would transform this area and become another extension of the four walls of our classrooms.

Our plans will be to do this sympathetically to the nature of this space. Our classroom will nestle within this wooded area, creating natural spaces for learning, amongst the trees and habitats already well-established. Our site-controller, Mr Lewis, works with our children and parents, to get them involved in maintaining our school site, developing pride and sense of community in doing so. This area will give us a space for everyone to be proud of, and for all to be involved in establishing, developing and maintaining.

3. What goals do you have for improving outdoor learning in your own teaching setting?



For 5 years, outdoor learning has been at the heart of our school development journey. Our school vision reads:

*'Imagine a school that is the heartbeat of its COMMUNITY, a place that inspires each and every child, young person and adult to live and learn through RESPECT for others, for ourselves and for our school.'*

*Imagine a school where, day-in, day-out, the fabric of our amazing curriculum strives for EXCELLENCE; a school where experiences equip our young people with skills for life and NURTURE a love of learning; where a love of the outdoors develops a CURIOSITY about the wider world.*

*Imagine a school where everyone is part of a safe and secure 'school-family', there for each other, caring and sharing in the joy of celebrating those very special moments that fill us with happiness and PRIDE, INSPIRED to be the best we can be.*

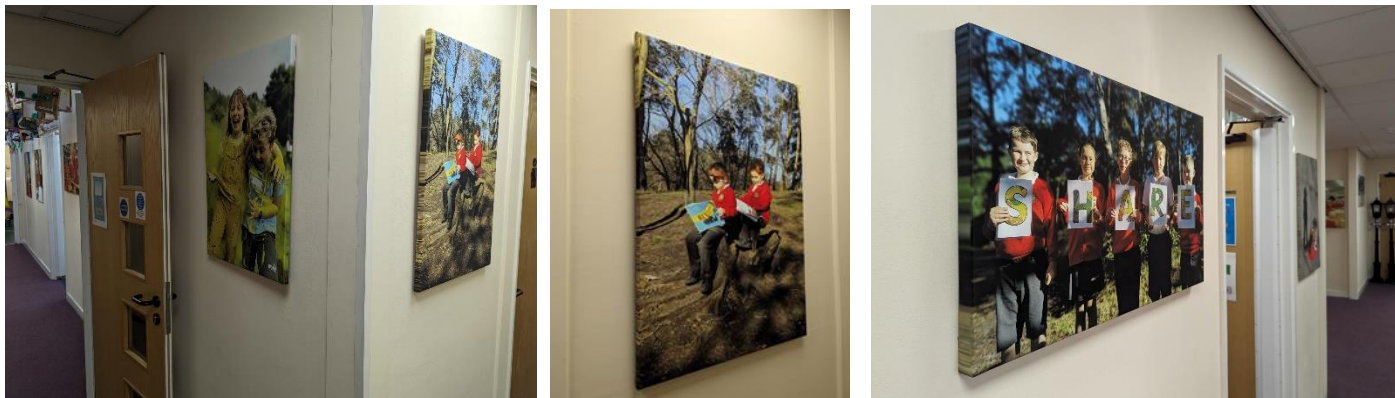
*That school is New Scotland Hill...'*





Outdoor learning has been the driver for transforming the lives of our young people. It is on our school development plans, year-in, year-out, and is lived and breathed day-in, day-out.

Our corridor walls share the joy of our children getting outside.



We were 'Ofsteded' in March of last year. With a confidence, New Scotland Hill flew the flag for outdoor learning. Our report, which can be found in full here:

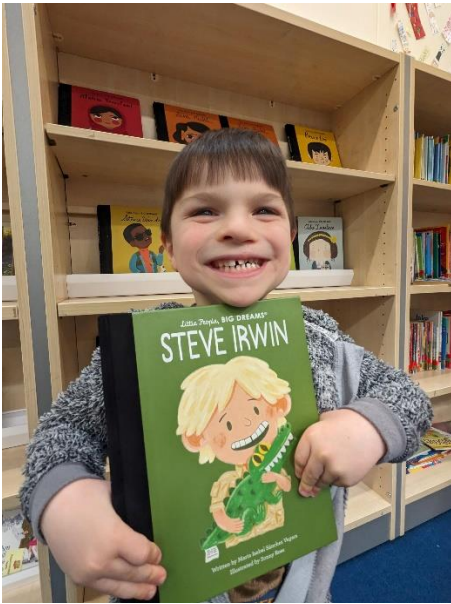
[10268891-new-scotland-hill-ofsted-final-report.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/primarysite-prod-10268891-new-scotland-hill-ofsted-final-report.pdf) (primarysite-prod-sorted.s3.amazonaws.com)

Our inspector immersed themselves in the culture of our school and our report sang about the impact of the outdoors on our children:

*'Learning in the outdoors is at the heart of the school. During lunchtime and breaktimes, the playground is a calm, positive space where pupils and staff make full use of the extensive school grounds and the equipment available to them.'*



*'They (school leaders) have created an exciting curriculum that aims to connect ideas together and bring the outdoors into learning wherever possible.'*



We are immensely proud of our Ofsted report for how it celebrates the passion for outdoor learning and the importance of the outdoors in our young people's lives. We are equally proud that in an educational world that can easily be solely led by targets, numbers and narrowed outcomes, our school stands by the impact of outdoor learning on our children as the thing that will most empower them and change their lives.

But we don't rest on our laurels... On our journey towards excellence and the very best opportunities for our children, we are creating a Personal Development curriculum, with outdoor learning as a driver for how we can inspire our children to be the very best they can be, to love and care for the environment, and to use nature and the natural world to support their personal development. Getting outdoors gives our children the chance to challenge themselves and to develop as young people. Our offer to our children includes:

- **Regular outdoor learning days:** on a termly basis offer everything from problem solving to make a zip-wire for teddies, to artistic creations that adorn our Enchanted Dell, to drumming with natural resources (led by one of our teaching assistants) to a 10-mile hike... yes, our Year 5 and 6's trekked 10 miles in the rain, to a local area of interest, spending the whole day proving that they getting out there brings rewards (and maybe blisters) but mostly memories and the confidence to know that they can achieve anything. This stands them in great stead when they head off to their residential visits to The New Forest in Yr 5, donning head-torches for a night walk, and Snowdonia in Yr 6, where they climb a real mountain. This journey all began taking those first steps up our very own hill in the school grounds.
- **The chance for Year 6's to apply and interview for roles as Environmental Ambassadors:** In role, they have now built a relationship with Michael, from the Thames Basin Heath partnership. These children have held meeting with him and are working on projects



to raise awareness amongst our community about how special our locality is. They have also developed the confidence from these roles to present to our Governing Body; the outdoors was their connection to finding a position of responsibility within our school and knowing they can make a true difference.

- Incidental learning that takes our children outside. Our teachers have license, and trust, leave the classroom door and use the outdoor space to inspire. Creating an outdoor classroom will allow us to build this into our weekly timetable, and take outdoor learning experiences to the next level.
- Quite simply, our commitment is that everyone can learn outdoors. In doing so, they are changed as young people, as much as our parent volunteer helpers feel a sense of pride and purpose when they come in to help and be part of all of this, or serve up a warming hot chocolate on a cold winter's day.



**4. How do you envision the classroom and surrounding area being utilized by your school? Please include examples from your traditional academic curriculum as well as any special focus areas.**

Our outdoor classroom will become the hub for outdoor learning at New Scotland Hill.

Yes, every class will have a timetabled slot in the outdoor classroom every week as a basic commitment. This will be for teachers to make curriculum links through music, science, art, etc. and also to incorporate team building activities and planned sessions that further develop that love of nature.

In addition, we will plan for interventions and support sessions to run here. 2 years ago we created 'The Nest', a nurture space that was an old cupboard. This is a vibrant area for children and families to gain the support they need to thrive in school and life.



We see our outdoor classroom as an extension of this, and will plan for how it can be used to support our children with their Personal and Social Development. The same vision that transformed this space in our school building will be used to create a stunning area for our children to be supported to be themselves outdoors.

In the terms following lockdowns, we ran interventions using mapping and navigation skills to support children who had stopped speaking as a form of communication. Through drawing maps of 'The Hill' and leading each other on journeys in the outdoor spaces, our vulnerable children learnt to communicate again. We will use our outdoor classroom to build such provision into our school curriculum offer.

The outdoor classroom will also be a meeting space for our children. School Council, Environmental Ambassadors, House Captains... can all use this space to meet, rather than reverting to form and meeting indoors, often shoe-horned into the limited space available in school. This will give a sense of purpose and pride to our children and place further value on these roles. Our 'top table' (children picked out of our assembly raffle for displaying respectful behaviours, can sit in the outdoor classroom at lunchtime and picnic together, promoting talk and the social experience of eating together.

This space will also be used by staff. Rather than sitting indoors at the end of a long Wednesday, teachers will meet in the outdoor classroom, giving valuable head-space and fresh air that will invigorate them. We value our staff and their well-being, and although the outdoor classroom is ultimately to enhance our children's lives, the chance to create a space for staff to enjoy and feel valued in, cannot be underestimated.

We also see our children creating a hub for all the exciting things that happen in the outdoors. Our environmental ambassadors have wildlife cameras set up around our school grounds. By planning to install sustainable ways of creating the energy to run these (our PTA will fundraise for this as an 'add-on' to our Soul outdoor classroom) our young leaders can continue this great work, in an environmentally conscious manner, in keeping with the roles they applied and interviewed for. They will see the difference they make by being passionate about the outdoors.



## 5. How do you envision your space being used outside of term times and the normal teaching day? Partnerships with other groups? Extended school year?

Our outdoor classroom will be for everyone. Our school is at the heart of our community, and we see this space as being for:

- Our wraparound club and holiday provision: before and after school clubs will be able to get out and wake-up or wind-down in this area
- Parents and families: from our Family Support Worker meeting with groups of parents to support them supporting their children, to PTA events making use of the space, to parent-toddler groups, we see this as space for all of our families to access. Our Family Support Worker works closely with parent/carers to improve attendance for pupils; having an outdoor classroom will provide an inspirational area to engage our children and encourage positive relationships with school.



- Community groups, such as the local scouts using the fire-pit, Crowthorne Amateur Dramatics Group (who use our community building) can use this as part of our offer, and build outdoor performances into their repertoire; we will also open this area up to local parent-toddler groups; these are the children who will become part of the New Scotland Hill family, and by offering this at an early age, they can benefit from the school culture and 'outdoor life' at our school.
- We regularly connect with local residential homes and in the past had a strong relationship with the Dementia Café in Yateley. The pandemic severed these ties and as a school we are rebuilding these, knowing that our children can make a difference to the lives of those in our community in doing so. We will be able to invite such groups in to use this space, enhancing mental-health and well-being for all.
- We have links to Sandhurst Gardening Club; they provide our children with resources throughout the year, and connect with us by popping in to pass on skills and share the joy of growing and gardening. We will use the outdoor classroom as a base for this club,

and enhance the area around it by our children planting and growing to landscape and cultivate it.

- We are ambitious to build Forest Schools into our school, and wider community offer. Members of our staff team are keen to train as Forest School Leaders and build a skills based approach to the outdoor curriculum into what New Scotland Hill offers. Our outdoor classroom would be a hub for this work, with the potential to offer it a venue for training for the wider community to be offered. Our school ethos is about giving and making a difference. If we are given the opportunity of a lifetime of having an outdoor classroom created, we will give the opportunity of using this to our wider community as a way of passing on the impact of this gesture.

We also want to think creatively about how this space can be used 'outside the box'. Only recently, the lady who runs first-aid courses from our community building, offered to provide Forest School First Aid to staff. What better setting to do so, than in an outdoor classroom where the skills are in context and everyone's engagement is enhanced by being outside in a beautiful setting.

At New Scotland Hill we also see our role as giving to make a difference to others. We would be keen to welcome other schools, particularly through our Local Authority partnership work, to use our Soul classroom. By receiving this gift of an outdoor classroom for our children, we can play a role in offering wider opportunities to others if we have such a resource on site.

## **6. Who will be in charge of general upkeep, maintenance and repairs of the classroom and surrounding areas and how will this happen?**

We have a passionate, full-time site controller, who everyone within the local community knows. Along with our Bursar (who doesn't just sit at a desk and count the money we don't have – he gets out and runs clubs and activities for our children), they manage our school site and enhance the environment for our children. They will lead on the planned upkeep and maintenance of this area.

By bidding for this opportunity, should we 'win' the outdoor classroom that we long for, our PTA can direct fundraising towards additional elements to this outdoor learning area. Whether this be 'Soul' resources such as team building equipment (we love the web-cube at Eagle House!) or 'The Swamp' for loose parts play, or money that can be put aside for natural resources for our site-controller to work with to create elements for this area, we can maintain this as a long-term investment for our children. Most importantly, our PTA can make the commitment to support any ongoing maintenance costs and upkeep. Our community will love this area so much, that we believe we can include them in this project. Parents will be able to take part in community get-togethers, where we keep on top of upkeep, whilst also creating new resources for our children. Inviting them in for a cuppa and time together, in return for them making a positive difference as part of a working party, makes a difference for everyone.

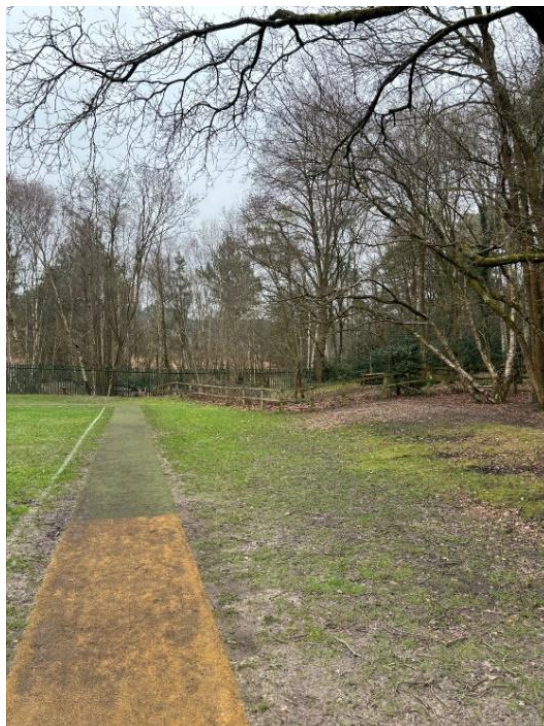




7. Provide a visual design of the layout of your new space. Your design (hand drawn or digital) should be uploaded as a separate JPEG/PNG or PDF. Please also include current photos of the site. Please label and number (School/Establishment Name, SCCC Proposal) and add as attachments.

Current Photographs of the area for outdoor classroom to be sited:

Looking towards the end of the field:





Entrance to wildlife area:



Area where outdoor classroom would be sited:





8. Feel free to include additional information you want us to know about your establishment and the desired space in your proposal. Mark as 'Additional Documents':

#### What our Children Say About Outdoor Learning:

Our Reception children, very honestly said about getting outdoors:

*'Hot chocolate and biscuits!'*

*'Because playing outside is just the best!'*

*'It is fun!'*

*'We can run in fresh air!'*

*'I like making dens' (loads said this!)*

*'I like all the growing and planting we do'*

*'Weaving is good for my hands!'*

*'Doing special yoga on the heath'*

*'Because being on the hill is so great!!'*

#### Our Key Stage One Children Wanted to Tell You:

*"We can complete new and exciting challenges that make me proud"*

*"We can have more space to learn"*

*"Opportunities to try new things"*

*"It's about helping each other"*

*"It's about sharing; sharing equipment and sharing ideas"*

*"It's about taking turns"*

*"It's about being kind and looking after your friends"*

#### And Our Juniors Say:

*'We work outdoors when we can in our woods and on the heath. An outdoor classroom would be used a lot and not just for show!'*

*'An outdoor classroom would make a big difference because we could do outdoor learning in our amazing woods, whatever the weather.'*

*'When we were in Y4 we had a morning in the woods making stone-age tools. We made axes, spears and bows and arrows with flintstones, sticks and string. A massive rainstorm meant we had to finish inside and if we'd had an outdoor classroom we wouldn't have got soaked.'*

*All of the our children are very happy to share their views in person; if you would like to pop-along to New Scotland Hill, please do and they will talk passionately about their favourite subject – getting outdoors and getting us an outdoor classroom! Or you can hear what their parents and carers say about the impact of outdoor learning on them...*

## Parental Comments About the Impact of Outdoor Learning at New Scotland Hill:

*As a Guardian/school helper, who gladly assists in class in reading, crafting and even cooking, I am also lucky enough to be asked to accompany various classes on outdoor activities. These range from school trips, treks to the local woodland to engage in outdoor classrooms and have guided talks by local woodland rangers. I have often accompanied classes to traverse the Edgbarrow Woods to use the outdoor facilities at both Eagle House School and Wellington College. It never ceases to amaze me to see the enthusiasm and the engagement of the children when outside the confines of the classroom, even the quieter ones seem to come alive. Regardless of the weather, the children seem immune to the cold and the wet and some even delight in the mud and puddles, often emulating Peppa Pig and encouraging their classmates to compete with them. New Scotland Hill School is so fortunate to have so much outdoor space and the proximity of Edgbarrow Woods is an absolute bonus, which is often capitalized by the teaching staff.*

*The outdoor learning (dream) days are hugely beneficial for the children. They're encouraged to engage their senses and explore their creativity by integrating natural resources into the fun of learning. My three girls are extremely lucky to experience these days and I know they benefit greatly from them, both physically and mentally. Utilising the beautiful surroundings, to help shape their growing minds. Fresh air; fun and freedom... what a stimulating environment and a joy these days are!*

*Spending time outdoors and connecting with nature has always been a priority for our family. As such, the fantastic outdoor space at NSH and the way it is used for learning and support of its pupils was a key reason we chose to send our children there. There is an enormous body of research linking time spent outdoors and people's mental health and well-being, something that is so important given that our children's lives are far more stressful and online-based than ever before. The importance of getting outdoors cannot be underestimated in reducing the pressure children feel and improving mood, confidence and health. Connection with nature is also vitally important in a world where climate change and biodiversity loss are huge issues facing our planet. Learning to appreciate nature as children is by far the best way to encourage them to protect it, it also promotes respect of one another, fosters their creativity and deepens their learning experience. Outdoor learning days have always been a favourite in our house and for my middle child, the one day he doesn't need encouraging to go to school. My eldest had the opportunity to be the Environmental Ambassador when he was in Year 6. This gave him a wonderful experience in pursuing his passion in wildlife; setting up a trail camera in different areas of the school grounds to see what animals visited at night and improving his confidence through talking about something he is passionate about and sharing his knowledge. We believe the opportunity for children to experience outdoor learning is essential and invaluable.*





*'Our decision for choosing NSH was influenced significantly by the incredible opportunities the pupils are given to connect with nature. The outdoor learning days are outstanding, providing the children with the chance to flourish beyond the classroom, benefiting their general education but also their mental health. The focus on encouraging the children to respect and value each other as people, not just for their academic achievements, is at the core of NSH's ethos and clearly a huge strength of the school. The holistic education they offer, in which the outdoor activities play a crucial role, is something few state primary schools can match.'*

*'Outdoor learning has a positive effect on my children's mental health and encourages their natural curiosity to learn about their world. They are more interested about their surroundings, wildlife, green spaces etc. and often have many questions when they return from trips out.'*

*'The ability for both our boys to be outdoors in nature is invaluable and I feel is a unique opportunity that NSH provides above other schools. There is true commitment to the benefits of learning outside and you can see the children thrive. They also hold cross country training sessions one day a week before school and our children are up, dressed and ready to run without hesitation - they love it!'*



*Having helped out at one of the outdoor learning days, it has been wonderful to see the positive effects these days have not only on the children's physical and mental well-being but also on their ability to engage in hands-on exploration and discovery in nature.*

*Our children definitely need residential and learning days outside. It's a break from the norm. They learn so much more being able to touch and see things instead of imagining. Also I think being outside is part of energising your body. Outside and in nature. Isn't that why they play outside at lunchtime and breaks so they can concentrate better when they do learn. If you can learn outside it's a double whammy.*

*Outdoor learning ... Choosing New Scotland Hill was a no-brainer for us, and one of the primary reasons is its exceptional outdoor space and dedication to outdoor learning. The school's commitment to connecting children with nature on a daily basis is truly commendable. Recognizing the immense value of outdoor spaces, New Scotland Hill leverages this natural setting to enhance children's learning experiences. It provides a platform for them to delve into the wonders of nature, explore diverse environments, and engage in cross-curricular learning. Having two boys who cherish the opportunity to access both the school's outdoor space and the adjoining heathlands, we feel grateful for the enriching environment that fosters not only education but also a genuine connection with the great outdoors.*

*Our son always looks forward to the school's outdoor learning days and loves the activities they involve. He takes part in Wake-Up Wednesdays on the playground/track and every week says how good it's been! We feel that getting outdoors is wonderful for physical and mental health and makes for memorable, enjoyable learning experiences. The teachers at New Scotland Hill make excellent use of their great outdoor space.*

*Being outdoors and learning was a key part of my own school time - I remember begging the teacher "it's really nice outside, please can we go and learn maths outside on the field?". Sadly this rarely happened then, but I absolutely love that New Scotland Hill Primary School embraces outdoor learning in all weathers, my children absolutely thrive being outside during school time. My eldest son has some developmental issues and he absolutely thrives being in an environment away from a desk having to sit still during his learning. Can they tell me anything about their day when they come home from school? Generally not - but my goodness on an outdoor learning day they can tell me EVERYTHING that happened! It's so good for their mental health!*



## Our Staff:

'Outdoor learning makes such a difference to our children, and everyone at New Scotland Hill. It is the difference between your average days at school and amazing experiences. Everyone is involved, and it makes such a difference to our staff too!' **Paul Brill, Bursar**

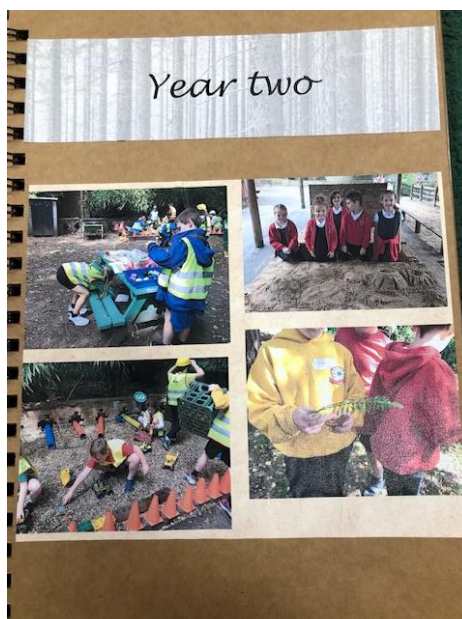
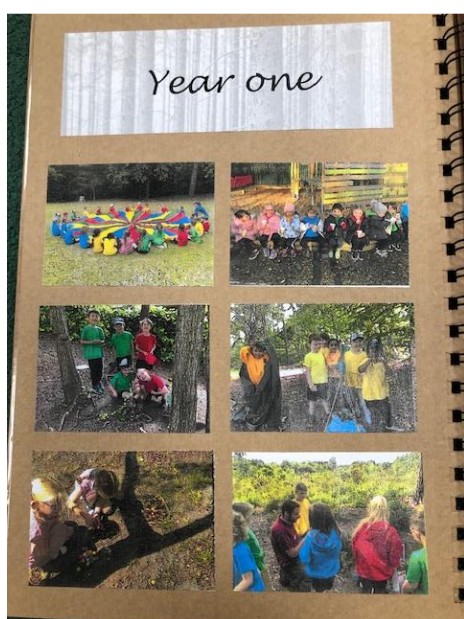
5 years ago I stood in our playground and dreamed of being appointed Headteacher and taking us on a journey with outdoor learning. I have been able to live that dream and vision in the privileged position of leading our truly special school. Through the partnership we have fostered with Eagle House, our children have been able to experience using the outdoor classroom space. We were inspired by this. I then met Andy from Soul last summer at the Wellington Edufest. He visited school and we loved the designs (having seen the impact of these first-hand at Eagle House). Our only barrier to creating this space within our grounds, is financial. Our aspiration is there, and we would love to be able to put a Soul canopy and outdoor classroom in place as it would create such opportunities and experiences for our children and give them license to create the most incredible learning and nurture space. And if this happens, we'd love to pass on this inspiration to others, just as this happened for us, through sharing this gift with our wider community. **Simon Cotterill, Headteacher**

'When I visited New Scotland Hill for the first time, I knew this was the school for me. Seeing the grounds and the potential blew my mind as a Newly Qualified Teacher. I even interviewed in a tent in the rain!' **Toby Leivers, Teacher**

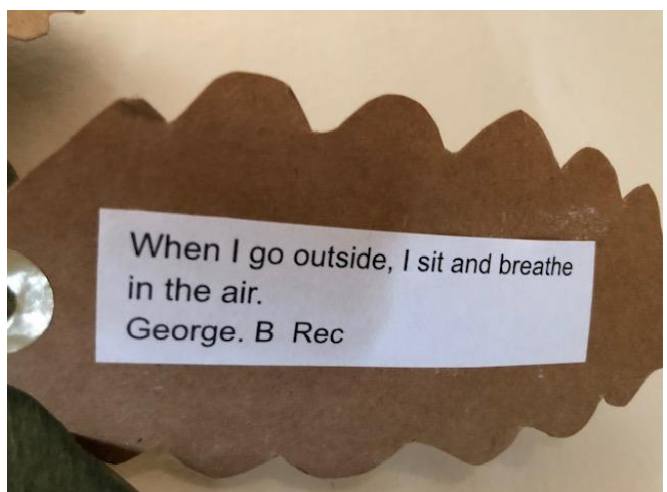
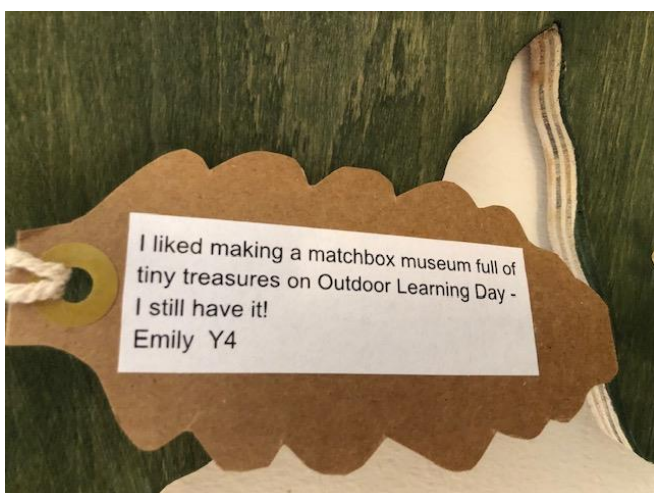
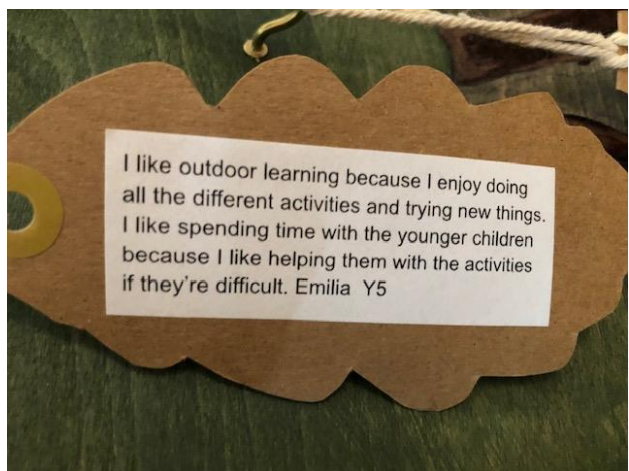
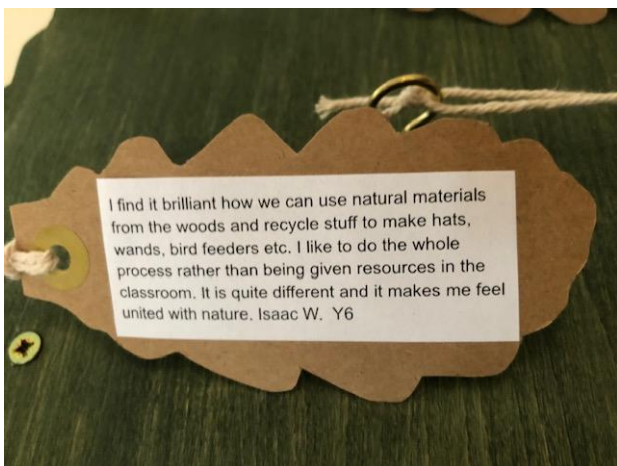
'Outdoor learning is quite simply a wonderful opportunity for our children.' **Claire Evans, TA**

## Additional Photographs:

### Examples of our Outdoor Learning journals:



Our Outdoor Learning Tree (in the hall):





And finally, why our children would love their own outdoor classroom, just like the one they have chance to enjoy thanks to our friends at Eagle House School:



'I'd love an outdoor classroom so I could feel all the nature and listen to the birds,' Arya.

'If I felt sad, I could sit in our outside space,' Rhys.

'I'd love to toast marshmallows...' Billie

'And have yummy hot chocolate,' Tinotenda

'And on outdoor learning day, we could have our hot chocolate and biscuits there!'  
Tinovimba

'It would be outdoors, not inside. I love being outdoors!' Isadora

'Sometimes I just want some alone time and that could be the place that I could stay, relax and calm down,' Dexter

'It could be where you listen to the wind going past the trees and make the leaves go swishing,' Isla