

OUTDOOR &amp; FOREST SCHOOL · WHOLE SCHOOL

# Outdoor Learning Skills Progression

EYFS to Year 6

## About this tracker

Most primaries that take outdoor learning seriously hit the same wall around Y4: 'We've done minibeasts THREE TIMES already.' The fix is a proper progression — what gets introduced when, what gets revisited at depth, what's reserved for older year groups. This tracker covers six skill strands across all year groups. It is a starting point, not a prescription. Adapt to your site, your staff confidence and your curriculum priorities. Use it as: an audit (what are we currently doing well? where's the gap?), a planning tool (what should this year group do that's NEW?), and a CPD checklist (what does each year-group team need training on?).

## EYFS (Reception) — establishing the relationship

Strand	What this year group does
Movement & physical confidence	Gross motor in nature: running, climbing low logs, balancing, rolling, jumping safely
Sensory exploration	Touch, smell, listen — lots of vocabulary building. Mud play. Water play. Weather noticing.
Tool use	None yet. Maybe trowels in the mud kitchen. Adult-led only.
Identification & ecology	Names of common things — tree, leaf, bird, beetle, snail
Independence & risk	Adults very present. Children begin to learn boundaries and the call-back signal.
Reflection & language	End-of-session circle. 'What did you do? What did you find?' Single sentence answers.



## Year 1 — extending and consolidating

Strand	What this year group does
Movement	Den-building (with sheets, no tools). Climbing more confidently. Outdoor games.
Sensory exploration	Sound mapping. Texture hunting. Weather diary.
Tool use	Magnifying glasses. Trowels. No bladed tools.
Identification & ecology	Common minibeasts. 4–5 named UK trees. Garden birds.
Independence & risk	Pairs work. Knows site boundaries without prompting.
Reflection	Two-sentence reflection. Shares one observation with the circle.

## Year 2 — first procedural responsibilities

Strand	What this year group does
Movement	Den-building with poles and sheets. More physical risk allowed (climbing logs).
Sensory exploration	Bark rubbings. Pond-dipping with adult lead. Plant-pressing.
Tool use	Loppers (with adult). Hand-trowel. Sticks for digging — supervised.
Identification	10+ trees. Common birds. Common minibeasts.
Independence & risk	Small groups (3–4) given a task and 10 minutes — adult close but not directing.
Reflection	Drawing + 1 sentence. Compares to last session.

## Year 3 — expanding tool use

Strand	What this year group does
Movement	Larger den-building. Tree climbing (where safe). Long bouldering games.



Strand	What this year group does
Sensory exploration	Listening to birdsong by species. Leaf-press field guides.
Tool use	Bow saws (1:1 supervision). Hand drill. Loppers (independent, with rule).
Identification	Birdsong of 5+ species. Local wildflowers. Cloud types.
Independence & risk	30-minute self-directed time per session within a clear task.
Reflection	Written observation. Posts to a class outdoor journal.

## Year 4 — first fire and craft

Strand	What this year group does
Movement	Multi-day den-building projects. Site management (path-clearing).
Sensory exploration	Detailed field-sketching. Sound-recording (if equipment available).
Tool use	Whittling (peelers, then small fixed-blade knives with 1:1 lessons). Bow saws independently with rule. Mallets.
Fire	Watching adult-led fire. Learning the safety circle. Adding sticks.
Identification	Tree ID by leaf, bark and silhouette. Soil types. Pollinator species.
Independence & risk	Plans own task within session. Manages own kit.
Reflection	Written entries with sketches. Self-evaluates progress.

## Year 5 — independent project work



Strand	What this year group does
Movement	Long sessions. Walks beyond school site (with permission). Endurance and resilience.
Sensory exploration	Long-form observation. Multi-week projects.
Tool use	Whittling independently (bench-made). Saws independently. Begins shelter construction.
Fire	Striker / flint use under supervision. Cooking simple food (toast, marshmallow, baked apple) on supervised fire.
Identification	Bird ID by sight + sound. Tree ID by bud + bark. Wildflower keys.
Independence & risk	Designs own projects (within agreed scope). Risk-assesses own activities.
Reflection	Multi-week journal. Presents findings to class.

## Year 6 — leadership and synthesis

Strand	What this year group does
Movement	Endurance walks. Multi-hour sessions. Site stewardship.
Sensory exploration	Independent multi-month observation projects.
Tool use	Confident with all primary-appropriate tools. Mentors Y4 if peer-leadership in place.
Fire	Light and manage a small fire under supervision. Cook simple meal.
Identification	Confident UK natural history at primary level. Local environment expert role.
Independence	Plans, runs and reflects on own project. Considers ethical dimensions (conservation, impact).
Reflection	Synthesis across the year. Final showcase / portfolio. Hand-over to Y5.



**Audit prompts for your school**

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