

# The importance of green spaces and time spent outdoors

*By Naomi Bartholomew, Headmistress of St Catherine's Prep School*

One silver lining of the last challenging year has been increased opportunities to spend time outdoors both at school and at home. Spending time in green spaces has proven benefits for young learners, including:

- Encouraging natural curiosity
- Promoting active learning
- Honing observation skills
- Developing cognition, especially visual spatial memory
- Building connections in learning
- Building confidence and resilience
- Reducing stress and sadness
- Promoting a sense of well-being
- Encouraging appreciation of the immediate environment
- Building greater environmental awareness

Encouraging young children to observe very closely and to learn first-hand about life cycles and the need to care for habitats enables powerful early eco lessons. Children love foraging and exploring, building on their natural curiosity. Such lessons give chances for children to learn through doing, making and experiencing which is such a key element in a successful primary education.

We are educating and raising the global citizens of the future and children's understanding of our inter-dependence with each other and with the natural world is essential. These topics can actually be quite overwhelming for young



children who hear of our planet being at risk. Hence, we need to engage them in appropriate environmental tasks such as helping to sort recycling, taking part in observations such as the Big Garden Birdwatch run by the RSPB and ensuring that they are playing a role in protecting their immediate outdoor environments. In this way we can help children to feel that they can make a difference to the future we have created for them.

A final and very powerful reason to include green spaces within school environments is the indisputable positive impact on mental well-being. Children are living in a fast-paced world, both real and virtual, with increasing amounts of screen time interrupting their interactions with nature. We know that green spaces reduce stress and sadness and lift our mood, making us all feel better. I can think of no better reason to ensure that we protect and continue to include green space in every primary school in the country and keep taking advantage of the great outdoors.

*For more information about St Catherine's, Bramley please visit [www.stcatherines.info](http://www.stcatherines.info)*





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