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Headteacher: Cathy Bednal, BSc. (Hons)

Dear Parents & Carers

You are invited into our garden for one day a week at the beginning of each session. We are keen to share with you the potential the outdoor space has for learning. We all dress according to the weather conditions and currently the children are wearing our waterproofs and/or fleeces with their wellington boots. We also have snowsuits for use during Winter. Children may still need a little help in getting the waterproofs and wellingtons on – although many children are now very independent in getting dressed.

Below is a table indicating which day your child's base will be outside at the start of the session. If you have availability and are interested in finding out what the garden has to offer please join us from next week.

Times 8.30 – 9.00am/12.30 – 1.00pm	Base
Monday	Owls
Tuesday	Rabbits
Thursday	Hedgehogs
Friday	Squirrels

The Benefits of Outdoor Play
Did you know that being outside in natural sunlight gives children and adults access to high oxygen levels, vitamin D and serotonin – a natural feel good chemical which supports well-being and promotes learning. Vitamin D helps to keep bones and teeth healthy and fresh air increases oxygen levels which improves the function of our lungs, brain and digestion and further improves our levels of serotonin! Fresh air is also essential to strengthen your immune system. White blood cells require more oxygen when working to kill and destroy bacteria, viruses and germs. **Active learning outside is healthy!**

Learning Outside
Encouraging children's regular access to a natural outdoor space allows them opportunity to develop and refine their physical, language and personal and social skills – the building blocks of all future development. The garden space lends itself to problem solving opportunities and we have stocked the garden with open ended resources including; logs, crates, variety of stones and sticks to support children's creative thinking. Den making resources are provided to encourage children to make enclosures and develop joining techniques.

The wonderful British climate provides us with a wealth of sensory information and materials; rain, wind, frost, sunshine and snow, all allowing opportunities to develop meaningful investigation and exploration.

Learning outside throughout the four seasons.
The Autumn term lends itself to exploring seasonal changes with the leaves changing colours and falling from the trees. Winter is a fantastic time to explore icy conditions and experiment with freezing and melting. During Spring we plant bulbs, seeds and shurbs to support our knowledge of growth and harvest our produce during the Summer. We know that by developing children's interest in nature we are supporting our young children to care for it and want to engage positively with it in the future.

Refurbishment of the garden.
We successfully raised money 2018 – 2019 to further extend the learning opportunities in our garden including the climbing frame which has been designed to allow all children to access climbing and balancing opportunities. The sensory bike track promotes a challenge to scoot around our garden and the dry stream with the child operated pump system provides a wealth of learning opportunities about the properties of water.

Our garden also includes a large sand pit with fixed pulleys and a robust weighing scale to promote exploration of forces, weight and measurement. Finally we have developed a mud kitchen to support a range of imaginative and malleable play in response to recent studies which show that mud contains microscopic bacteria called Mycobacterium Vaccae which increases the levels of serotonin in our brains helping to soothe, relax and calm. The same release of serotonin that occurs when playing in soil has also been shown to improve cognitive function. Research also shows that early exposure to naturally occurring microbes in soil will help build stronger, more disease resistant children.

To summarise, the components of a natural outdoor environment; space to move, fresh air, different weather patterns, an assortment of trees, bushes and plant, water, soil, minibeasts and well-chosen resources provide a rich learning environment which children are naturally drawn to. You can see why we have chosen to embrace our garden and devote our future resources to further developing it. Projects for 2020 – 2021 include the planting of a wild meadow to encourage a wider variety of minbeasts on site, completion of the canopy over the stage and mud kitchen and a small nature hide.

We hope to see you at outside base time, please wear appropriate clothing for the weather conditions and we welcome any comments on how to develop our garden.

Kind Regards,

C. L. Bednal

Cathy Bednal and all the staff at Ripley Nursery School.

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