

Justification for the need for an outdoor play space

Whalley Pre-School (Registered Charity) is an Ofsted registered provider of Early Years Education for children aged 2 to 5. They have been serving the needs of local families for sixty years providing a high-quality early-years education to the children of Whalley and the surrounding areas and it provides this at low cost to ensure that it is available to all.

Pre-School operates from the Main Hall within The Old Grammar School. Pre-School has long since recognised that they require an outdoor space for the children which can be accessed freely throughout the day. The provision of a safe, enclosed area from their room would enable free flow play giving the children the ability and choice to move indoors and outdoors within their learning environment. The benefits to the children of free flow to the outdoors will be immense; the importance of free flow access to the outdoors is universally accepted by all in education. It boosts physical wellbeing, it allows the children to make their own choices promoting greater independence, it promotes decision making, it allows the different learning styles of children to be respected and catered for, it enhances knowledge of the outdoors and their surroundings, it promotes creativity and relationships. In addition are obvious benefits that we all recognise of being able to access the outdoors to our mental health and wellbeing. These benefits are currently denied to our children and cannot be matched by simply taking the children outdoors daily.

There are up to 25 children in the Pre-School room during any session ranging from 2 to 5 years old. The younger children have different needs to the older and the provision of a free flow to the outdoors will enable Pre-School to better meet their differing needs based on age and on their individual learning styles. Since the introduction by the government of the 30 hours free entitlement in 2017 (which doubled the free entitlement for those eligible from 15 hours), many of the children now attend for 6 hours a day making the need for this outdoor space even more urgent and important. Some children do not have access to the outdoors at home.

The proposed position of the area is the only suitable and safe option from the room. It will enable the beautiful grounds of The Old Grammar School to be seen and enjoyed by the children which is another benefit. There is much evidence of the grounds being enjoyed by the pupils of The Old Grammar School when the building was originally built as a school in 1725 and one of the many benefits of the proposed scheme is that the children will be able to use and enjoy the grounds once again.

The importance of free flow to the outdoors to children is well acknowledged by all who work within education. The statutory curriculum Pre-School is required to follow is the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS) and we are judged against this by Ofsted. A document prepared by Lancashire County Council's Early Years Foundation Stage Consultants as to the importance and the many benefits of free flow to the outdoors is attached. Also attached is an email from Annette Shepherd (Lancashire Early Years Quality Improvement Team Leader) confirming her endorsement of this document and her opinion that "open access to the outdoors is really essential in delivering the EYFS". Pre-School wish to meet the requirements of the EYFS as fully as possible to deliver the best possible early years education to children within the community.

In summary the provision of an outdoor space enabling free flow to the outdoors would be hugely beneficial to the children at Pre-School both present and future. It will improve the quality of education provided by Pre-School ensuring its viability and sustainability and securing its future.