

# Toy-free nursery where kids are kept outside in all weathers is named Britain's best

AN OUTDOOR nursery where kids are kept outside in all weathers and only allowed to play with toys they made themselves has been praised as Britain's best. PUBLISHED by The Daily Express: Wed, Oct 18, 2017

No matter the weather, children play and learn outdoors at the Dandelion Education nursery. It was set up by former primary school teachers Hayley Room and Emma Harwood who left the classroom to bring children back to their roots.

Children are expected to arrive at the nursery dressed in 'appropriate clothing' for a day outdoors but can take cover from the foulest weather in a 'yurt' equipped with a wood-burning stove.

Ms Room, 44, said: "There are no plastic toys here at Dandelion.

The nursery promises to be all natural, no plastic toys

If a child wants a car as a toy and even a garage for it they make it themselves

"The only toys that you see here are made by the children themselves.

"Toys are so closed and give no space for imagination - a car is only a car, nothing else.

"If a child wants a car as a toy and even a garage for it they make it themselves.

"We give them the tools and resources to make what they want to play with as this encourages them to think creatively and more critically and it improves their problem-solving skills.

"Being outdoors, learning comes alive - all of the senses are stimulated."

The nursery provides a hands on environment which practically teaches children

Open 47 weeks a year and eight hours a day no matter the weather, Dandelion Nursery is nestled in the countryside village of Marsham in Norfolk.

Ms Room added: "As children are outdoors, it also does wonders for their health. They are often less sick - it's a great immunity booster.

"Rather than reading about things in a book, the children can feel the wind and see the leaves on the trees.

"Children help to enrich their own environment here; they create and develop their own space.

"They made their own swing and chose where to put it on the site.

"They wanted a castle, so they worked in a team to make it. We work with the environment using all natural resources."

"The only limit is a child's imagination."

The nursery was set up by the duo in 2015 and has since been deemed outstanding by Ofsted in all areas and has been named Nursery of the year by education magazine Nursery World. Ms Harwood, 54, said: "We were both primary school teachers for a long time specialising in early years.

"We were both very disillusioned with schools and we had a different idea of what education should look like.

"We combined principles from Forest School - learning outdoors - and Philosophy for Children. "We have children from two to eight that come to our group.

Since we are both teachers we can be responsible for older children so we have Flexi-school children and children who are home schooled."

Ms Room added: "Emma and I both have children that are now grown-up and we wanted this for our own children but it didn't exist.

"The state system is no longer designed for children's needs but more for the needs of bureaucrats and spread sheets.

"In that system we are not letting children become what they want to become we are just teaching them to take exams and fit in a box."

Ms Room and Ms Harwood have also criticised the government for their 30 hour free childcare, which is subsidised by care providers.

The group provides 15 hours free childcare per week and after these hours care for two-year-olds costs £15 per hour and £6.50 per hour for three, four and five-year olds.

Ms Room said: "We only offer 15 hours free childcare since we can't afford to provide any more. "We only have fully qualified teachers at our nursery and our ratios are higher than other spaces. "The childcare is subsidised by us and would come from any profits we would make - if any - and centres are closing down because of it.

The nursery believes that the outdoor lessons help keep children healthy  
"If you want quality education we need to pay our staff a good wage.  
"We are going to go to the House of Commons to raise this issue."

TV child psychologist Emma Kenny applauded the "amazing" idea of an outdoor nursery.

She said: "This is a perfect environment for children. The psychological benefits of being with nature has been proved to be so important for well being.

The nursery founders made the nursery to give children a bit more autonomy  
"It helps with stress and gives them an idea that they are part of something bigger.  
"It's incredible that they can get a true sense of who they are and what they are at that age and it makes the world a playground.

"This is also amazing because it encourages gender neutrality.  
"These children are not restricted by gender restraints that they would come across in a school environment.

"When the only limit is the child's imagination they don't see limits of what boys are or what girls are but they can make their own environment and own personalities.

If rolled out to the country, the founders believe this will quell drop-out rates  
"The most important thing is this trusts children to know what they need.  
"We have forgotten that children are much more capable than we give them credit for.  
"The current education system at the moment is stacked up against children and doesn't address all of their needs.

"If this is rolled out in the whole country - this could prevent children dropping out of education and it encourages the idea of practical education is just as important as academia.  
"Children wouldn't be limited like they are in the classroom. This is a brilliant idea."