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Part 1:



Part 2: Learning Journal: Early Years Visit to Ogmore Castle & Stepping Stones

A visit to Ogmore Castle and the surrounding stepping stones will provide Early Years pupils with a rich, authentic and highly stimulating learning environment in which scientific and mathematical learning can be developed through direct experience, exploration, observation and purposeful interaction with the natural world. Ogmore provides a rich combination of historical architecture, natural landscape, flowing water, rocks, plants, wildlife and varied terrain. This will offer children opportunities to witness, investigate, compare, predict and problem-solve in meaningful contexts, compared with classroom discussion.

Date: September 2026

Group: Early Years pupils with supporting adults

Focus: Awe & Wonder – Science & Mathematics

09:00

As the children stepped off the minibus, they were immediately captivated by the vastness of Ogmore Castle. The towering stone walls, the open landscape and the distant sound of the river created an atmosphere of excitement and curiosity. Several children paused, staring upwards, asking how old the castle was and why it looked “broken but still standing.” Adults encouraged them to touch the stone, notice the texture, and observe how the sun light cast long shadows across the ruins.

This first moment of awe set the tone for the day. The children’s natural curiosity appeared instantly, and their questions reflected early scientific thinking: noticing materials, wondering about change over time, and comparing the castle to buildings they knew.

09:15

As we moved deeper into the grounds, the children began navigating the uneven terrain. They counted steps between different parts of the ruins, compared the height of walls, and identified shapes in the stonework. Some noticed that certain stones were smoother than others, prompting discussions about weathering and erosion.

Adults supported the children with this exploration by offering mathematical language such as *taller, shorter, wider, narrower*, and encouraging children to estimate distances between some of the features. The physical environment allowed mathematical concepts to be lived rather than merely discussed within a classroom.

09:30

Children gathered around one of the larger walls, fascinated by its height and stability. One child asked, “Why hasn’t it fallen down yet?” which led to a spontaneous conversation about strength of materials, balance and the way in which the castle might have been built so many years ago.



Adults encouraged children to think about how the stones were placed, how weight is distributed, and how forces act on structures. These early construction ideas emerged naturally from the children’s observations and questions.

09:45

As we began walking toward the river, children noticed the sound of flowing water becoming louder. They estimated how far away the river might be and predicted what it would look like if we were closer. Some wondered whether the water would be “fast or slow,” demonstrating some early prediction skills.

The walk itself became a mathematical experience: children compared the lengths of shadows, counted steps, and noticed changes in the terrain.

10:00

When the stepping stones came into view, the children gasped with excitement. Although they were not permitted to access the stones, they were able to observe them safely from the riverbank. From this viewing point, they counted the stones, noticed repeating patterns, and compared their shapes and sizes.



Adults used open-ended questions such as:

- “How many stones can you see?”
- “Which stone looks closest to you?”
- “Do you think the stones are all the same size?”

These questions encouraged mathematical reasoning and supported children in articulating their observations.

10:15

From a safe spot on the riverbank, children observed how the water moved around rocks and stones. They noticed that the river flowed differently in different areas, sometimes swirling, sometimes rushing, sometimes slowing down.

Children dropped leaves and small twigs into the water to see which ones would float or sink. They watched how the current carried objects at different speeds and asked why some items moved quickly while others drifted slowly.

Adults encouraged them to think about forces, flow, and movement, prompting questions such as:

- “What happens when the water meets a rock?”
- “Why do some things float?”
- “Do you think the river look the same tomorrow?” “Why?”

These questions supported early scientific enquiry, prediction and cause-and-effect thinking.

10:40

Children began exploring the grassy areas near the riverbank, lifting small stones and discovering insects underneath. They noticed plants growing along the river’s edge and spotted birds overhead with horses in the fields next to the castle.

Adults encouraged them to think scientifically about habitats by asking:

- “What living things can you find?”
- “What do they need to live here?”
- “Why do you think they like being near the river?”



These encounters helped children understand relationships between organisms and their environment.

11:00

Children compared the width of the river at different points, noticed symmetry in rock formations, and sorted pebbles by size, colour and texture. Some created simple patterns on the ground, while others compared the weight of stones.

These experiences supported early numeracy through authentic engagement with the environment.

11:20

Adults gathered the group for a storytelling session about castles, knights and the history of Ogmore. Children asked questions about how people lived long ago, why the castle is now in ruins, and how the materials have changed over time.

This moment combined awe, imagination and scientific thinking, helping children connect the past and the present.

11:40

Children sat together for lunch overlooking the river. They discussed their favourite discoveries so far, shared observations and asked new questions. Some children wondered whether the river would rise if it rained, while others speculated about how the castle was built.

This social time allowed children to consolidate learning, reflect on experiences and build confidence in expressing their ideas.

12:15

After lunch, with adult support, the children noticed changes in the sky and temperature. They compared the length of shadows to those seen earlier in the morning and discussed why they looked different.

Adults encouraged them to think about the position of the sun, prompting early ideas about light, shadow and time.

12:30

Children's spontaneous observations guided the next part of the visit. One child noticed a wet rock and asked why it looked shiny. This led to an investigation into water absorption and

reflection. Another child wondered why some stones were darker than others, prompting discussions about moisture, texture and material differences.

Adults supported these inquiries with prompts such as:

- “Tell me what you noticed.”
- “What might happen if we moved this stone?”
- “How could we find out?”

These questions encouraged children to discuss their thinking, test ideas and consider alternative explanations.

13:00

Children gathered to share their theories about the river, the stones and the castle. They listened to one another, compared ideas and built on each other’s thinking.

This reflective time supported metacognitive development and helped children recognise themselves as active learners.

13:20

On the walk back toward the minibus, children noticed how the environment had changed throughout the day. They chatted about morning and afternoon temperatures, observed cloud movement and guessed how far they had walked.

These observations reinforced scientific and mathematical thinking in real contexts.

13:40

Before leaving, children shared their favourite moments. Many mentioned the flowing river, discovering insects and noticing patterns in the stones. Adults reflected on how the environment naturally encouraged curiosity, problem-solving and scientific thinking.

Overall Reflection

The visit to Ogmores Castle and the stepping stones provided a rich, multisensory environment where children could explore scientific and mathematical concepts through first-hand experience. They engaged in counting, comparing, predicting, observing, questioning and problem-solving in authentic contexts. Awe and wonder acted as powerful motivators, sustaining engagement and deepening enquiry.

The day supported the development of children who are not simply able to recall information, but who are beginning to understand themselves as curious learners and active explorers of their world. Ogmore offered an environment where children could look closely, listen carefully, move with purpose, ask questions and develop curiosity and wonder, allowing scientific and mathematical learning to become lived, embodied and meaningful.

The importance of adult support was imperative in nurturing confidence. Without encouragement, children could have felt hesitant to test ideas or express theories. Adults were fully briefed on how children learn to ensure they did not unintentionally limit exploration or curiosity.

Part 3:

Initial Benefit-Risk Assessment of Activities in Nature-based Early Childhood Education



This benefit-risk assessment focuses on the specific activities that occur in a space. This tool should be used in tandem with a site assessment which identifies potential hazards in a space—no matter the activity occurring there. Once you've completed this initial benefit-risk assessment it's recommended to generate detailed protocols for medium- and high-risk activities.

Location/Organization:	An Early Years visit to Ogmores Castle (and river with steppingstones alongside) – children to walk from the school setting.	Date:	29 th September 2026
Assessor(s):	K Chiplin	Scheduled review date:	

The three questions driving this assessment: 1) What are the benefits of doing this activity? 2) How might we (or nature) get hurt doing this activity? 3) How can we keep ourselves, each other, and nature safe doing this activity?

Benefits of our Visit

- Provides a memorable first-hand experience that can stimulate curiosity and awe.
- Connects classroom learning to a real place and meaningful experiences.
- Encourages children to ask questions, make observations and develop vocabulary.
- Supports early scientific exploration through water, weather, materials and living things.
- Supports early mathematical thinking through counting, comparing, estimating, shape, pattern and positional language.
- Develops confidence, independence, cooperation and safe exploration.
- Provides rich opportunities for imaginative play, storytelling and creative responses.
- Encourages respect for the natural environment and Wales' historic heritage.

How will young children benefit from this activity?	Activity	What are the possible risks of this activity?	Who is at risk?	What actions will be put in place to reduce the risk of injury?	Overall risk rating*: L/M/H
This visit will provide our Early Years children with an exciting opportunity to experience awe and wonder through exploring a real castle, river and natural environment. Being outdoors in a historic setting will encourage children to be curious, ask questions and use all their senses to explore the world around them. Children will have the opportunity to look closely at the old stone walls, listen to the sound of the river, feel different natural textures, notice plants and wildlife, and observe how the environment changes around them. The castle will provide a wonderful starting point for imaginary play and storytelling. Children can wonder who might have lived in the castle, imagine what life was like long ago and use the castle as inspiration for stories, role play and creative activities. The visit will also support early scientific understanding through simple, hands-on exploration. Children will observe the water flowing in the river, investigate what happens	River / open water	Fall into water, drowning, cold-water shock or injury.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	*No paddling or entering the river. Regular headcounts – risk reduced Children remain in small, supervised groups. Establish a clear no-go boundary well away from the river edge. Adults positioned between children and the water.	High – *all adults to adhere to actions to mitigate risk
	Vehicles / car park	Collision or serious injury.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Children remain together with adults. Adults supervise all movement between transport and the site. Headcounts at transition points. Adults to navigate crossing roads etc ensuring all adults are obvious to drivers – hi viz jackets.	Medium
	Castle walls and ruins	Cuts, falling masonry, climbing/falling from height.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Children to stay on permitted routes. No climbing, leaning on or disturbing walls. Follow site signage and staff guidance.	Low
	Uneven ground, stones and mud	Trips, slips, falls or sprains.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Suitable footwear required. Children walk rather than run. Adults supervise movement and	Low

How will young children benefit from this activity?	Activity	What are the possible risks of this activity?	Who is at risk?	What actions will be put in place to reduce the risk of injury?	Overall risk rating*: L/M/H
when water moves around stones, notice changes in the environment/weather and can explore natural materials such as rocks, mud, leaves and grass. This will provide an opportunity for use of simple language to describe what they see, make predictions and talk about what they notice. The environment will naturally support early mathematical development. Children can count steps and objects, compare big and small stones, look for different shapes, notice patterns, estimate distances and use positional language such as near, far, next to, behind, in front, above and below. The stepping stones can provide an engaging opportunity to count, compare and talk about size and distance, while being observed safely rather than crossed. Most importantly, the visit will give children the opportunity to experience the learning rather than simply hear about it. The combination of an ancient castle, flowing river, natural landscape and wildlife will offer memorable				avoid excessively muddy or slippery areas.	
	Edges / drops	Fall causing injury.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Clear boundaries established. Children remain with adults and are prevented from approaching unsafe edges.	Low
	Livestock / wildlife	Bites, kicks, allergic reaction or distress.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Children do not approach, feed or touch animals. Stay together and follow agreed routes. Must not touch faeces or animal food	Low
	Child separated from group	Anxiety or safeguarding concern.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Named adults supervise small groups. Regular headcounts. Clear meeting point and agreed procedure for a missing child. Boundaries given to all. All children to be wearing wrist bands with school details and uniform with school logo.	Low

How will young children benefit from this activity?	Activity	What are the possible risks of this activity?	Who is at risk?	What actions will be put in place to reduce the risk of injury?	Overall risk rating*: L/M/H
experiences that increase curiosity, imagination and a sense of wonder. The visit will provide inclusive opportunities for all learners and the provision included in any statutory documents must be adhered to. All adults to made aware of any allergies, needs (both medical and educational) whilst away from the school setting. IMPORTANT Ensure all equipment required is available for use on the day: Buckets, magnifying glasses, iPads, pencils, paper, charcoal, clip boards etc. Children to wear suitable clothing for the visit considering the weather - to be ascertained prior to the trip. School uniform, school logo bracelets, adults in High-visibility jackets/tabards. Towels to be available, sick bucket for the travel, comprehensive 1st aid kit any medications etc. Evolve forms to be completed and managed by the class teacher whilst off site with a suitable	Medical needs / first aid	Illness or injury not treated promptly.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	First-aid kit and required medication carried. Relevant medical information available to authorised staff. Emergency contact details carried.	Low
	Weather	Cold, heat, dehydration, sunburn, wet/slippery surfaces.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Check forecast before the visit. Suitable clothing, waterproofs, water and sun protection. Modify or cancel activities if conditions become unsafe.	Low
	Stepping stones	Slip or fall, injury or fall into the river.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Children will NOT cross the stepping stones. They may observe them from a safe distance only. Explain that they are uneven, smooth and slippery.	Low (children are not to be permitted to cross the stones)
	Plants / natural materials	Skin irritation or illness if eaten.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Children instructed not to eat plants, berries or natural materials. Hand hygiene before eating.	Low

How will young children benefit from this activity?	Activity	What are the possible risks of this activity?	Who is at risk?	What actions will be put in place to reduce the risk of injury?	Overall risk rating*: L/M/H
means to contact parents/school/authorities if required i.e. school mobile phone – fully charged. For this visit, to ensure all can access and enjoy, adult to pupil ratios will be 1:4, all adults to hold full DBS certificates, at least 1 x fully trained paediatric first aider. Consider groupings to ensure trained staff with complex needs i.e. diabetes, ALN, allergies etc.	Behaviour / rushing	Collision, falls or injury.	Children and adults attending the site for the visit	Clear expectations before and during the visit. Walking feet and listening ears. Unsafe behaviour addressed immediately. Boundaries discussed before leaving the school setting.	Low
Pre-Visit / On-the-Day 1. Complete a pre-visit investigation where possible. 2. Check current site information, access arrangements and any restrictions. 3. Check weather and local river/site conditions before departure and on arrival. 4. Identify safe boundaries around the river, steppingstones and castle ruins. 5. Confirm toilet, handwashing and refreshment arrangements. 6. Allocate children to named supervising adults and brief all adults. 7. Check medical, dietary, ALN and accessibility requirements – all adults to be made aware of any requirements such as: allergies, IDP's, One page profiles etc. 8. Ensure mobile phone signal. 9. Review the assessment dynamically on the day and change or cancel activities if conditions differ from those anticipated.			Emergency Procedures 1. Stop the activity and move children to a safe location. 2. Ensure the remainder of the group remains supervised. 3. Administer first aid within staff competence (if required). 4. Contact emergency services if required: 999. 5. Contact the school according to the school's educational visits procedure. 6. Record and report the incident in line with school policy (contacting parents/carers if required – fully charged mobile phone and contact numbers to be held by class teacher). *If conditions become unsafe, stop or modify the activity and return to the agreed safe location/transport.		

How will young children benefit from this activity?	Activity	What are the possible risks of this activity?	Who is at risk?	What actions will be put in place to reduce the risk of injury?	Overall risk rating*: L/M/H
10. Class teacher to take the lead in the event of an emergency (*or first aider in the event of an accident).					

* Low, medium or high is a judgement of the relation of Risks to Benefits in the activity; Activities with a high or medium rating should have a detailed protocol written to reduce risk.

Modified by Samara Early Learning based on template created by Tim Gill at <http://www.learningaway.org.uk>

Part 4:

The Curriculum for Wales (2022) suggests that learners who regularly engage with scientific and technological evidence in a thoughtful and thorough way can expect to develop into ethical, well-informed citizens of Wales and their wider world. This enables them to make considered decisions about their actions, both current and future. Becoming healthy, confident individuals who are prepared to lead meaningful lives as valued members of society depends on them understanding their own bodies, the ecosystems they are part of, and the ways technological innovation can enhance health and everyday living. This area of learning draws on the fields of biology, chemistry, computer science, design and technology, along with physics to enhance learners' knowledge and understanding of their surroundings. Children are encouraged to ask questions, solve problems, make predictions and develop their own explanations. They experience themselves as capable investigators who can learn from their environment. The unfamiliar environment encourages children to think creatively, find solutions to physical and mathematical problems, develop imaginative ideas and work collaboratively. Children will go on to develop respect for their local environment, historical places and living things. They can consider how people interact with and care for their surroundings. Outdoor learning and visits to local sites provide opportunities for physical activity, managed challenge/risk, confidence-building and the development of independence. Children can learn to recognise their own feelings, communicate their needs and make appropriate decisions within a safe and carefully supported environment.

Foundation Phase learners have an entitlement to receive outdoor activities which involve rich, engaging play. As society develops, there are increasing anxieties around children accessing outside spaces. Featherstone, S (2001) refers to the guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage which states that education practitioners should plan activities which are rich in appropriate opportunities. These planned activities should have sufficient equipment, space and supervision with enabling adults on hand to promote curiosity and engagement. Activities will encourage independence and increased physical engagement. All enabling adults should undertake appropriate training to ensure they understand the developing minds of early years children and that lack of awareness could potentially be hindering these developments. Poorly resourced or damaged spaces, limited access or shared areas may cause practitioners to limit access to the space, but consideration must be made to ensure all pupils within the setting have the best possible experiences with the available outside space.

Outdoor learning encompasses many areas of learning, with mathematics and its use in solving real-world problems, being central to everyday life and to economic wellbeing. For this reason, it is essential that learners experience mathematics and numeracy in alternative ways that are enjoyable and accessible promoting engagement, and that these outdoor experiences help them build strong mathematical understanding. In the early years, play is a vital part of developing mathematical and numeracy skills. Through play, learners develop the confidence to explore ideas, tackle problems, make connections and work with others. As they grow older, children need opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively, building on the foundations laid during their early learning. Opportunities to record their findings and have these recordings discussed with a more knowledgeable other will support their critical thinking as they develop their mathematical skills (Gifford, S. 2018). Failing this element of a child's development contradicts their right to an education as noted in article 28 (UNCRC 2022).

Parkin, N *et al.* (2025) research document considered that children's time in nature is linked to far ranging developmental benefits, including stronger cognitive (and metacognitive) skills, healthier social and emotional development, and improved communication. Being outdoors was found to also support greater physical activity, healthier weight and better overall wellbeing. Two key psychological models within the document, helped to explain these effects: Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and Stress Reduction Theory (SRT). ART proposes that natural environments restore children's ability to focus by offering gentle, low-demand stimuli, unlike urban settings that require sustained attention and can drain mental resources. Research with primary school aged children shows that greater access to green space is associated with better working memory and reduced inattention. SRT suggests that nature helps lower stress and promote positive emotions, whereas urban environments may affect emotional recovery. Evidence consistently links time outdoors with reduced stress, anxiety and improved physiological health. Access to nearby nature also appears to buffer children against the negative effects of stressful life events. Although ART and SRT describe different pathways, they likely operate together.

Nature connectedness, used in programmes such as Generation Wild (Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Limited n.d.), adds an important dimension. It refers to the sense of closeness or belonging a person feels with the natural world and builds on the idea that humans have an innate tendency to seek connection with living things. Nature connectedness is separate from simply spending time outdoors or just knowing about the environment. Engagement is associated with better wellbeing and stronger environmentally responsible behaviour in both

adults and children. Because of these benefits, fostering nature connectedness is increasingly recognised as a valuable aim within environmental education. Outdoor learning has also been linked to improved achievement across subjects such as reading, maths and science, as well as greater engagement with school among primary-aged children in Wales. Additional benefits include enhanced language learning, better attendance and grades, stronger skills and increased fundamental motivation.

The outdoors was championed by Froebel as a space filled with awe and wonder for those children in early stages of developing minds. Children were considered curious, active and creative learners who were actively seeking answers to questions that their play led them to. Outdoor play led the learners to rich, sensory filled first hand experiences. (Tovey, H. n.d.).

Vygotsky's core ideas centre on the belief that learning is fundamentally social. According to the sociocultural theory that he developed, children's understanding grows through interactions with more knowledgeable others; whether these be adults, peers or even supportive tools and resources. These interactions help scaffold their thinking and guide them towards new levels of competence. One of Vygotsky's most influential concepts is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This refers to the space between what a child can do on their own and what they can achieve with guidance. It represents the optimal learning zone: challenging enough to promote growth, yet achievable with the right support. Scaffolding describes the assistance provided by the more knowledgeable other as the child works within the ZPD. This support might involve modelling, direct instructions, prompts or cues. Crucially, scaffolding is designed to fade gradually as the child becomes more confident and capable, allowing them to take increasing ownership of their learning (Lewis, M 2025). Providing clear, accurate and up-to-date information to children and young people is a central responsibility for anyone working within early years education settings. The guidance and facts adults share can shape young people's decisions, influence how they see the world and have a direct impact on their wellbeing. Because young people often rely on adults for support in areas where they have limited experience, trust becomes crucial and trust depends on the reliability of the information they receive (Care and Learning 2026).

Härkönen, U. (2013) studied the concept of "no hurry, no haste". There were indications during this early year's research in European kindergartens that the children benefitted from an overall philosophy to slow down. The adults in the setting were encouraged to take their time with the children rather than rushing through the daily routines. This was recognised as sometimes being challenging for practitioners, especially when helping children get ready to go outdoors or when

returning from the forest. Working in an environment where this “no hurry, no haste” approach is central encourages practitioners to rethink how they work. It becomes a valuable guiding principle for what early childhood education should look like and how adults should interact with children. This philosophy was particularly visible on the walks to the forest. Children were allowed to move at their own pace, taking their time whenever something caught their attention taking the opportunities to explore things more closely. Many parents also seemed to embrace this unrushed approach, supporting its importance for the children’s learning and wellbeing.

Murray, J (2022) found that even though open-ended questions will support children’s critical thinking they are considered less commonly used within an educational setting. Practitioners are to be encouraged to develop the use of open-ended questions to fully understand how the learning is developing. In contrast, closed questioning will prevent rich learning opportunities often shutting down the process around curiosity and the impact this will have of learning and understanding. This approach is supported by Wasik and Hindman (2013) who also champion open-ended questions and the impact this will have on a child’s learning and understanding.

Olson, D (2007) found that Bruner’s theory which found children being responsible for the direction of which their own learning took, promoted the suggestion of even those considered very young (3 months old). The findings suggested young children were able to refocus an image that was slightly out of focus by sucking more on their pacifiers. This meant that children were very aware of the impact they had on the image themselves. As a concept, this is shared by Featherston, S (2010) where children can offer suggestions and differing ideas around how activities can be adapted and improved by exploring alternative resources and equipment. This inevitably will improve the outcomes and engagement of the activity as children have had opportunities to direct the learning for themselves through an enabling adult. Key early learning goals which are considered significant indicators of high-quality learning range from relationship building between adults and children, maintaining concentration and an ability to use talk to sequence and clarify thoughts.

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