



HOW CAN BEAN BAGS AID LEARNING IN PRIMARY EDUCATION?

A research study into how bean bag furniture can assist modern teaching methods for key stages one and two in education.

Original report published April 2014
Report updated February 2024

Eden Learning Spaces

Unit 3, Easter Park,
Baker Road,
Nelson Park West,
Cramlington, NE23 1WQ

Tel: 01670 594138
www.edenlearningspaces.co.uk

Contents	Page
Introduction	
Executive Summary	2
About Eden Learning Spaces	3
How Bean Bags Aid Learning: Key Educational Themes	
Learning Space Set Ups: Aesthetics & Flexibility	4
Product Design, Quality & Ergonomics	5
Encouraging Reading	6-7
Technology	8
Outdoor Learning	9-10
Class Sizes, Interventions & Group Work	11
SEND & Inclusive Learning	12-13
Conclusion	14
Appendices	
A. Eden Learning Spaces Products: Designed for Education	15-16
B. Research Method	17
C. Participating Teaching Professionals	18-19
D. Interview & Research Findings	20-21-22
E. References	23-24
F. Case Study: St Mary's Catholic Primary School	25

INTRODUCTION

- Executive Summary
- About Eden Learning Spaces

Executive Summary

In April 2014, The Bazaar Group published this report, based on qualitative research drawn from findings of 15 educational site visits and interviews with 40 educational professionals and approximately 60 pupils with extensive user testing (see Appendices B, C and D). This research project was the start of a journey in developing a new educational brand, Eden Learning Spaces, and its product range. Its product range has consequently addressed specifically how bean bags can aid teaching and learning in primary school environments.

Key findings

- Teachers have been adapting their classroom environment to meet the needs of different learning activities. Reading, for example, can benefit from a different set up to the traditional desk and chair. Bean bags offered comfort and relaxation for pupils that no other structured furniture could provide; increasing comfort, improving concentration and elongating time spent reading.
- With a national focus on encouraging reading and improving literacy amongst primary school children, Eden Learning Spaces learnt that teachers would use bean bag furniture as a motivational tool to encourage engagement with books and e-readers or reward positive pupil behaviour. Learning environments equipped with ergonomic high-backed bean bags improved comfort levels and increased time spent reading.
- Multifunctional themed classroom displays were also popular. Teachers used the animal or cross-curricular themed soft seating from Eden Learning Spaces as part of an engaging, memorable or visual lesson reminder and learning aid.
- Since the 'Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto' in 2006 there has been an increased focus on outdoor learning resources and activities. Waterproof bean bags offered a safe, practical, and portable soft seating solution to aid teaching and group work outside of a traditional, indoor classroom set up.
- In response to growing classroom sizes and 'bulge classrooms', bean bags were considered useful in facilitating 'pop up' learning spaces – as portable, versatile and comfortable seating anywhere, any time.
- The new draft SEND Code of Practice highlights the responsibility of 'every teacher' to provide inclusive learning for all children including those with special educational needs. Teachers found that bean bags were a useful tool for providing a calming, safe and sensory learning environment that all learners could benefit from. Specifically bean bags provided proprioceptive input for learners on the autistic spectrum or with sensory processing disorders.
- While the education landscape is continually evolving, the key findings from this report are as relevant today as they were in 2014. Primary school buildings and classrooms have changed very little over the last decade and class sizes, on average, remain the same.

For many schools, a focus on reading and general literacy skills remains a priority. Outdoor learning is also still an important element of primary education. Finally, inclusive education and catering for all children's needs, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including neurodivergent learners, is paramount in all educational settings.

About Eden Learning Spaces

Eden Learning Spaces was devised by the Bazaar Group, a team of expert product designers with a wealth of knowledge and experience in soft furnishings. Although not educationalists, the team has worked closely with many professionals from the education industry since July 2012.

The Bazaar Group, through Eden Learning Spaces, is in a strong position to help support the agenda of defining the most effective modern learning environment set up and supply of appropriate products and resources for education.

With over a decade now as a supplier to the educational sector, Eden Learning Spaces has a wealth of experience and has built trust in its range of high-quality products. From Day 1, listening to up-to-date research findings and drawing upon the team's extensive experience in product design has informed the development of cross-curricular soft seating, custom-designed for the education sector. Case studies have shown that bean bag seating (along with other flexible seating options) can be highly beneficial to developing a culture of supported wellbeing and inspired learning within a classroom, and outdoors.

Since the birth of Eden Learning Spaces, The Bazaar Group have continued to invest in ongoing research and product development, in order to provide innovative solutions that meet the needs of teachers and school children now and in the future. Eden Learning Spaces believe that educational bean bag products are fundamental for modern learning in UK education.

HOW BEAN BAGS AID LEARNING:

Key Educational Themes

- Learning Space Set Ups: Aesthetics & Flexibility
- Product Design, Quality & Ergonomics
- Encouraging Reading
- Technology
- Outdoor Learning
- Class Sizes, Interventions & Group Work
- SEND & Inclusive Learning

Learning Space Set Ups: Aesthetics & Flexibility

The set up of classrooms and other learning spaces is a well-researched area of education. Teachers invest time and effort in organising the furniture in their classrooms to facilitate the best learning outcomes, while trying to make the most of the space available.

The layout and design can impact learning, both negatively and positively.

Aspects to consider include:

- **Space:** Are pupils able to move easily around the classroom? How is the learning space divided into different zones?
- **Safety:** Does the classroom layout present any safety risks or concerns? Can pupils safely move resources independently?
- **Storage:** How are resources stored and accessed by pupils?
- **Flexibility:** Can areas of the learning space be effectively used for different activities?
- **Learners' needs:** How does the physical environment support individuals' physical, wellbeing and learning needs?
- **Engagement:** How can the learning environment support pupil engagement?

'Learning environments can affect a child's academic progress over a year by as much as 25%' – University of Salford's study on classroom design, 2012

A crucial point arising from Eden Learning Spaces' research is that different learning activities require different environmental set ups. Whilst writing tasks often require a desk and chair, an activity such as reading, or using a device such as a laptop or tablet, is improved by comfort and relaxation in order to avoid distraction.

Our research showed that teachers adapted their learning environments on an ad hoc and individual basis to meet different learning needs, for example, creating an informal reading corner within a classroom therefore replacing dedicated library environments.

To support pupil engagement, bean bags can feature animal characteristics, realistic high-definition nature prints, vibrant colours and textured fabric (such as faux fur) (see Appendix A).

Adaptability and flexibility are key to creating the most effective learning environment. Flexible seating such as bean bags allows teachers and pupils to utilise areas of the learning environment, both inside and outside, for a range of activities.

Consequently, Eden Learning Spaces has:

- Used lightweight bean bag filling so that pupils can easily lift, carry and move them.
- Ensured a level of firmness for ease of stackable storage.
- Used prints on our bean bags, such as stars, galaxy, meadow flowers and leaves, to engage pupils.



Product Design, Quality & Ergonomics

It has been proven that design and ergonomics play an important part in a learner's concentration and efficiency levels. Discomfort is a distraction; so, improving comfort can help to achieve maximum learning outcomes.

Bean bags are not just traditional rounded shapes anymore. Using expert ergonomic design they have been transformed into supportive chair shapes.

"Bean bags provide an ergonomically relaxed design for learners to be able to enjoy their reading in an informal setting." – Northumberland Church of England Academy Librarian Denise Littlewood

Polystyrene bead filling inside bean bags naturally moulds to the shape of the body, for optimum comfort – almost as if it was a chair made especially for whomever sits in it. This allows learners to remain focused on the task at hand without feeling distracted.

Our research has shown:

- Soft furnishings were considered a desirable but luxury item due to budget constraints.
- If products could provide added value and versatility this was considered a beneficial addition to a learning environment.
- Durability was a key consideration due to long periods between furnishing updates and heavy usage.

Teachers stressed that quality assurance is vitally important in education and bean bag furniture design should always take extra safety measures to ensure the products can withstand the test of time as well as impactful use from children. Reinforced seams, double zips and a careful selection of hardwearing and easy-care fabrics are all features that have helped to create a sturdy and dependable bean bag seat for educational use.

"The bean bags are still in good condition a year after purchase and have not worn at all."
– Ringway First School head teacher Hazel Scott

"They are big enough for adults to sit in & small enough for the children to sit in - And they hold you in a comfy position." – Sunrise & Sunset Clubs manager Pippa Alexander

"Considering they have lasted an entire term they still look like new so I would rate these bean bags very highly." – Queen Margaret's School house master Stephen Ottewell

Product design and quality is paramount to ensure that learners are safe and comfortable, that the products offer good value for money, and that they enhance the aesthetics of the learning environment.

Consequently, Eden Learning Spaces has:

- Designed fit-for-purpose products, based on the needs of key stage one and two learners.
- Utilised certified waterproof fabric to meet the cleaning and maintenance requirements for school and outdoor environments.
- Maintained a level of quality and durability to withstand long-term use.

Encouraging Reading

Given that learning to read and inspiring a love of reading is fundamental to education, a survey by the National Literacy Trust (2012) revealed some unexpected insights, with one in five children aged 8 to 16 reporting that they were 'embarrassed' to be seen reading.

In the National Literacy Trust's latest report (2023), it was revealed that just 44.6% of children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they enjoyed reading at school (almost the same percentage who said they enjoyed reading in their free time – 43.4%).

Changing children's perspectives on reading and encouraging them to read for pleasure remain as much a priority for schools today as when The Bazaar Group first published its research in 2014.

Observations and discoveries made from multiple visits to educational establishments included:

- Imagination and vision appeared to be crucial when creating reading environments due to budget constraints and growing class sizes, as they need to appeal to various age groups.
- Popular use of themed learning areas used for reading, displaying work and soft play.
- An enthusiasm for bright and colourful cross-curricular themes to create attractive multipurpose learning areas.
- A preference towards seating options that could sit multiple children, or a teacher and child for assisted reading.

The perception that bean bags are intrinsically more fun than traditional structured seating and therefore can be used as a motivational tool to encourage reading and reward positive behaviour.

Using bean bag furniture as a motivational tool works well in a library or reading corner as it helps to instantly modernise a traditional educational environment. Reading on bean bags is more familiar and comfortable to young learners and therefore can encourage interest in reading.

"We use them in our library and every break time students are to be found snuggled up with a book. They have worked particularly well as they provide a comfortable place to browse for those students who are less motivated readers." – Beccles Free School subject leader for literacy Laura Ballantyne

To support popular learning themes such as Sea Life and Minibeasts, Eden Learning Spaces created a range of products in animal shapes and curriculum inspired prints. This also helped to differentiate reading from more formal learning activities. Reading then becomes a desirable activity for learners.

"The variety of colours allows children individual choice and they [bean bags] are used regularly for reading and as part of their own imaginative play activities." – Ringway First School head teacher Hazel Scott

"We have a range of bags to suit ages from 4 to 19 – lion bags to gaming bags and everything in between. The children love them." – Barndale School head teacher Colin Bradshaw

Removable covers were also developed for two-seater pods using curriculum and cross-curricular designs, allowing teachers to change themes according to the lesson, such as:

- **Literacy and phonics**
- **Numeracy and counting**
- **Lifecycles and habitats**

Consequently, busy schools are now able to use a versatile soft seating solution to encourage reading, with the additional benefit that they can also be used for a variety of other learning activities.

“Having such an appealing area in the classroom means that children are motivated to want to go and read there. They enjoy the comfort and the informality that it brings, which is relaxing and different to the normal classroom set up – especially in KS2.”

– St Mary’s Catholic Primary School year six teacher Mrs Gail Mason (see Appendix F)

Technology

SMART Technologies' research, which took place between 2018 and 2022, revealed that 64% of UK schools use technology in everyday teaching and learning practices.

Jim Knight (Rt Hon Lord Knight), Director of Suklaa and former schools minister, said: "While the pandemic has changed the day-to-day execution of teaching and learning across the world, it also accelerated the evolution of technology adoption, curriculum, and other key elements of learning. The data here suggests that technology like collaborative software and game-based activity supports increased levels of student engagement and leads to improved outcomes holistically."

As pupils' use of devices in school increases, so does the need for learning spaces that support activities involving technology. A supportive, modern and flexible learning environment set up is most appropriate for using portable devices which can be similarly teamed with portable furniture.

Eden Learning Spaces has specifically designed bean-filled reading chairs with substantial back and neck support (see Appendix A) which can help improve comfort concentration whilst using a technical device. The lightweight mobility of bean bag furniture has meant they can be used for break-out sessions and could inspire independent learning and higher levels of engagement in collaborative work.

"The size and shape of the high-back bean bags are more supportive than a classic shaped bean bag which is great for our students as it helps them to feel more relaxed and allows them to concentrate." – Longford Park School media co-ordinator

Schools that don't have the space for a dedicated library can create virtual libraries using e-readers and bean bags, which have the added benefit of being portable so you can move the virtual library to any space in the school.

Bean bags can also be effective seating for pupils to use when engaging in practical design and technology activities. For example, pupils can use bean bags for floor-based activities such as programming a floor robot.



Outdoor Learning

The UK Primary National Curriculum does not recognise outdoor learning as a subject, and, unlike the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), access to the outdoors for specific learning activities in Years 1–6 is not a statutory requirement. However, the benefits of outdoor learning have been widely researched. Outdoor learning can support pupils' personal development and a school's commitment to giving pupils opportunities to be active at school and to learn about keeping healthy: two key focus areas outlined in Ofsted's Inspection Handbook.

In an analysis study on the recognition and reporting of outdoor learning in primary schools in England, Prince & Digory explored the extent to which outdoor learning was recognized and reported by Ofsted, using data obtained from 629 inspection reports between September 2019 and February 2020. It was found that,

'Outdoor learning was rarely reported linked to other curricular subjects other than generically as 'cross-curricular' and there were no reports linked to its place in supporting learners in knowledge, skills and understanding about global and local environmental issues.'

Flexible seating such as bean bags can facilitate outdoor learning linked to many curricular subjects, particularly (but not limited to) science and geography. It can also be used to support environmental education.

The DfE's 'Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems' publication (first released in 2022) details four strategic aims to support the vision of the UK to be the world-leading education sector in sustainability and climate change by 2030. The first of these is,

'Excellence in education and skills for a changing world: preparing all young people for a world impacted by climate change through learning and practical experience.'

Outdoor learning was explored in focus groups and interviews with teaching professionals, as part of The Bazaar Group's 2014 research (Appendix D), which showed:

- Limited budget spend meant practicality and durability were the core necessary traits required of outdoor resources.
- Indoor/outdoor products that provided added value and versatility were deemed a better use of resource to support outdoor teaching strategies.
- Products that could help to bring different areas of the curriculum to life and be used both indoors and outdoors were preferred.
- Product trials in teaching situations demonstrated:
- Waterproof bean bags were practical and ideal for outdoor use as they are durable and wipe clean.
- Having an outdoor seat was a useful tool in focusing learners and keeping them grouped together.
- Children can carry the lightweight bean bags themselves which helps them to develop a sense of responsibility and encourages inclusive learning.

"We are always looking for products that can be used inside and out, especially if you can use them within a theme or as part of mathematics." – Upland Primary foundation stage manager Jane Hull

"The variety of colours allows children individual choice, and they are used regularly for reading and as part of their own imaginative play activities. The quality and texture of the material of the bean bags makes them a really versatile product, they have even been found being used in the outdoor classroom." – Primary school head teacher Hazel Scott, Ringway First School

The interactivity and mobility made possible with educational bean bags far surpasses that of traditional options to create outdoor classrooms. The polystyrene bead filling also has insulating properties to encourage learners outdoors even when the weather is cooler.

"We are looking forward to using them outside to form a soft area in our new playground and have fun with games, teaching pupils different colours and to enjoy being active with play."
– North East Autism Society assessment and training coordinator Kerrie Highcock

"The bean bags are used frequently so I am pleased to see that they can withstand persistent use. The washable surface is also a really useful feature as it means they are easily wiped clean, so they have remained looking fresh since we bought them."
– Longford Park School Business Manager Lisa Hughes

"We're also looking forward to taking the bean bags outside in the summer and really getting to grips with nature." – St Mary's Catholic Primary School year six teacher Mrs Gail Mason

The strength of educational bean bags as a viable learning aid in the outdoor environment has led Eden Learning Spaces to develop more than 90% of its range in certified waterproof fabric.

Class Sizes, Interventions & Group Work

Although class sizes in primary schools remain stable at 26.6 pupils, variations exist from school to school. Some primary schools will have the maximum number of pupils in their class and their classroom may be smaller than average. These teachers may wish to make use of other learning spaces where groups of children may engage in activities outside of the classroom, supervised by a teaching assistant, student teacher or teaching support volunteer.

Additionally, the number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support has increased by 5% from 2022 to 2023, to 1,183,000 and by a total of 19% since 2016. Pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) made up one quarter (25%) of all pupils with SEND in January 2022. This means that teachers are utilising interventions and group work to support individuals or groups of learners, either inside their classroom or in other learning spaces within the school.

Interview findings and observations made on class sizes, interventions and group work were:

- A high level of concern with space saving and storage due to busy classrooms.
- Learning spaces throughout an establishment are used for a variety of learning activities by a variety of age groups.
- Break-out sessions can be used as a management strategy to learn in smaller groups or to ensure special learning needs are met.

The lightweight mobility of bean bags can facilitate 'pop up' classrooms allowing teachers to create learning zones in areas that would not normally be used, such as hallways, libraries, reception areas, playgrounds and portacabins. This also allows for multiple uses of existing learning rooms that can be swapped and changed accordingly.

"We can easily move them from room to room, and their wipe-clean material makes them really practical." - North East Autism Society assessment and training coordinator Kerrie Highcock

"They look fantastic and can be easily transported to different classrooms at specific times to enhance display and reading areas." - Year Six teacher Mrs Gail Mason, St Mary's Catholic Primary School

The research showed that bean bag furniture was shared between different classes, across different locations within a school and by various age groups. The firmness and flat bases of some bean bags also make them easy to stack, providing a space-saving storage solution whilst not in use.

Eden Learning Spaces has ensured the vast majority of products are lightweight and can be neatly stacked to store away to reflect common spacing issues in classrooms today, and the future (see Appendix A).



SEND & Inclusive Learning

In line with the SEND Code of Practice, all schools are required to deliver inclusive learning for all, specifically with the responsibility of appropriate learning provision for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) learners.

Teachers are accountable for supporting the needs of all the pupils in their class, through their teaching approaches and the use of appropriate resources. Supporting the needs of learners will take place both in the classroom and in other learning spaces in schools, where learning takes place.

Eden Learning Spaces' research revealed specialist facilities and learning spaces can be limited within mainstream schools due to lack of space and resource. Schools had trialled different methods of managing common classroom distractions with sensory tools, but none were deemed a suitable solution (see Appendix D).

- St Mary's Catholic Primary School followed recommendations that stress balls and blue tack should be used as options for SEN learners to fiddle with and improve behaviour; however, these resorted in being thrown.
- Escomb Primary similarly invested in tangle bracelets, which also resulted in disruptive issues with throwing.
- Children with special education needs were also described as trying to find small spaces to squeeze into such as between chairs and wrapping themselves in material, which could take their focus away from the lesson.

Attractive and contemporary sensory bean bags helped to promote inclusive learning for all, as children of all learning needs could benefit from their use. For instance, teachers described how children are often comforted by stroking soft fabrics such as the tags in school jumpers. This is also a calming experience for autistic learners or those with sensory processing disorders. Evidence showed that bean bags helped learners with additional needs to feel more supported, relaxed and able to engage with the lesson.

"People with autism experience the world from a very different sensory perspective. The stability provided by a bean bag seat is ideal for supporting proprioceptive vestibular senses. Everything experienced is accentuated and the deep pressure provided by a giant bean bag helps to keep people calm.

"The Touch Tags bean bag in particular is great for pupils who have hyper-tactile senses. It can be used a teaching tool, helping the individual to gradually feel the different textures at their own pace, assisting in desensitisation." - North East Autism Society autism assessment and training coordinator Kerrie Highcock

Bean bag furniture can be used to create specific learning zones in one classroom to help cater to different learning levels and needs during specialist break-out sessions.

A relaxed and comfortable atmosphere is important to support a wide range of special needs. Bean bags are particularly useful to:

- Facilitate conversations regarding feelings and emotions.
- Provide a safe space for children experiencing anxiety or behavioural difficulties.
- Provide a proprioceptive deep pressure input for those with sensory processing disorders. Findings showed this calming atmosphere produced higher levels of engagement and promoted inclusive learning.

“Our film room is now the perfect environment for pupils to share their thoughts and feelings about the films they view, which in turn develops their critical awareness and understanding of the film story and structure.” – Longford Park [Special School] School Media Co-ordinator

“As well as using the bean bag as a seat, it has become our “safe place” during meltdowns. Whilst he is sat on the bean bag [he calms down] quicker. (I’m not sure if that’s because he has the feeling of being cocooned, or whether he feels safe on the beanbag). Either way, it has made life a little less stressful for us both”. – MotherGeek blogger Tina Bailey

As well as creating safe spaces in classrooms, bean bags are a popular addition to a schools’ sensory room. Many schools have created or are looking to create a sensory room to support the growing number of pupils with sensory preferences and needs.



CONCLUSION

At a time when budgets are tight, schools are challenged with finding the most pragmatic solutions to furnishing their learning environments in ways that will support pupil wellbeing and learning.

Primary schools require learning environments that reflect today's modern and progressive teaching approaches, while catering for individual learners' needs, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This means creating flexible spaces that can be used for multiple purposes by various age groups, using versatile furnishings, products and resources.

Specifically, the report has covered the practical, versatile, aesthetic and quality reasons why education-specific bean bags are an ideal solution to many key modern educational issues.

Findings demonstrated that bean bag furniture designed specifically for the education market with cross-curricular themes and curriculum-based designs can be used not only as comfortable and contemporary seating but as inspirational learning aids. Overall, bean bags were proven to facilitate a positive relationship between learners and reading.

Bean bags were also found to assist in creating a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere which can be an important element to supporting a wide range of special educational needs. It is this categorical development of bean bag furniture that can be used in support of many common educational issues including bulge classrooms, reluctant readers, outdoor learning, incorporating technology and providing top quality inclusive learning in schools with special education needs learners.

The research also showed there is scope for further product development, with the goal of creating innovative solutions for the modern primary classroom environment.

APPENDICES

- Eden Learning Spaces Products: Designed for Education
- Case Study: St Mary's Catholic Primary School
- Eden Learning Spaces Lesson Library: Life Cycles Activity Resource
- Research Method
- Participating Teaching Professionals
- Interview & Research Findings
- References

A: Eden Learning Spaces Products: Designed for Education

High back support, attractive designs with structure and back support for optimum comfort when reading or using a mobile device.



Stackable for storage

Firm stability for stackable storage and building playtime activities. Carry cushions come with a zipped carrier bag for mobility and storage.



Cross-curricular designs

Engaging animal shapes with friendly faces based on popular cross-curricular themes from key stages one and two.



SEND & Sensory

Specialist SEND and sensory bean bags feature textured fabrics or are designed to be used in tandem with other sensory products such as bubble tubes, fibre optics and UV lit rooms.



Outdoor classrooms

Water resistant products, made from waterproof, durable polyester fabric. Carry cushions come with a zipped carrier bag for mobility and storage.



B: Research Method

Eden Learning Spaces research project aim: *'To assess and evaluate the benefits and uses of bean bag seating in an educational environment, with a view to creating products specifically designed for the education sector.'*

Predominantly this involved understanding how and where these products could be used to enhance learning environments and how designs could be improved to better suit user needs.

Focus has so far centered largely on Early Years, Primary and Special Educational Needs settings, consumer behaviour in these areas and the appropriateness and benefits of the products within these specified areas.

Between July 2012 and July 2013 the research involved 15 different schools in which information was gathered from 40 different educational specialists and approximately 60 different pupils.

Primary Research

A qualitative primary research method has been undertaken due to the broad and complex nature of the research topic and the inherently anthropological nature of the information being sought. The typically exploratory and descriptive nature of qualitative research methods allowed a greater understanding of the educational environment and discovery of the challenges faced from an educationalist's perspective.

Interviews formed a core part of the research technique from the beginning. The majority of interviewees were primary school teachers as this was considered the core influencer group on classroom settings and on a child's learning experience. The goal of the interviews was to discover emerging patterns from the participants' dialogue – allowing for thoughtful and considered analysis of the research topic and for this to then be applied to product development.

This research was further supported by a range of product trials, case studies and focus groups with students, teachers and parents; ultimately allowing an understanding of how bean bags can be used effectively to enhance learning spaces and support modern teaching strategies.

As research continues the number of sources used for primary data collection will increase along with the implementation of more quantitative research methods.

Secondary Research

Secondary research is used to inform and support the primary research throughout. A number of government and educational reports, research papers, scholarly journals, newspaper articles and books have been consulted. This provided a basis of contextual understanding of the economic and socio-economic factors that directly impact upon educational environments.

This information was used to guide interviews as well as to evaluate and corroborate findings. This provided a rounded and detailed look at how the products could best support the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, emotional and physical development of learners – in answer to the initial research question.

C: Participating Teaching Professionals

Preliminary Interviews

	Institution Name	Interviewee	Date	Method of interview	Objective
Primary	Ripple Primary School	Julie Sprenger - Main Office	05/07/2012	Phone Interview	To assess and evaluate the benefits and uses of bean bag seating in an educational environment.
Primary	Keyingham Primary School, Hull	Pamela Moat - Main Office	05/07/2012	Phone Interview	<p>Predominantly understanding how and where these products could be used, how they could be used to enhance the learning environment and how designs could be improved to better suit user needs.</p> <p><u>Questions focused on:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determining what soft furnishings were currently used in schools, what areas they were used in and what they were used for. - If beanbags were currently used, or could be used in place of other furnishings. - Determining the budget and space available for the purchase and use of beanbags. - What external factors were changing the way lessons were taught in schools or how budgets were spent. - Determining what styles of product / product shapes that would be most suited to the specified areas and uses. - How products could be developed to better fit in the learning environment. - What they feel could be done to improve products and make them more classroom friendly. - How these could aid inclusion or benefit those with SPD's or SEN.
Primary	Kents Hill Junior School, Benfleet	Kerry Purser - Main Office/Buying	05/07/2012	Phone Interview	
Specialist School for emotional and behavioural needs	Castle Green Community School, Sunderland	Phillip Hawkins	07/07/2012	One to One Interview	
Primary	Escomb Primary School, Co. Durham	Wendy Gill - Head Teacher	07/07/2012	One to One Interview	
Primary	St. Marys Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe	Gail Mason- Year 6 Teacher	18/07/2012	One to One Interview	
Primary	St. Marys Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe	Paula Hopwood - Reception Teacher	18/08/2012	One to One Interview	
Primary	St. Marys Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe	Lisa Machin - Reception Teaching Assistant/SENCo	18/07/2012	One to One Interview	
Primary	St. Marys Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe	Mrs Miles - Year 3 teacher	18/07/2012	One to One Interview	
Primary	St. Marys Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe	Mrs Brown - Year 5 teacher	18/07/2012	One to One Interview	
Nursery	Goose Hill Private Nursery, Morpeth	Mrs. Clarke - Deputy Manager	08/08/2012	One to One Interview	
Nursery	Shildon Early Years Sure Start Centre, Co. Durham	Kim - Nursery Manager	14/08/2012	One to One Interview	
Specialist School	Evergreen Primary School, Co. Durham	Sharon Christon (former carer for pupils at evergreen primary)	14/08/2012	One to One Interview	
Primary	Upland Primary School, Kent	Jackie Johnson - Reception Teaching Assistant	14/08/2012	Phone Interview	

After school Care	1st Four Kids - Holiday and After School Care, Newton Aycliffe	Liz Jones - Manager 1	7/09/2012	Phone Interview
Specialist School	Northumberland CofE Academy, Ashington	The Centre (4 members of staff and student student groups) 0	4/02/2013	Short focus group sessions
Specialist School	Barndale House, Northumberland	Colin Bradshaw (Headteacher) 2	1/09/2012	One to One Interview

Product Specific Interviews

Institution Name	Interviewee	Date	Methodology	Objective
Ringway County First School, Choppington	Nursery Manager	18/09/2012	One to One Interview and user testing	To re-visit those involved in the initial research process with products developed specifically for the learning environment. Re-address initial 'needs' and 'uses' and assess how new designs fulfilled these criteria.
Ringway County First School, Choppington	Reception Teacher	18/09/2012	One to One Interview and user testing	
Ringway County First School, Choppington	Y1 Teacher	18/09/2012	One to One Interview and user testing	
Ringway County First School, Choppington	Y2 Teacher	18/09/2012	One to One Interview and user testing	
Ringway County First School, Choppington	Y4 Teacher and Pupils	18/09/2012	One to One Interview and user testing	To visit new educational establishments to 'sense- check' ideas and expand upon our knowledge and understanding of how beanbag products could be used to enhance learning and the classroom environment.
St. Marys Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe	Katie - Year 2 Teacher and Pupils	08/10/2012	One to One Interview and Product Trial	
St. Marys Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe	Paula Hopwood - Reception Teacher and Pupils	08/10/2012	One to One Interview and Product Trial	
St. Marys Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe	Lisa Machin - Reception Teaching Assistant/SENCo	08/10/2012	One to One Interview	
St. Marys Catholic Primary School, Newton Aycliffe	Gail Mason- Year 6 Teacher and pupils	15/02/2013	One to One Interview and Product Trial	
House of Eden Children's Nursery, Newton Aycliffe	Jan Hooper - Senior Nursery Manager	05/03/2013	One to One Interview and Product Trial	
House of Eden Children's Nursery, Newton Aycliffe	John Newbould - Managing Director	05/03/2013	One to One Interview and Product Trial	
Upland Primary School, Kent	Sue Winter - Reception Teacher	19/03/2013	Questionnaire centred on New Product Development	
Upland Primary School, Kent	Jane Hill - Foundation Stage Manager	19/03/2013	Questionnaire centred on New Product Development	
Upland Primary School, Kent	Katie Smith - Year 2 Teacher	19/03/2013	Questionnaire centred on New Product Development	
Barndale House, Northumberland	Colin Bradshaw (Headteacher)	22/05/2013	One to One Interview	
Barndale House, Northumberland	Colin Bradshaw (Headteacher)	18/07/2013	One to One Interview and Product Trial/ User testing	
Barndale House, Northumberland	Sally Carrigan - Admin	18/07/2013	One to One Interview and Product Trial/ User testing	

D: Interview & Research Findings

Primary School Direction (Customer-led)

- Expect products to be durable and long lasting and preferably to have removable covers for ease of cleaning,
- being able to hang the covers up to dry, wipe products down easily or machine washable. (Comments on indoor/outdoor products bought from Argos being difficult to wipe clean and disappointing in quality.)
- Soft furnishings most likely to be used in library areas and in reception class in either the library area or for soft play.
- Prefer smaller, versatile, products as there isn't the space for large furnishing in classrooms.
- Safety key issue – reinforced seams and either an inner and outer bag or double zip in case of seams splitting or children opening bag.
- Minimal budget for 'non-essential' items - need to be convinced of value for money.
- Multi-functional products that have alternative uses other than solely being seating, products that are versatile (curriculum based, interactive, play based, indoor / outdoor).
- Products that more than one child can use at once preferred.
- 'Fidget' product that cannot cause damage/be thrown easily would be ideal.

Future Trends (Market / Industry / Design)

- Government statistics show that in the school year 2022/23, there was an increase of 73,800 pupils across all school types from the previous year, to nearly 9.1 million pupils.
- The projection for 2028 is 4,180,930 nursery and primary school pupils, down 412,000 from the population in 2023.
- The average primary class remains stable at 26.6 pupils.
- The number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support has increased by 5% from 2022 to 2023, to 1,183,000 and by a total of 19% since 2016. Over the same period, the total pupil population increased by 6%. Pupils with an EHC plan made up one quarter (25%) of all pupils with SEND in January 2022.
- As the statistics for children with SEND are currently at a high point and the figures for SEND units within mainstream schools are low, it is important to raise awareness of the different types of resources and tools that can further educational development for pupils.
- The population in special schools has been increasing and is projected to peak around 2025 before starting to slowly drop. This is primarily driven by the decrease in the overall population from the same point.
- According to The National Literacy Trust's 2023 Annual Literacy Survey:
 - Just 2 in 5 (44.6%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said they enjoyed reading at school in 2023.
 - The number of children aged 8 to 11 who said they enjoyed reading in their free time has decreased by 11.3 percentage points over the past 18 years.
 - There were regional differences in reading enjoyment at school across England, with levels being highest in the North East (50.6%) and Greater London (50.3%) and lowest in the East Midlands (41.2.9%), the South West (41.0%) and the South East (40.3%).
 - Fewer than 3 in 10 (28.0%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they read daily in 2023.

- Budget cuts are expected to continue to affect the improvement and refurbishment of many schools across the UK – with many council primary schools in deficit.
- Increasing awareness of the link between physical learning environments and pupil wellbeing – natural elements, and sensory elements (tactile, visual, auditory).
- According to data from the Outdoor Classroom Day 2017 survey, 88% of teachers say that children are more engaged in learning when taking lessons outdoors. However, schools find timetable pressures to be a barrier to teaching outdoors; a possible solution would be to encourage learning outdoors using active tasks which cover National Curriculum objectives

Realisation within range

- Growing opportunity within education market due to increase in 5-10 year olds need to utilise this through
- designing specific education range, revisiting previous designs and improving / building upon these.
- Further development of BazZoo animal range in keeping with commonly taught themes within schools (insect / minibeast, Under the Sea, Farm).
- Need to emphasis safety features, durability, quality, value for money and ease of cleaning in order to product added value against current supplier offerings.
- Cohesive products that can be used in conjunction with one another and bought individually or as part of a set of products.
- Range of lower price (Better) and premium (Best) products that appeal to all budgets – avoid budget range due to high expectations of durability and quality.
- More products that are multipurpose (caterpillar shape that has individual sections, larger kids 'pod' seat, curriculum based designs).
- Removable covers – explore machine washable covers and waterproof inners.
- Explore new fabrics / colours – pastel and natural.
- The majority of primary schools have a reception class which is an extension of the early years foundation level – this results in a large crossover of products between EY's and Primary.
- Growing opportunities for SEN products for a variety of ages.
- Look into Teflon coated fabric and the benefits/disadvantages of stain resistance associated with this, is this necessary?
- Fidget product that cannot be thrown / can be attached to desk.
- Cushions that support individuals with poor posture / hip dysplasia – beans ideal for this as it offers support whilst forming to shape of body.

Research was also carried out into early years learning environments, which supports the primary school research because of similar learning themes used across early years, key stage one and two – particularly with reference to reception learners in primary schools.

Research was also carried out into early years learning environments, which supports the primary school research because of similar learning themes used across early years, key stage one and two – particularly with reference to reception learners in primary schools.

Early Years Direction (customer-led)

- Expect products to be durable and long lasting and either wipe clean or machine washable (Comments on indoor / outdoor products bought from Argos being difficult to wipe clean and disappointing in quality).
- Safety – reinforced seams and either an inner and outer bag or double zip in case of seams splitting or children opening bean bag.
- Younger children prefer softer fabrics.
- Sensory development and self-discovery key at this age.
- Trend for natural / organic / environmentally responsible fabrics.
- Natural and neutral colours and prints– more in keeping with nature and an outdoor environment.

Future trends (Market / Industry / Design)

- Amongst the larger, group-based childcare providers, full day care providers were the most widespread, with an estimated total of 16,700 such settings in 2010. This continues the long-term trend whereby the estimated number of full day care providers has increased every year since 2001.
- However, slow demand for nursery places in comparison to birth rate is predicted to continue over the next few as rising unemployment has eroded the ability of families to pay for pre-primary education and reduced the need to outsource care.
- Projected increase in number of young families (birth rate expected to rise by 4.5% over next 5 years), particularly within second generation immigrant families.
- Products that are multi-purpose are favoured (can be used as seating, building block, sensory stimulation and as open ended play items).
- No main spending period, products bought as and when they are needed and as and when money is available.

Realisation within range

- Quality and safety features should feature heavily.
- “Better” range that offers products targeted at more budget conscious consumer whilst still providing quality expected.
- “Best” range of sensory, neutral/natural products with added design/aesthetic appeal. Potential for construction range (sensory, building blocks, white ones for snow theme / igloo building).
- Differentiate with natural and pastel colours – maybe with the use of one or two key bright colours for colour recognition in younger babies (primary colours or black on light colours as younger babies find it easier to visually interpret these colours) unlike many competitors that use bright colours.
- Removable covers– explore machine washable covers in natural fabrics and waterproof inners.

E: References

P.S.Barrett, Y. Zhang, J. Moffat and K.Kobbacy (2012). "An holistic, multi-level analysis identifying the impact of classroom design on pupils' learning." *Building and Environment*.

GOV.UK. (2010) Reading at an early age the key to success. [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reading-at-an-early-age-the-key-to-success> [Accessed: February 2014].

NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST. (2013) Findings from the 2012 National Literacy Trust Annual Survey. UK

OFSTED. (2008) Learning Outside the Classroom. UK: Ofsted.

GREAT BRITAIN. DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS. (2006). Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

DfE (2011). 'Class Size in Education in England' Evidence Report, DFE-RR169. [Online] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183364/DFE-RR169.pdf. [Originally accessed: February 2014].

Nasen (2013). 'Draft Special Education Needs Code of Practice' Summary. [Online] [Originally accessed February 2014 - currently unavailable].

DfE and DfH (2013). 'Draft Special Education Needs Code of Practice' [Online] [Originally accessed: February 2014 - currently unavailable].

BESA (2013). 'Tablets and Apps in Schools 2013' Full Report. [Online] [Originally accessed: February 2014 - currently unavailable].

BESA (2013). 'Classroom Learning Resources' Full Report. [Online] [Originally accessed: February 2014 - currently unavailable].

BAILEY, T. (2014) 'Eden Learning Spaces Sensory Bean Bag' Blog, [Online] Available from: <http://www.mothergeek.co.uk/reviews/146/sensory-bean-bag-> [Originally accessed: April 2014].

GOV.UK. (2010) Reading at an early age key to success. [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/reading-at-an-early-age-the-key-to-success>. [Originally accessed: February 2014].

THE NEXT WEB. (2014). Government Launches Year of Code Campaign. [Online] [Originally accessed: March 2014 - currently unavailable].

GOV.UK. (2023) Schools, pupils and their characteristics. [Online] Available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics> [Accessed: accessed: February 2024].

GOV.UK. (2023) Special educational needs in England. [Online] Available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england> [Accessed: February 2024].

GOV.UK. (2024) LA and school expenditure. [Online] Available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/la-and-school-expenditure/2022-23> [Accessed February 2024].

Outdoor Classroom Day: From muddy hands and dirty faces... to higher grades and happy places. (2018) [Online] Available from: https://issuu.com/outdoorclassroomday/docs/muddy_hands_report_-_full?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=outdoorclassroomday.com [Accessed February 2024].

Recognition and reporting of outdoor learning in primary schools in England (2023), University of Cumbria. [Online] Available from: https://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/6812/8/Prince_RecognitionAndReporting.pdf [Accessed February 2024].

The National Literacy Trust (2023) Children and young people's reading in 2023. [Online] Available from: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-in-2023/> [Accessed February 2024].

Capabilities for Success: What's Working in EdTech Today (2023). [Online] Available from: <https://go.smarttech.com/whats-working-in-edtech-today> [Accessed February 2024].

GOV.UK. (2024) School inspection handbook. [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif> [Accessed February 2024].

F: Case Study: St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Primary School Case Study:

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is part of a vibrant Catholic community in Great Aycliffe. Teaching ages 4-11, the school aims to nurture, inspire and challenge children.

Need:

St Mary's wanted to create an engaging display and reading area for their Year Six class that could be utilised for reading time and curriculum-based group work. The aim was to improve the quality and comfort of the learning environment, as well as the overall attractiveness.

Solution:

St Mary's was particularly impressed with Eden's curriculum related products and utilised a selection of the nature, lifecycle and habitat bean bags including the BazZoo Snail, the BazZoo Ladybird, the Lifecycle Oval Pod, the Tree Stumps and Grass Cubes, as well as a pack of five Seat Pods and a Kids Reading Pod.

The versatility of the products has meant that the school has found even greater value with the bean bags as they can be used throughout the school for the different key stages, not just in the Year Six reading area as initially planned.



"The children love them"



ideal for different key stages



comfortable learning environment

Result:

St Mary's chose to purchase from Eden because of the wide choice of curriculum related products that could be utilised not just as comfy and stylish seating but as teaching tools too.

"I've never seen classroom furniture so curriculum specific. Having such an appealing area in the classroom means that children are motivated to want to go and read there."

Mrs Gail Mason, Year Six Teacher, ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL