# Building your Curriculum: Outside and In





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# Introduction

Outdoor learning is an integral part of good practice within learning and teaching. Schools need to take a strategic approach to developing outdoor learning. Building your Curriculum is a collaborative and participative process which can be used to involve and engage pupils, parents and other partners in the school community when reviewing and redesigning a school or centre curriculum. The Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) website has a specific section that outlines different ways of doing this. www.LTScotland.org.uk/buildingyourcurriculum/index.asp

### There are at least two ways of considering outdoor learning within the context of strategic planning:

First, schools and centres may look at the role of outdoor learning across the different components of Curriculum for Excellence as outlined in the diagram on page 13 of Building the Curriculum 3 and use this to construct a strategic curriculum plan. The advantage of this approach is that outdoor learning can be comprehensively embedded into the school's vision for the future. Figure 1 demonstrates a vision statement for outdoor learning within this framework. The aim of this vision statement is to allow practitioners and professionals from partner organisations to see potential for outdoor learning as a natural part of a school's ethos and approach to learning and teaching. Schools and centres may wish to use some or all of the elements illustrated.

Figure 1: Outdoor learning – Where do we want to get to?

#### Values

Our school is a place where children have a right to work and play where it most suits their learning needs. All children are able to experience and enjoy the essential and special nature of being outdoors. We value the contribution of all staff to ensure children maximise the potential of the outdoors.

#### **Totality of the Curriculum**

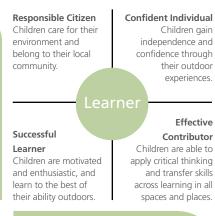
Outdoor learning takes places as part of discrete subject development and interdisciplinary learning. Outdoors and the wider community provide rich learning environments. Children learn and play in real settings and apply skills and make connections across subject areas in relevant contexts. Sustainable development, international education, enterprise and creativity are prominent themes outdoors and indoors.

#### Learning and Teaching

Learning and teaching outdoors actively involves and engages children. It is a collaborative process. Standards and expectations of learning outdoors are as high as indoors and are put together through discussion and agreement with children. The activities are reviewed to find out what worked well and what will be improved upon next time.

### **Experiences and Outcomes**

Experiences and outcomes ideally suited to being taught outdoors have been identified. They are integrated into a wide range of quality learning experiences across the curriculum. This ensures that every child has frequent regular opportunities for learning outdoors all year round at all levels, with progression through the school. In pre-school centres, outdoor play experiences are offered on an equal basis to indoor play simultaneously.



### Entitlements

All children and young people have access to a broad range of outdoor experiences that include at least one carefully integrated residential programme and plenty of opportunities to explore the diversity of habitats in Scotland during their time in school. We use partner organisations to assist, advise and help us develop quality programmes of learning, including work experiences and skills for learning, life and work.

#### Personal Support

The benefits of spending time outdoors are recognised and used to provide targeted support where needed for individual children. This includes carefully planned transition activities. The school grounds are in a process of continual improvement which helps support learning and teaching. Outdoor breaks and lunchtimes take place in all weathers, all year round, where children access open-ended materials, structures and natural resources which encourage free play.

#### Principles

The curriculum design principles underpin our approach to learning outdoors. The use of outdoor contexts and settings provides holistic and real-world opportunities that cannot be replicated indoors. The outdoor experiences allow children to experience choice, autonomy, risk and challenge safely.

#### Assessment

Children and staff have opportunities to gain recognised awards and formal qualifications that involve being outdoors as a core part of the process. Staff selfevaluate the impact of taking learning outdoors to inform next steps in learning and school improvement. Stakeholders are consulted through participative and inclusive approaches to outdoor learning and play developments. Learning outdoors is not an end in itself. It is a means to enable learning and deliver outcomes across the whole of the curriculum through developing the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence. Outdoor experiences provide a rich learning context that enhances other ongoing improvement work. Schools and centres can look at the components of Curriculum for Excellence and identify the opportunities that exist where taking learning outside benefits the learners and contributes to the vision for that aspect of school life.

For example, a school that is developing the responsibilities of all in terms of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across learning should consider the opportunities presented to achieve its vision for this, through taking learning outdoors. Figure 2 illustrates this process, where outdoor learning is part of the steps outlined in black text in each component.

Figure 2: Outdoor learning as part of the practical steps taken towards the vision for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in a school.

# Values

Staff, children, parents, partner organisations and the wider school community work together to provide an enriched and highly motivating learning environment.

• staff, pupils and parents contribute to the school's strategic curriculum plan.

• master classes using staff and local expertise will be available once per week in terms 2 and 4 for all pupils and include outdoor options.

#### **Totality of the Curriculum**

A blend of discrete subject development and interdisciplinary learning (IDL) provides rich learning opportunities and highly motivating contexts for children.

• establish shared understanding of IDL and consider the balance of time spent on IDL and discrete subject learning.

- shorten planning cycle and focus on involving learners in a meaningful way that includes real-world learning.
- review social studies topics in light of above.

#### Learning and Teaching

Staff and learners have a shared understanding of active learning, which is embedded in practice at all stages and across all curriculum areas

- staff review and agree shared understanding of what active learning means across the school, using early years work as starting point.
- use learning and teaching meetings, sharing practice sessions, Critical Skills twilights and parent sessions to discuss active learning strategies. Try in class and other learning contexts and review, including learners in this process.

#### Experience and Outcomes

Experiences and outcomes are developed through the four contexts for learning, providing a varied and rich learning environment.

• continue familiarisation with experiences and outcomes and how they link to current practice and resources.

• begin to break down experiences and outcomes into the knowledge, understanding and skills which they contain. Work with cluster schools.

• identify which experiences and outcomes need an outdoor experience.



### Entitlements

All children and young people have an appropriate understanding of their environment and of Scotland's place in the world today.

• develop a coherent whole-school approach to developing learners' understanding of Scotland and its place in the world.

• consider opportunities offered by IDL experiences and use of the outdoors as a context for learning.

#### Supporting Learners

All children and young people are supported in transitions, and strong partnerships provide a coherent experience for all learners 3–18.

 staff across clusters work together to consider effective transition and begin to establish shared standards and expectations.

#### **Principles**

The principles are applied systematically across the totality of the curriculum, including the life and ethos of the school. Learning is mapped into the principles across curriculum areas.

• consider how the principles are being applied in IDL and discrete subject development.

• review opportunities for personalisation and choice across the school in terms of achievement.

• consider wider achievement opportunities during and outwith school hours on – and off-site.

### Assessment

Assessment is for Learning (AifL) strategies are firmly embedded across learning at all levels. National Assessment Resource (NAR) is used to support the school's own assessment strategies and promote rigour in assessment procedures in line with national and Education Authority (EA) guidance.

• review and continue to develop AifL across the school at learning and teaching meetings and sharing practice sessions.

• consider quality marked examples in NAR for literacy and numeracy; work with schools in cluster to begin to establish moderation approaches.

White text describes the school's vision for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Black text summarises the steps the school plans to take towards its vision in the current session.

# Outdoor learning – How do we get there?

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The suggestions below can be used as a flexible checklist for schools who are looking at improving their learning and teaching approaches through the use of the outdoors.

### 1) Where are you now?

In conjunction with staff, pupils and other stakeholders, complete a curriculum strategic planner to audit where your school is currently at, in terms of embedding outdoor learning. Next outline the steps your school intends to take towards embedding outdoor learning. This can be completed on a blank curriculum strategic planner form. Tweak the contents of the planners above to meet your specific needs.

### 2) Use How Good is Our School 3 to audit how effectively outdoor learning is embedded into all aspects of school life

As part of Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning a self-evaluation toolkit, based upon the key quality indicators, is available on the outdoor learning section of the LTS website www.LTScotland.org.uk/ learningteachingandassessment/approaches/ outdoorlearning/about/selfevaluation.asp

This can be used to consider the impact on the learners' experiences of integrating outdoor learning into the school or centre. It can help to provide a more in-depth baseline audit. The main points are:

- find out what outdoor learning is taking place how, when, where and why map it out.
- examine how good it is and how pupils are benefiting. Provide clear evidence.

- consider a rigorous approach to planning and evaluating outdoor learning.
- build on strengths and identify gaps in provision or approach. Use the strategic vision planner in Figure 1 as a guide.

# 3) Integrate outdoor learning into the school improvement plan

Almost every initiative or development can be enhanced by the contribution of taking learning outdoors. Look at each curriculum area as well as themes across the curriculum and approaches to learning and teaching.

### 4) Communicate with and consult parents and carers about improving learning and teaching through outdoor learning

Many parents are enthusiastic about outdoor learning. To ensure understanding of what is happening, keep parents informed and involved. Discuss matters and seek the advice of the Parent Council. Use transition meetings and other events as well as informal opportunities to consult and reassure parents about the benefits of taking learning outdoors. Look for the factfile on outdoor learning on the LTS website and share this with parents and staff. Invite parents and carers to participate in or volunteer to assist with outdoor learning activities. Get permission at the start of the academic year for local non-adventurous outdoor learning activities that take place within school time and within walking distance of your establishment. Where possible communicate and showcase outdoor learning and other opportunities through your school website and other communication channels.

### 5) Include reference to outdoor learning when reviewing a school policy

Whenever a school is revising, updating or creating a policy or guidance on any aspect of school life, include reference to outdoor learning. There is no need for a separate outdoor learning policy, unless this is part of the school and local authority guidance on off-site visits. It should be part of a school's approach to learning and teaching, sustainable development education, health and wellbeing, Eco Schools, meeting the needs of children, involving parents, etc.

# 6) Identify children with additional support needs who could benefit from more time outside

Incorporate outdoor learning into Individualised Education Programmes and partnership work with other agencies and partner organisations using the Getting it Right for Every Child approach. Consider simple local activities outdoors as well as more in-depth approaches that may have financial implications.

### 7) Plan outdoor activities together

Allocate a shared planning time each term for practitioners to bounce ideas off each other in relation to their projects, subject specialisms and wider work within school. It is best to plan a series of activities or an interdisciplinary project rather than fragmented opportunities. Early years practitioners can plan their sessions to ensure an equal balance of activities is offered outdoors and in. Senior management teams may request to see outdoor work clearly highlighted in termly plans or use this as a focus for professional discussions. Support for Learning and Visiting Specialists can be included here.

### 8) Encourage practitioners to support each other

This is helpful when developing the habit of going outside frequently. Time to reflect together after staff have undertaken a series of outdoor lessons can be useful. Local teacher learning communities (TLCs) can have a focus on outdoor learning. TeachMeets can be organised on outdoor learning themes. Use Glow and other forms of social media as a tool for sharing, support and networking. Remember, the best form of outdoor learning professional development happens outside.

### 9) Share outdoor successes

Where possible allocate collegiate activity time for each teacher to give a quick feedback or demonstration about an outdoor activity they have undertaken recently. This helps with the support and sharing of ideas and solutions to issues that arise. Share outdoor learning experiences that learners have participated in with the school community via newsletter, email and your school website. This is particularly important in a large establishment. All staff should be aware of the outdoor learning experiences of the young people they work with, and should talk with them about those experiences. This should include experiences that young people have participated in within their own time.

# 10) Create opportunities to access continuing professional development about outdoor learning

Keep all staff informed about outdoor developments and opportunities happening through the local outdoor learning networks and listed on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Find. Use partner organisations and outdoor professionals to provide advice, ideas and training that further develop the confidence and skills of practitioners to develop quality outdoor learning experiences for children and young people. Capitalise on the experiences and expertise of staff to develop internal CPD opportunities.

# 11) Make outdoor learning a focus of classroom visits

Observations of teaching, for purposes of moderation, support and evaluation, should take place outdoors too. Use the same criteria as for indoors. Consider too how the outdoor session complements and extends the learning inside and vice versa, and the impact of being outdoors on the learners.

### 12) Involve partner organisations to help enhance the quality of experiences offered outdoors

Work out who can help with what projects in the school grounds and local neighbourhood. Use outdoor professionals and interested people in the local community where there is a gap in knowledge or skills amongst staff. Create a database of the skills and interests of staff, parents and the wider school community so that their expertise in different areas can make a contribution. Remember the skills and interests of staff, parents and the wider community will change on an annual basis.

# 13) Get to know your local environment and use it

Encourage staff to set aside time to walk around your neighbourhood and explore the learning opportunities offered. Visit shops, businesses, cultural and historic sites, places of worship and greenspace. Build up a collection of activities that can be undertaken across all ages and stages. Look for collaborative projects with local organisations, including community learning. This is an ideal activity for new staff induction.

# 14) Develop the habit of going outside regularly and frequently

It will take a concerted effort to develop the habit of taking learning outdoors, just like any other school improvement. Raise the profile of outdoor learning through CPD sessions, outdoor social events (staff and PTA), and mentions in channels of communication within a school.

# 15) Enthuse the children and young people about being outside.

Involve children and young people in planning and reviewing the activities and making the connection between indoors and outside. Involve them in key decisions, such as buying outdoor clothing, deciding on school trips, developing the school grounds or outdoor space and curriculum developments.

### 16) Take a broad view of outdoor learning experiences offered across the stages, including the transition points

Progression and continuity of experiences are important. Think about opportunities for expeditions, farming/rural skills, field and urban studies, adventure activities and exploring natural habitats. The main focus should be on using the school grounds and local area to make outdoor experiences a regular part of learning and teaching, but the value of residential outdoor experiences make them a unique way to extend and develop skills and knowledge. A variety of outdoor experiences is important. Use the experiences and outcomes guides on the LTS outdoor learning website to assist staff in ensuring that all experiences and outcomes that have an element of outdoor activity are accounted for.

www.LTScotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/ approaches/outdoorlearning/about/experiencesandoutcomes. asp

- look at the outdoor learning offered to learners and the totality of their experiences.
- do learners have frequent and regular opportunities to learn outdoors in every subject?
- are there interdisciplinary projects that include outdoor activities?
- are there options for learning outdoors to meet the specific needs of pupils?

- is there provision for informal learning through outdoor activities offered during and beyond the school day?
- where do skills for life, learning and work fit into the progression of experiences?
- where are partner organisations and youth workers involved?
- can learning indoors be consolidated, progressed or enhanced through taking learning outside?

# 17) Compile generic and specific risk – benefit assessments (RBA) for outdoor learning which takes place within the outdoor space and for local or day trips

This can be a useful cluster activity or collegiate activity time for all staff to work together on this within a school or centre. Check with your corporate health and safety team and outdoor education service to ensure you have not missed any local guidance. Check the LTS outdoor learning website health and safety section for further advice too. Remember that although generic risk assessments are useful they should still be reviewed before and after an experience.

# 18) Organise the resources needed for outdoor work

A good variety of resources for learning as well as play needs to be easily accessible by staff, children and young people. For example, have a shed with gardening tools beside your garden or inside near the exit to the garden area. Develop a storage system that allows learners to take resources to and from the classrooms easily. Where possible children and young people should be involved in helping to organise and look after resources.

# 19) Ensure learners have appropriate outdoor clothing and footwear

This enables classes to go outside all year round, whatever the weather. This may involve an enterprise activity by a class or group of learners, fundraising or the setting up of a scheme for donating unwanted outdoor items.

# 20) Develop your school grounds year on year

Developing school grounds for play and learning is a continuous process. Schools with beautiful, engaging grounds consistently develop them every year and have this approach embedded into the life of the school. Include this in your school improvement plan under a linked priority. Refer to Section 2 of the practical guidance pack.

# 21) Consider intervals and how to facilitate free play outside

Children and young people of all ages need time to play and do their own thing outside. Work with the children and playground staff to find out which resources and activities work well in different places. Look at ways of enabling all children and young people to access outdoor intervals all year round, in all weathers. This applies to all sectors.