

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICE COMMITTEE
23 August 2012

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Outdoor Learning Strategy

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service

Summary

This report presents for Members' approval an Outdoor Learning Strategy for Highland's Children and Young People 2012-2015, in accordance with the former ECS Committee's recommendation on 12 January 2012 and as part of the authority's response to the Scottish Government's expectations in the document, ***Curriculum for Excellence Through Outdoor Learning (2010)***.

1. Background

- 1.1. In April 2010, ***Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning*** was published by Learning and Teaching Scotland (now part of Education Scotland) in partnership with Scottish Government, HMIE, and SQA. The document makes the Scottish Government's expectations clear: *The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences*. In effect, outdoor learning was established as an entitlement within the Curriculum for Excellence.
- 1.2 The underpinning **vision** expressed in the ***CfE Through Outdoor Learning*** document is shared by The Highland Council, namely:
- All children and young people participate in a range of progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences which are clearly part of the curriculum.
 - Schools and centres provide regular, frequent, enjoyable and challenging opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors throughout their school career and beyond.
 - Teachers and educators embed outdoor learning in the curriculum so that learning in the outdoor environment becomes a reality for all children and young people.
- 1.3 Highland has had a strong track record in outdoor education and also in the wider definition implied by the term outdoor learning. Following the publication of ***CfE Through Outdoor Learning***, the council's various services

for children and young people have been proactive in outdoor learning development. A Highland Outdoor Learning Group (HOLG) was established in the spring of 2010. Its wide membership includes school staff, the council's Ranger Service, the Cairngorm National Park's Education Officer and, now from within High Life Highland, the Outdoor Education Officer, Active Schools Coordinators and Youth Development Officers. The group has met regularly to:

- consider the implications for policies and practice;
- recommend a strategy for implementing the national guidance in *CfE Through Outdoor Learning*;
- report on Health and Safety challenges to practitioners and the assessment and risk management;
- develop advice on inclusive practice;
- facilitate the sharing of the good practice evident in many Highland schools;
- make recommendations on appropriate CPD for teachers and other adults;
- implement an on-line resource (Evolve) aimed at streamlining the authority's approval processes and recording all excursions in order to evaluate the development of outdoor learning across the authority.

The *Report of the Highland Outdoor Learning Group* was presented to the Education, Culture and Sport Service in June 2011.

2 Highland Developments 2011- 2012

2.1 An interim report, presented to the ECS Committee on 12 January 2012, brought members up to date on how outdoor learning was being implemented across Highland. The report was exemplified by a presentation from John Port, head teacher at Gairloch High School who explained that outdoor education was not simply undertaking outdoor activities but was also about integrating the environment around the school into the day to day curriculum. The report also illustrated the diverse range of activities that comprise outdoor learning. For example:

- pupils at Loch Duich and Auchtertyre primary schools, who had designed and produced footpath brochures providing a real life context for writing;
- early years pupils at Carrbridge Primary School, who use the outdoors to work on numeracy skills;

- a gardening club at Dingwall Academy which has developed into a CfE interdisciplinary course for all S2 pupils;
- the embedding of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award within the curriculum being piloted in several Highland secondary schools;
- the Alladale Challenge where partnership with the estate allows S2 pupils to achieve a John Muir Award while engaged in a week of travelling, camping and learning entirely in open country; and
- the Bridge Intensive Support Unit where young people gain SQA personal development Awards while engaged in adventurous activities and a Bushcraft outdoor skills.

2.2 The attached HOLG Newsletters, edited by Simon Coker of the Bridge ISU, further illustrate the wide range of pupil learning activities as well as the CPD opportunities and development work of schools' staff. These newsletters have been disseminated across Scotland by Education Scotland as exemplars of good practice in outdoor learning. Other developments in Highland schools, such as Park Primary School's use of the John Muir Awards, have also been the subject of good practice reports in the *Times Educational Supplement Scotland* as well as numerous good news items in the local press.

2.3 Other developments have underlined the increased importance of policies about play in children's development as exemplified in Highland's strategy, *Play Matters*, approved by members on 16 March 2012.

3 Involvement in National Developments

3.1 With an outdoor environment that is internationally known for its splendour, diversity and conservation, while also having the UK's largest National Park within our boundaries, Highland has naturally been at the forefront of national developments in outdoor learning. The first national conference on Outdoor Learning in the National Parks was held, very successfully, at Glenmore Lodge in October 2011. Highland senior pupils will be helping to organise the second residential conference at the Abernethy Centre in September this year.

3.2 Inverness has acted as the venue for Education Scotland's two regional events for senior staff that have launched outdoor learning in Highlands, Islands and the North- East of Scotland.

3.3 Office-holders of the HOLG maintain close contact with partners and colleagues across Scotland through the National Network for Outdoor Learning.

4 **Developing a Three-year Outdoor Learning Strategy**

- 4.1 Outdoor learning is a key component of Curriculum for Excellence. HOLG were tasked with turning their 2011 report into a vision and strategic plan for outdoor learning in Highland. The vision is captured in the bullet points in section 1.2 of this report.
- 4.2 This vision depends on effective partnerships. Our key partner is High Life Highland whose Outdoor Education Officer, George Reid, is the key contact and technical adviser.
- 4.3 Other partners include, for example, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Scottish National Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, Royal Highland Education Trust, John Muir Trust and Award. A fuller list is in the strategy paper. It is by working with similarly committed people in partnership that we are able to create a strategic, authority wide plan to ensure children and young people have greater access to quality outdoor learning experiences.
- 4.4 In that context, outdoor learning should not be a 'bolt-on'. Instead, it needs to be an integrated plan to develop skills in health and wellbeing, literacy, numeracy, problem solving, environmental awareness and working with others.
- 4.5 At the January 2012 ECS Committee meeting, members noted the progress made in developing outdoor learning and
- **AGREED** to endorse the further development of partnerships to help realise the above vision;
 - **AGREED** that the experience of the Education, Culture and Sport Service in relation to the development of outdoor learning be fed into the Council's Play Strategy; and
 - **AGREED** that the barriers to outdoor learning be investigated and consideration be given to how it could be implemented in all Highland schools.
- 4.6 The above agreements have been incorporated into this first draft Outdoor Learning Strategy which sets out to maximise opportunities for progress, while taking account of the current workload for schools, now implementing the Curriculum for Excellence. In accordance with these requirements, the group has prepared the annexed, **Outdoor Learning Strategy for Highland's Children and Young People, 2012-2015.**

5 **Recommendation**

- 5.1 Members are asked to approve the Outdoor Learning Strategy for Highland's Children and Young People, 2012-2015.

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Date: 1 August 2012

Authors: Calum MacSween, Head of Education; John Garvie, Rector of Dornoch Academy (HOLG Chair)

Attachments

Appendix 1 Outdoor Learning Strategy for Highland's Children and Young People, 2012-2015.

Appendix 2 HOLG Newsletter 2011

Appendix 3 HOLG Newsletter 2012

Appendix 4 Outdoors at Invergarry Primary School



**Outdoor Learning Strategy
for Highland's Children
and Young People
2012 - 2015**

Contents

Foreword	Page 1
Introduction	Page 2
Highland Outdoor Learning and Curriculum for Excellence	Page 3
For Highland's Children - Outdoors	Page 4
Supporting Outdoor Learning: The Highland Council	Page 5
Guidance and Procedures	
Approval, Monitoring and Recording	
Advice and Training	
Removing Barriers to Outdoor Learning	Page 6
Feeling Free to Break Out	
Feeling Confident in Outdoor Learning	
Finding Solutions Outdoors	
Outdoor Partnerships in the Highlands	Page 7
Partnership within the local authority	
Partnership with High Life Highland	
Partnerships with National Agencies	
Recognising Achievement	
Grants for Outdoor Learning Projects	

This is the time to develop the partnerships necessary at national, local authority, community planning and school level to overcome the barriers and sustain outdoor learning opportunities for all children and young people.

David Cameron, Chair of the Outdoor Connections Advisory Group

Foreword by Councillor Linda Munro – Children’s Champion

Outdoor Learning

To skip and to tumble, to run and to roam, to hide and to seek, to fall and to rise; seeing pictures in clouds and stars in the night sky; puddles for jumping and trees that were ever, ever so high.

That is how I remember playing. It was always outside, with friends of mixed ages and the oldest in charge. That was child’s play.

My childhood took place, first, on the tenement streets of the Gorbals and then, when I was six-years old, our family had a real rise in status. The Glasgow Corporation gave us a house in the brand new Castlemilk housing scheme. My mother was ecstatic, a house with its own bathroom. Until then we went to the public baths.



Every Saturday my grandfather took us for a day out, to Glasgow Green or Richmond Park, or maybe bramble picking. We learned about trees and swans, we fed ducks and discovered dew on spider webs, pure magic. In the dead of winter we walked miles to the Barras and listened to the rapid banter of the street traders. A long-winded way of saying I believe that play and outdoor learning is not restricted to green, leafy and ‘safe’ areas.

Learning, playing or just being outdoors is an essential part of both childhood and adolescence, especially if young people are to develop an active lifestyle and experience the highest standards of physical and mental health.

As Children’s Champion for the Highland Council I am proud of our commitment to children’s issues. The value of the outdoors, as a place to play and learn, is a theme found in each of our key policies for children and young people - Getting it Right for Every Child, the Early Years Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and our Play Strategy.

And when we listen to young people and their representatives, they are quite clear that they want more opportunities to be outdoors.

The Outdoor Learning Strategy is part of our response to creating the Highland’s Curriculum for Excellence, which aims to develop young people, who are successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Academic research, and my own experience, both tell me that playing and learning outdoors can make a very significant contribution to these aims.

Introduction

The Highland Council values the unique natural heritage of its Highlands/Gaidhealtachd, which is internationally renowned and includes the UK's biggest national park, Cairngorms National Park. The people and communities of the Highlands are privileged to live in and enjoy access to its magnificent outdoor environment. The Highland Council, with its new responsibilities for managing all services relating to children and young people, is committed to promoting their enjoyment and understanding of that environment.

At the Education, Culture and Sport Committee meeting on 12th January 2012 it was agreed that Outdoor Learning must be a key component of Curriculum for Excellence for Highland children and young people. Along with The Scottish Government, The Highland Council shares the **vision** expressed in *Curriculum for Excellence Through Outdoor Learning* (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010) that:

- All children and young people should participate in a range of progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences which are clearly part of the curriculum.
- Schools and centres should provide regular, frequent, enjoyable and challenging opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors throughout their school career and beyond.
- Teachers and educators should embed outdoor learning in the curriculum so that learning in the outdoor environment becomes a reality for all children and young people.

Members acknowledged that this vision would only be realised by developing effective partnerships. High Life Highland, as the council's key partner in outdoor learning, was well placed to provide support through its Outdoor Education personnel.

The Council intends its various services to work collaboratively with one another and with the widest possible range of partners to build a strategic, authority wide plan to ensure children and young people have greater access to quality outdoor learning experiences. Outdoor learning is an important element of Health and Wellbeing. However, it should not be seen as a 'bolt on' but as part of an integrated plan to develop, in children and young people, skills such as communication, problem solving, environmental awareness, working with others, literacy and numeracy.

The Committee thereafter:

AGREED to endorse the further development of partnerships to help realise its vision;

AGREED that the experience of the Education, Culture and Sport Service in relation to the development of outdoor learning be fed into the Council's Play Strategy; and

AGREED that the barriers to outdoor learning be investigated and consideration be given to how it could be implemented in all Highland schools.

The Director undertook to incorporate these issues in a further report to Committee with the draft outdoor learning strategy. This *Highland Outdoor Learning Strategy: 2012-15* has been prepared by the Highland Outdoor Learning Group, which was formed in spring 2010 as an advisory partnership, chaired by a headteacher, and comprising: school staff from all sectors; Education Scotland, Cairngorms National Park and other national or local partners;; the council's Ranger Service and (now within High Life Highland) the Outdoor Education Officer, Active Schools Coordinators and Youth Development Officers.

Highland Outdoor Learning and Curriculum for Excellence

The increased emphasis on outdoor learning in 21st century Scottish education originated in public concern and specialised evidence that children are increasingly separated from the natural environment, that they have little opportunity to learn to deal with risks in modern society, and that they exercise physically less than they should. This led to the most comprehensive and integrated national scale research programme on outdoor education ever undertaken in the UK or overseas through the Outdoor Connections development programme, which was initiated in 2005, by the Scottish Executive and led by Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS). The research provided strong evidence for the health and educational benefits of education outdoors and led to national policy promoting and supporting the delivery of outdoor learning across all sectors. It is now accepted that “the journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences”. In 2010, Learning and Teaching Scotland published *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning*, which provides a rationale and guidance to help embed outdoor learning within the Curriculum for Excellence. These educational developments also resonate with the widest aspirations of public policy in the Highlands, where the unrivalled outdoor environment is a key asset for the social and economic wellbeing of our communities.

The Highland Council is committed to every child and young person in the Highlands receiving a progressive experience, from 3 to 18, of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences. Specifically:

1. The Highland Council endorses the importance of outdoor learning and welcomes the guidance provided in *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* and its associated support materials.
2. Our vision for outdoor learning in Highland is that:
 - Highland’s children and young people all participate in a range of progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences which are clearly part of the curriculum;
 - Highland schools and centres provide regular, frequent, enjoyable and challenging opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors throughout their school career and beyond;
 - Highland’s teachers and educators embed outdoor learning in the curriculum so that learning in the outdoor environment becomes a reality for all children and young people.
3. The Highland Council commends the frequent use of local, natural and built outdoor settings, including school grounds, as well as opportunities for excursions and residential experiences in the delivery of outdoor learning across the curriculum.
4. The Highland Council commends the imaginative use of the guidance contained in *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* and its associated support materials.
5. The Highland Council recognises competing priorities within the new curriculum and recommends that each establishment and area grouping should set its own priorities and timescales in improvement planning towards the full vision for outdoor learning.
6. The Highland Council intends that the outdoor learning strategy will be implemented within existing resources and encourages an enterprising use of devolved budgets and the many grants that are available for Outdoor Learning (See page 9).

For Highland's Children – Outdoors

The importance of outdoor experiences for children and young people has long been advocated by The Highland Council. It has been a major theme in policy relating to childhood play since the introduction of our play strategy for 2006-2010, *All to Play For*, which predated the emphasis on the outdoors in Curriculum for Excellence.

The revised “For Highland’s Children” Play Strategy, *Play Matters, 2012-2015* was approved by the Joint Committee for Children and Young People on 26 March 2012.

Throughout the development of the play strategy, it has been recognised that the natural environment is an ideal playground for children and young people, that outdoor active play guards against childhood obesity, that it helps to develop a physically active lifestyle going on into adulthood, and that being outdoors, active and sociable are protective factors in mental health.

Play Matters encourages people living in communities, people working in the public, private and voluntary sectors and people elected to community councils and The Highland Council to work in partnership to deliver the desired outcomes for children and young people.

The integration of services for children across the authority, which became a reality in April 2012, opens exciting new partnership opportunities on behalf of children by uniting actions of the Health and Social Care Service with those of the Education, Culture and Sport Service.

In *Play Matters*, The Highland Council states its commitment to “all children having access to rich, stimulating play experiences, with safeguards from inappropriate risk, but full of challenge, offering them the opportunity to explore, through freely-chosen play, both themselves and the world”. Access to such unstructured, outdoor play experiences clearly complements the provision of “planned quality outdoor learning experiences to every child and young person in the Highlands”, which is the commitment of our Outdoor Learning Strategy. There is a wealth of experience in outdoor education within the Education, Culture and Sport Service (and in High Life Highland), gained both before and during the development of Curriculum for Excellence, which should be fed into the operation of the council’s Play Strategy. Equally, the Play Strategy Delivery Plan offers guidance on how play can enhance learning, particularly in primary schools.



Partnership in Action

Allsorts After School Club uses the shared campus of Dornoch Academy and Dornoch Primary School. Its daily sessions go outdoors three days a week. The Club has invested in weather-proof outfits and head torches to allow outdoor free play all year round.



Supporting Outdoor Learning: The Highland Council

The Highland Council takes seriously its responsibilities to support all employees and volunteers, who enable our children and young people to participate in outdoor learning. This support flows naturally from the authority's statutory duties in the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the significant extensions in the 1999 Regulations, to the 1974 Act.

In the case of all off-site excursions the authority's support consists mainly in:

- providing written guidelines for heads of establishments and excursion leaders including advice on risk assessment;
- having emergency procedures in place for dealing with major incidents/emergencies;
- assessing and approving proposals for off-site excursions;
- monitoring and reviewing safety during off-site excursions and activities;
- providing access to technical advice where necessary;
- ensuring training needs are addressed;
- providing access to named staff for advice;
- providing appropriate insurance cover.

Guidelines and Procedures

Establishments must adhere to the Council's *Procedures and Guidance for Conducting All Off-site Excursions*. Heads of establishment must ensure that teachers, and other staff in charge of pupils, understand and comply with these procedures, in addition to accepting their common law duty to act as any reasonably prudent parent would do in the same circumstances. The procedures, based on the Scottish Executive's *Health and Safety on Educational Excursions (2004)*, are web-based and kept continually up to date, for example in taking account of the Equality Act 2010. In Highland all educational excursions are planned with equality in mind. When recording excursions staff have a useful 'checklist' as well as links to guidance, for example, to ensure disability is no barrier to participation.

Approval, Monitoring and Recording

All Off Site Excursions must be submitted to the head of establishment for approval prior to their taking place. In the case of "home-stay" and overseas excursions additional approval is required from the Head of Service or Area Manager respectively. Checking by the Outdoor Education Officer is also mandatory in the case of adventurous activities.

The Highland Council has invested in the web-based system **EVOLVE** to manage the approval process for excursions. All excursions are recorded on a single electronic form created by logging onto www.highland-council-excursions.org.uk. The internet provides ready access and a simple recording process for any visit leader. All heads of establishment have been provided with a username and password for approving excursions and also for providing every potential visit leader with a username and password. **The Highland Council requires all heads of establishment to use EVOLVE when approving off-site excursions.**

Advice and Training

The Highland Council delivers advice and training through its key partner **High Life Highland**, whose specialist Outdoor Education staff are responsible for promoting outdoor learning, for the necessary safety management systems, including EVOLVE, and for providing technical advice with regard to adventurous activities. All necessary guidance and advice, including named contacts, are available by accessing its Outdoor Education service on the High Life Highland website, www.highlifehighland.com.



Removing Barriers to Outdoor Learning

The research in Scotland demonstrated that issues, which act as barriers to outdoor learning, were both perceptual and actual. The main perceptual barriers were:

- preconceptions about the practitioner's role in relation to the curriculum;
- preconceptions and fears about health and safety, risk assessments and liability.

The most commonly mentioned actual barriers were:

- financial cost to pupils and schools;
- adult/pupil ratios required;
- time involved in organising events;
- uncertainty of the Scottish weather;
- disruption to classes.

Feeling Free to Break Out

The Curriculum for Excellence allows us to rethink the unconscious presumption that classroom interiors are the natural setting for teaching about the exterior world. In planning more frequent lessons outdoors, teachers can be confident that they are fulfilling The Highland Council's intention that "the journey through education for any child in Highland should include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences".

Feeling Confident in Outdoor Learning

Regarding safety, risk and personal liability, the first principle for feeling confident about leading others outdoors is to understand limitations. The main limitation is that The Highland Council procedures will not allow approval of adventurous activities (hillwalking, canoeing etc.) unless the leader possesses the necessary qualification and competence. On the other hand, teachers may feel quite confident about undertaking any other learning activity in low-risk environments (e.g. school grounds, local community, open country, beaches etc.). The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has issued clear statements that it fully supports schools arranging a wide range of out-of-school activities and wants to ensure that mistaken and unfounded health and safety concerns do not create obstacles. Risk-benefit analysis typically identifies huge benefits *versus* minimal risks. The key message from HSE to teachers is that school procedures should encourage participation, be proportionate to the level of risk and avoid bureaucracy. Highland's procedures give this assurance to staff.

Finding Solutions Outdoors

Other barriers are tougher than perceptual ones. To embed outdoor learning in the curriculum, working with established budgets and staffing will require creativity. Teachers and headteachers have begun to do this: by reprioritising; by devising zero cost activities; by innovative timetabling to reduce disruption; by careful planning to alleviate organising time (processing repeat activities once per year) or uncertain weather (pre-planned visits). Nevertheless, more ambitious schemes such as remote excursions or residential experiences for every pupil are unlikely to be realised until economic conditions improve.



Outdoor Partnerships in the Highlands

The full vision of progressive, quality Outdoor Learning for every child and young person cannot be achieved without the support of the people and organisations which utilise and manage the outdoor environment. There has been considerable national investment to facilitate such Outdoor Learning partnerships and there is an extensive National Network for Outdoor Learning, organised by Education Scotland. The Highland Council is also committed to developing and maintaining outdoor partnerships within the authority itself, with national organisations and with community or commercial enterprises in the Highlands.

Partnership within the local authority

The Highland Council encourages all its services to work in partnership with the ECS Service and with schools locally, to help provide quality outdoor learning experiences for our children and young people. The recent integration of services for children across the authority will help to ensure equal and inclusive delivery of opportunities to all children and young people as well as facilitating personnel working on the health and wellbeing objectives of outdoor learning. Some services, such as Planning and Development, with its Countryside Rangers, have more obvious links with the outdoors than others but personnel from any service may find creative ways to contribute.

Partnership with High Life Highland

High Life Highland, now an arm's length organisation with charitable status, manages assets and staff which were formerly part of Highland Council Community Learning and Leisure. Its services now comprise Adult Learning, Archives, Arts, Community Centres, Leisure, Libraries, Museums, Outdoor Education, Sport and Youth. High Life Highland is therefore a key partner in the delivery of Outdoor Learning. The Highland Council continues to draw upon the functions and expertise of the Outdoor Education service. High Life Highland also retains Youth Development Officers and Active Schools Coordinators, who are directly involved in many outdoor learning initiatives in their Area School Groups.

Partnerships with National Agencies and Organisations

Partnerships greatly extend the opportunities that can be provided for children and young people in Outdoor Learning. Some of those with which we already engage are:

Cairngorms National Park Authority	Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park
Education Scotland	Youth Scotland (Youth Achievement/Dynamic Youth Awards)
Duke of Edinburgh's Award (Scotland)	Scottish Youth Hostel Association (SYHA)
Forestry Commission Scotland	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Scottish Natural Heritage	UK National Parks
National Trust for Scotland	The Prince's Trust
Grounds for Learning	Eco Schools
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	Real World Learning Partnership
Institute of Risk Management (IRM)	Royal Highland Education Trust
John Muir Trust and Award	Venture Trust

Recognising Achievement

Significant Awards are also provided by partner organisations to recognise the achievements of young people outdoors. These include Duke of Edinburgh's Award, John Muir Award and both Youth Scotland Awards, as well as new SQA qualifications such as Rural Skills.

Grants for Outdoor Learning Projects

There are also many organisations, which will award grants for Outdoor Learning, such as Scottish Natural Heritage or sportscotland (See *Getting into Scotland's National Parks and National Nature Reserves - resource pack* in the Learning Resources section of the National Park web-site, www.cairngorms.co.uk).





Outdoor Learning in Highland

'The June air infected us with primitive hungers, grass-seed and thistle-down idled through the windows, we smelt the fields and were tormented by cuckoos, while every out-of-door

sound that came drifting in was a sharp nudge in the solar plexus.....' a scene from the early pages of *Cinder with Rosie* by Laurie Lee in which pupils are desperate to escape the confines of the classroom for the great outdoors.

I imagine many staff identify with that yearning to be outdoors and not just in the balmy days of summer. En-

couragement – if it was needed – to use the outdoors as a learning environment comes in *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning*, a document enthusiastically welcomed in Highland.



The Highland Outdoor Learning Group, a committed and energetic group led by Irene Carson, Head Teacher at Grantown Grammar School has recognised the very good outdoor learning already going on in many schools across Highland. However, the group is in the process of identifying a number of key areas

which need to be addressed if the recommendations contained in the in the CfE through OL document are met for all pupils across Highland. Their target date for reporting is June 2011.

By that time, of course, the grass-seed and thistle down will be wafting in the air and I for one plan to read the report outdoors. In the meantime, I commend the contents of this newsletter as clear evidence of the very good work in progress.

Calum MacSween
Acting Head of Education

Issue 1

Inside this issue:

Outdoor Learning Cards

Activity Risk Benefit Assessment

Online Resources

Outdoor Learning in the National Parks



Online Resources by Jill O'Reilly

Along with Glow there are many fantastic online resources to support outdoor learning with inspirational ideas and practical resources. Here Jill O'Reilly recommends a few of the best:

Grounds for Learning

www.ltl.org.uk/scotland

The site contains advice and sources of support for developing and using school grounds for learning. There are also CPD opportunities and case studies. Particularly useful is the resources section where you can search for curricular areas and stages. There are a good number of resources available to non members, but if your school becomes a

member of grounds for learning for about £60 per year then there are lots more available for free download. The resources are focused on school grounds. The quarterly newsletter which you can subscribe to on the website is useful and inspiring.

SNH – Outdoor Learning Activities

www.snh.org.uk/teachingspace/what_to_do.asp

A great online resource covering a wide range of outdoor environments, including: forests, seashore, freshwater etc. Each set of resources includes comprehensive background teachers notes and a super range

of activities to help pupils to explore the particular environment.



I'm a Teacher Get Me Outside Here

www.creativestarlearning.blogspot.com

This is a really practical blog with loads of great ideas. If you click on the "help blog index" tab you will see the blogs listed by curricular area. Brilliant numeracy, literacy, expressive arts and science ideas that can be used in school grounds or further afield. Down the side of the blog there is also a long list of other blogs with great ideas.

In Brief.....

- "Evolve" - the new HC web based system for recording off-site excursions is now up and running. See your EVC for details or go to www.evolve.edufocus.co.uk/evco4/evchome_public.asp?domain=highland-council-excursions.org.uk
- The 2011 Outdoor Learning in the National Parks Annual Conference will take place at Glenmore Lodge on the 28th of October
- A Outdoor Learning in Highland event is being planned for the 30th Sept to 2nd Oct. A residential weekend, this is an opportunity to showcase Outdoor Learning Activities and provide CPD alongside fun family activities.
- Thursday May 12th at Glenmore Lodge –Reviewing in the Outdoors with Roger Greenway. More details from the John Muir Trust.

Activity Risk Benefit Analysis - An approach to planning OL activities by Bob Telfer

Many teachers, outdoor instructors, and community workers feel that the risk assessment process we have all had to work with over the years has simply become more and more onerous, and in some cases is getting in the way of good things happening. Well if you haven't already heard, there's a new kid on the block called Risk-Benefit Analysis. This process aims to restore some balance to our thinking and practice, and deserves to be carefully considered as a positive forward step.

Risk-benefit analysis is a process through which both the advantages and the hazards associated with an activity can be assessed. In doing so the decisions to undertake, limit, extend or indeed withdraw an activity can be viewed by teachers, instructors, participants, parents, the courts and any other stakeholders in light of both the benefits and risks which underpin them. The aim is to find a position in which the benefits *balance* and therefore *justify* the risks, as managed by the provider.

If a balance cannot be achieved, for example in a situation in which significant risks are identified within an activity which provides very little benefit, then it would be difficult to argue that the activity was valid, regardless of any controls which may

have attempted to manage those risks.

Equally if an activity provides considerable benefits, then risk-benefit analysis could provide a way of justifying the delivery of the activity and therefore allowing young people to experience the considerable benefits the process has identified. In this way risk-benefit analysis could become a method of enabling activities to take place and not a reason, or excuse, for them not doing so. Not doing an activity because there is little benefit, educational, recreational, social or otherwise, seems sensible. Not taking on the challenge because it has an element of inherent risk is perhaps to miss the point of adventure activities.

Read a current risk assessment for your operation and the chances are it starts with lots of the things that could go wrong and how much they will hurt if they do. The real difference with risk-benefit analysis is the good news. In a risk-benefit analysis you also write down the reasons for doing the activity, the things that make taking those risks not just acceptable but down right desirable.



Benefit vs Risk?

The idea is that instead of producing a list of reasons for not doing an activity you produce a list of reasons to do it, balanced against the potential price to pay. The analysis bit then states how you are going to manage the risks without spoiling the benefits. If you end up with a long list of risks and no benefits then an accident which you can't defend the corner. If you end up with a long list of benefits and no risks you have probably missed something, nothing is risk free. Risk-benefit analysis is just a way of explaining why it's worth taking these risks.

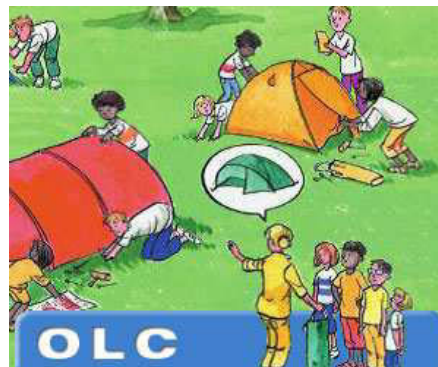
..... So, rather than take "Five Steps to Risk Assessment", try taking four steps to a positive new approach :-

1. Outline the activity proposed.
2. Identify the benefits for participants. (This could link to experiences and opportunities);
3. Identify the risks involved.
4. Analyse how the risks are to be managed.

Outdoor Learning Cards by Bridget Thomas, Active Schools Coordinator

Professional partnerships were very much in evidence at the recent Outdoor Learning CPD session when 14 Primary Teachers and Active Schools Co-ordinators reviewed the new Outdoor Learning Cards, an educational resource developed by the Outdoor Education Adviser's Panel which aims to promote active learning across the curriculum, healthy lifestyles and positive attitudes to others through high quality outdoor learning experiences.

Bridget Thomas and Louise Nadin,



Active Schools Co-ordinators in Fort William and Brora respectively, led the group through the 4 main practical elements featured in the cards;

journeying, team building, bouldering and orienteering. During the course of the day the group samples several activities in each section, discussing the relative merits of each to their own curricular or extra curricular circumstances. There seemed to be general consensus, reflected in the feedback, that the orienteering and team building sections were the most useful to members of this particular group while the journeying element had some ideas that would transfer well to primary children but was essentially a first steps towards Duke of Edinburgh for younger secondary pupils. The



bouldering section was felt to be of great value where schools or ASC had

access to a bouldering or climbing wall, but that wasn't the case for the

majority.

The Outdoor Learning cards resource pack is much more than a set of activity cards, however, containing as it does a wealth of supporting material for links into the Curriculum for Excellence E's and O's that met with widespread approval from the teach-

ers present. In addition, reviewing techniques and a section on the environment are well backed up with good ideas, resources and lots of information on where to go next. Hopefully, after this CPD introduction, there are more professionals enthused by the possibilities of education in the great outdoors and even more children about to benefit from their experiences.

Outdoor Learning in the National Parks by Alison Hammerton



The Outdoor Learning in the National Parks (NPs) is a two-year partnership project to support the development and embedding of outdoor learning in practice. The project aims to support the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning, generate opportunities for networking and sharing of practice and resources, and promote the National Parks as unique and ideal destinations for outdoor learning. Active partners comprise Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA), Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and seven local authorities – Aberdeenshire, Angus, Highland, Moray, Perth and Kinross, Stirling

and West Dunbartonshire. The development officer for this project, Alison Hammerton, is a member of the Highland Outdoor Learning Group.

The project ran a successful first annual conference at Carrochan, headquarters of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority on 28 October 2010. The conference was both over-subscribed and very well received. Many commented on the success of the day, with a very positive atmosphere and a wide variety of workshops being delivered by teachers and practitioners. Highlights included a thoroughly inspiring and entertaining keynote speech, 'My Journey through a Career in Outdoor Learning' by Alan Smith, Outdoor Learning Officer for Cairngorms National Park Authority. Morning workshops covered Access to Information, The Benefits of Risk, CPD and Developing Confidence, Practical Support, and Structured Educational Experiences. Afternoon workshops saw practitioners from the seven local authorities sharing their experiences and expertise, and local authorities discussed and made pledges to support the sustain-

ability of the project. These included a wide range of commitments from making regular use of school grounds and local areas with all classes, to providing CPD and resources for staff, to developing partnership working and involving pupils in the planning process.

Currently one of the exciting initiatives is a joint National Parks' Media Project, involving ten secondary



schools who will make a 12 minute video of 'Outdoor Learning through National Parks', with each school having a very different and creative approach. Some previous Cairngorms media project films can be seen at www.cairngorms.co.uk/learning/schoolsvideoproject.



Highland Council Outdoor Learning Web Links

Outdoor Learning www.highland.gov.uk/learninghere/communitylearning/outdoorlearning/

Off Site Excursions www.highland.gov.uk/learninghere/communitylearning/outdoorlearning/offsiteexcursions/

CfE through Outdoor Learning (HC's Glow page) <https://portal.glowscotland.org.uk/establishments/thehighlandcouncil/CfE%20-%20Through%20Outdoor%20Learn/default.aspx>

LTS CfE through Outdoor Learning www.ltscotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/outdoorlearning/about/



Outdoor Learning in Highland

Highland Sets Pace

As Chair of the Highland Outdoor Learning Group,



I meet colleagues from other education authorities. One thing that has

struck me is the high reputation we have as pace setters in Outdoor Learning. It is partly due to George Reid's widely recognised work on Excursions procedures and partly the renown of the Highland schools and early-years centres that are setting the trend nationally in Outdoor Learning. You will see plenty of exam-

ples of this in this March Newsletter—thanks to all contributors and to Simon Coker, our editor.

(John Garvie)



Gold DofE Training at Gairloch

Park Primary School

At Park Primary many classes have replaced their 'golden time' with outdoor learning time. While the P6s and the P7s are involved in nationally recognised awards, the P4 and P5 classes have been visit-

ing the local woods on a Friday afternoon. They are focussing on mini-beasts at the moment and have been exploring habitats. Twigs and leaves were collected and children have had great

Hands on Education

fun creating woodland homes in the school grounds. These have been established now for a couple of weeks and we're hoping for visitors of the creepy crawly nature soon. *Tania Mackie*



Outdoor Learning Competition



This biennial competition is for any educational establishments such as schools, youth clubs/groups, and outdoor centres that have experienced the Cairngorms National Park in the last 12 months.

It is free to enter, and pupils and participants are encouraged to be bold and creative when demonstrating their activities (such as visits, projects, or the John Muir Award) undertaken in the Park. The winners and runners-up of each of the age categories (3-7, 8-11, 12-16 years old) will receive prize grants of £300 and £150 respectively. Entries should include how you intend to use the grant to further develop outdoor learning opportunities.

For further information contact Alan Smith at the CNPA on 01479 870518, email: alansmith@cairngorms.co.uk. Closing date for entries will be the end of May.

Issue 2

Inside this issue:

Highland schools leading the way in Outdoor Learning

Upcoming CPD Opportunities at home and abroad

Staff development and training feedback

The inaugural Highland Outdoor Learning Festival report



In Brief.....

• *South Lodge and Park Primary were recently featured in the TES Scotland. The article highlights OL being used as part of a citizenship programme that encourage the transition to secondary school using nationally accredited schemes. The article can be found at—<http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Wildlife-turns-out-to-be-such-a-big-draw-6183068/>*

• *The Outdoor Learning in the National Parks has been extended for another year. The focus is on local support and training and sharing good practice and practical approaches.*

Grantown Grammar School

Lorna Crane



All S1 pupils, from August to October, as part of their John Muir Award, discover and explore the River Spey. We do this as a cross

curricular project with the Geography department. We canoe a short section of the river and identify river features and varied land use on the way. The pupils take pictures of themselves and the river features that they identify. As a group we also think about conservation of this habitat and the impact we have on it. At the end of the day pupils reflect on their experiences in their John Muir Award log book.

Pupils then use the photos and recall their experiences, when they are back in the classroom, as they study Rivers in more detail.



Place-based Education:

Working with groups in the local landscape



Place-Based Education and Consultancy

Venue: Glen Strae (near Dalmally), Argyll, Scotland

Cost: £100

Places: 15

Dates: 25th – 27th May 2012

Times: arrival from 7pm on the Friday, finish before 5pm Sunday

Spend a weekend in a beautiful glen honing your outdoor learning skills. Find out how to get the most from the places you use, and learn practices which can bring out the unique features of your locality and context. Share a stimulating workshop with other educators and journey in a rich landscape full of stories.

Ground - Develop a sense of how to work with the places you take your school/group as more than just venues. Insights from 'place-based education' will help you answer the question 'why here?' and

get the most from the locality in which you work.

Experience – Walk and discuss the ethics of working 'in, about and for' places. Look at ways of introducing, working with and reviewing learning in the landscape.



Develop – Model and discuss techniques and exercises for all age ranges which bring out the varied elements of place: history, land-use, ecology and personal connections.

Understand – Discuss the ideas behind this approach, asking what is a 'sense of place?' and investigating the curriculum and educational links to topics such as sustainability, and personal well-being.

We will be camping so please bring your own food, outdoor clothing and camping equipment. Transport is possible by train (Glasgow – Oban line), transfers between Dalmally Station and Glen Strae can be arranged.

A deposit of £50 will reserve your place please contact sam@openground.eu for details

Deposits are non-returnable and full balances will be due 4 weeks before the course – we recommend you take out insurance for cancellation

Any queries please contact Sam: sam@openground.eu



Outdoor Learning in Denmark

This visit involved 3 days in and around the Danish port of Esbjerg to learn about Outdoor Learning practice and integration in the education system there. A group of 24 from across Scotland, including teachers, head teachers, rangers and Education Scotland staff, took part in the SCIPD group study visit which gave opportunities for professional development and to compare strategies and ideas with a view to informing OL in Scotland. This was the third such visit relating to OL and was focused on secondary education.



Mini Field Stations at Myrthuegaard

Various visits and meetings were arranged during the trip. In Denmark the equivalent of our ranger service is provided by “nature interpreters” who are solely involved in education work. Myrthuegaard field centre is staffed by these Na-

ture Interpreters and was an excellent example of how outdoor spaces could be developed and used as stimulating and engaging learning spaces where experiential learning was embraced, but clearly linked to building knowledge and understanding. This centre was one of several in the region that are funded by an annual contribution from school’s budgets that then entitled them to use of the facilities. The experiences provided at the field centre were clearly linked to the curriculum being covered in the classroom. There

were also visits to teacher training facilities (where we used satnav on smartphones), a Danish “Folkskole”, and Esbjerg Fishery Museum.

In many ways the OL provision in

SCIPD Group Study Visit

Denmark was on a par with that in Scotland. The practitioners we encountered were also striving to integrate OL more consistently into secondary level education and budgets were a constraint (although there was an allocated budget for residentials meaning there was no cost to individuals to attend!).

The visit provided an excellent opportunity to look at examples of good practice in the outdoors that I will be feeding back as widely as possible and also provided reassurance that, in Highland, we are moving in the right direction.

Simon Coker



Louise Nadin

John Muir Award Training

Education and outdoor learning partnerships were very much in evidence at a recent John Muir Award training day held at the Ferrycroft Centre in Lairg. Several Sutherland primary head teachers, keen to further develop opportunities for outdoor learning within the Curriculum for Excellence in their schools, along with the Countryside Ranger Service, Day Care, Forest Schools, volunteers and Active Schools, enjoyed a thought provoking and action planning day with Alan Smith, Outdoor Learning Officer for the Cairngorms National Park.

The specific focus of the day was to explore the ways in which the



Pictured: L-R Ian Paterson, Countryside Ranger Service, Alan Smith OL Officer Cairngorm. Amanda Macrae parent volunteer Brora, Ruth Adams HT Lairg & Altnaharra, Jenny Neesham (Forest Schools) & Lucy Williams Dornoch All Sorts After School Care, Jane Mason HT Dornoch, Hazel Harrison HT Helmsdale and Kinbrace, , and not pictured, Wilma Kelt Active Schools Alness and Louise Nadin Active Schools East Sutherland who co-ordinated the event.

John Muir Award could be used to extend the outdoor experiences and skills of young people in ways that challenge them to discover, explore, share and conserve wild places, close to home and further afield. Undoubtedly, one of the great strengths of the John Muir Award is its flexibility to capture individual learner interests, but also for the various agencies to work together and bring their expertise to local programmes. This was definitely a day for sharing and further developing the network of partnerships and strengthening outdoor learning in Sutherland.



Highland Outdoor Learning Festival

Jill O'Reilly

Sounds fun – tell me about it.

The festival took place at Badaguish Outdoor Centre, near Aviemore over a weekend in early October. Over 70 delegates (mostly teachers) and outdoor learning providers participated either on a daily basis or stayed for the whole weekend in the Highland Council self catering lodges. The aim of the festival was to showcase good outdoor learning practise already happening across the region and to learn from some of the experts leading the way in this field from all over Scotland.

Did you have to be wearing wellies, waterproofs and beards to attend?

Wellies and waterproofs were definitely essential as the weather was atrocious – heavy rain almost from beginning to end, and no options for wimping out and staying indoors! Beards were optional, however those sporting an extra layer of facial hair were probably warmer. Although the weather was soggy, spirits were not dampened and fortified with regular



coffee and cake breaks we were inspired by a fantastic range of



enthusiastic presenters who lead workshops ranging from outdoor maths and problems solving to bush craft, from place based education to school gardening and from creative outdoor art and writing projects to the John Muir Award.

I hope there was a barbeque, chat and whisky...?

Most definitely! This was a key element of the festival. A relaxed atmosphere with opportunities for socialising was essential as those who attended had all given up their weekends after a long week at the education chalk face. As well as the BBQ on Saturday night (which took place during a well timed break in the weather), there was a market place where coffee was served throughout the weekend. Folks had time to browse stalls from various partner organisa-



tions, pick up lots of free resources (always an attractive proposition!) and network with other teachers and outdoor learning providers from Highland and further afield.

What do you think was the most important outcome?

Aside from the fun we had, I hope that the long term legacy of this weekend will be practitioners in Highland who have been:

Enthused and inspired by the potential benefits and learning that the outdoors can offer themselves and their students.

Equipped with ideas, confidence and resources to get their pupils outdoors, experiencing regular, planned outdoor learning in their local environment and further afield.

Connected to a network of like minded people who can support and encourage them to embed and sustain outdoor learning as a core element of their practice.

The festival was a huge success and we would like to thank everyone who participated and made it such an enjoyable and

educational weekend. We will be organising similar events in the future and if you would like to be included on a mailing list to receive further information, please contact John Garvie, Chair of the Highland Outdoor Learning Group

Institute for Outdoor Learning Scotland

The IOL Scotland are running a series of new workshop events for spring 2012. Courses are open to members and non-members and the events cover the following:

Leave No Trace

Astronomy

Natural Navigation

Environmental Storytelling

Scottish Geology and Landforms

Full details and booking information can be found at: <http://www.outdoor-learning.org/Default.aspx?tabid=168>

Adventurascotland

Delivering outdoor learning across spectrum from primary pupils to teachers/management.

As an ex-headteacher and teacher with a long history of outdoor learning/outdoor education training running alongside our education careers, we decided to embark on a new venture, and so our company Adventurascotland was conceived.

Pulling together the threads of our previous existence we decided to offer DofE training, supervision / assessment and became the first AAP (approved activity provider) for DofE in Scotland as well as AALA licensed. As Irene was one of the original Development Officers for DofE in the early 90's as well as being a Gold Award holder this was a natural route for us as it complimented Allys SML, WML, IML qualifications. Open Gold expeditions and Gold Residentials on outdoor leadership are part of our DofE schedule as well as all the training/supervision for Dornoch Academy at Bronze and Gold level. As the whole of 3rd year participate in DofE this can be 50+pupils to train, supervise and assess each season at Bronze alone! Millburn Academy Silvers are now added as part of our DofE work in Highland for 2012.

Week long 'curriculum for excellence' residentials for primary pupils are another popular outdoor learning opportunity offered, whereby we are involved from about a year in advance, working with the pupils who plan, budget,

organise and timetable their OWN programme. They therefore have 'ownership' of their experience - quite a different approach from arriving at a centre and being given a programme for the week, in addition to dovetailing with Curriculum for Excellence.

This has recently been extended to include a new venture based along the same method of approach on 'curriculum for excellence' principles but involving secondary pupils in planning/organising towards an experience in Belize which will have an overarching theme of conservation. We are delighted to be able to offer this in association with the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh who will provide the conservation background/field study training/support necessary for this expedition, before, during and after. This will first be offered in 2013, allowing time for the necessary research and planning by pupils. Having led expeditions for other companies in various parts of the world from Africa, South America to Greenland, we feel we can offer a tailor made Scottish led approach to expeditions, drawing on the best of those we have worked for.

Week long in-service training courses for teachers in 'taking learning outdoors' have been ongoing since 2005 both in Scotland and in Italy. These courses involve teachers from all over the EU and attract funding from Comenius up to 2500 Euros/person. Many Scottish teachers, including some from Highland, have attended these courses and give testament to the value of such courses when



working/learning alongside teachers from diverse EU countries/ages/stages of education.

The main purpose of these courses is to show that 'outdoor learning' can be soft skill based as opposed to a 'hard skill' emphasis which was the mainstay of outdoor education in the UK for many years. In all the areas we work in we aim to engage people in learning outdoors across the curriculum and with a strong emphasis on personal development, self esteem and confidence building.

We also offer another EU funded course "the reflective leader" in Andalucia, Spain, also using outdoor experiential methods. Highland staff have also taken part on this course.

See TES articles published on all of above;

<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6099542>

<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6090308>

<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6086016>

Ally Sangster / Irene Bews

'a journey with a difference, a journey of discovery'

www.adventurascotland.co.uk

info@adventurascotland.co.uk



Abernethy NNR Education Pack

CNPA and the Outdoor Learning in the National Parks project have had a resource pack developed for Abernethy National Nature Reserve to support teachers and rangers in using the reserve to help deliver Curriculum for Excellence. Local teacher and outdoor learning consultant Jill O Reilly was commissioned to develop guidance and resources, with an activity card clearly providing ideas, resources and lesson plans for Levels 0, 1, 2 and 3, ranging from an engaging story walk for the very young to minibeast adventures to a river survey for older children and plenty of support for pre and post visit activities in school. The pack is one of three being developed, the others being based at Muir of Dinnet in Aberdeenshire and Inchcailloch in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP. While the activities and resources were developed to be site-specific and to encourage and support repeat visits to a 'wild' protected place, many of them are transferable to your own local environs. Look out for a launch and some CPD events soon! For more details contact Elspeth Grant, CNPA



Scottish National Parks Schools Media Project

The Scottish National Parks School Media Project 2011 highlights will soon be available, featuring how 9 schools across Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and The Trossachs are delivering outdoor learning through the National Parks. DVD's are available from Elspeth Grant at CNPA offices, Grantown-on-Spey

Tel 01479 873535,

email elspethgrant@cairngorms.co.uk

or online at www.cairngorms.co.uk/learn



National Parks Pupil Residential Programme

In early September, 38 Senior pupils from a number of different schools and settings across Highland, Moray, Angus and West Dunbartonshire were brought together for four days at Loch Lomond Outdoor Centre, as part of the Outdoor Learning in the National Parks project. The focus was to provide the pupils with a range of challenging and fun outdoor experiences in the beautiful setting of the National Park to learn about leadership and personal development. This is the first such event, with a similar residential exchange programme planned for 2012 at Abernethy Nethybridge Adventure Centre – which some of the pupils from this year's programme will hopefully help to organise.



If you would have some Outdoor Learning news or ideas that you would like to share please get in touch:
simon.coker@highland.gov.uk

Invergarry Primary

Woodland play

Local authority

Invergarry, The Highlands

Roll and type

25 - Primary, 8 - Nursery

Timescale

ongoing

**'Work as a team
and involve the
children, the
variety of play
that results is so
beneficial'**





Over half of the school's outdoor space is two acres of mixed broadleaved woodland with a burn, a wealth of plants, wildlife and fungi, rocks and varied topography. With indoor space at a premium it is a valuable resource and open to all the Primary children throughout the year - whatever the weather.

The woodland is not open to the public but is well used by the school. Staff use it during lessons as active and outdoor learning is in their school improvement plan and the woodland is the main area where this takes place.

All the children play in the woods every break and navigate rocks, fallen trees and wet areas with ease, developing their coordination, self awareness and confidence as they swing on low branches, sit quietly with friends, chase, hide and seek, search for wildlife or climb on the boulders. The burn is always popular 'in the winter, the little ones made a dam for the water and when it was frozen we skated on it and jumped on it until it cracked.'

'when the burn was frozen we skated on it'

With the support of the Forestry Commission they planted trees and a willow tunnel, created a boardwalk over wet areas, installed picnic benches and log seating – all made using natural, locally sourced materials. With support from the parents they redesigned a wooden shelter to incorporate storage benches designed by the children and a mural painted by the whole school community. The shed is named KQ - Kids Headquarters.

No serious accidents have been recorded in the woods but cuts, grazes and bruises do occur as in any other play environment. It is impossible for staff to maintain visual contact with the children at all times and they stay at one point should help be required. This trust and a positive staff attitude are fundamental to the successful use of the woods. Children are encouraged to assess and manage risk and have been involved with developing and agreeing a set of simple rules:

- Climbing trees is not permitted due to boulders and rocks below.
- Children are allowed to play in and around the burn but if it is full or fast during the winter (or following rain) staff will check the area and the children don't play there until the water subsides.
- Outdoor shoes are worn and if the children are responsible for bringing suitable clothing (several spare waterproofs and wellington boots are kept in school just in case!)
- Children know which fungi not to touch through integrating topics during lessons and with help from a visiting fungi expert.

'if you trip on the tarmac it really hurts. If you fall in the woods you land on leaves'



Children discuss issues during circle time and can post thoughts in a box for school discussion. An example of this working well was on the issue of snowballs – children themselves decided to allocate a specific area for playing with snowballs. As the headteacher commented “peer pressure is much more effective than staff intervention!”

The woods require little maintenance but when parent action days are occasionally organised for tasks such as clearing vegetation from the burn and maintaining the willow dome. The trees are surveyed by the local authority and a few have been removed or thinned. Resources (e.g. maps for orienteering and wood preservative for benches), are funded by fundraising.

In 2009 the school was awarded its first green flag as “pupils were highly engaged active learners and talked animatedly about exploring, playing, learning and developing the outdoor areas. It was clear how involved children and parents had been in developing and creating your beautiful grounds.”

‘for outdoor learning we all do anything we can, wherever we can and as often as we can’

