

Outdoor Learning and the Curriculum

September 2021



Curriculum for Excellence offers opportunities for all children & young people to enjoy first-hand experience outdoors, whether within the school grounds, in urban green spaces, in the countryside or in wilder environments. Such experiences motivate our children & young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

It is the vision of Dumfries & Galloway Council, Education & Learning Directorate that:

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

What is outdoor learning?

Any form of learning which takes place outdoors ranging from reading a book outside through to a life-changing expedition abroad with a wide variety of outdoor experiences in between can be considered as outdoor learning.

Outdoor Learning enables learning across the whole of the curriculum. Outdoor experiences provide a rich opportunity to apply learning. Schools & settings are best placed to identify the opportunities that exist where taking learning outside would benefit the learners and contribute to the learning experience.



Why does outdoor learning matter?

The outdoor environment can be a more effective and stimulating place to learn than indoors. Frequent and regular outdoor learning encourages children & young people to engage with their natural and built heritage and brings a host of benefits in terms of health and wellbeing.

Well-constructed and well-planned outdoor learning helps develop the skills of enquiry, critical thinking and reflection necessary for our children & young people to meet the challenges of life in the 21st century. The outdoors also provides excellent opportunities to use a wide range of skills and abilities not always possible or relevant in the classroom.

Is it a subject?

Outdoor learning isn't a single subject; it is an approach to learning which can be incorporated into all areas of the curriculum. Being outdoors allows children & young people to engage directly with the environment through

a direct, 'hands on' approach with challenges & learning which cannot be offered in the classroom. Outdoor learning brings together many different areas allowing children & young people to 'make connections' on their learning journey. For example, a project involving growing vegetables involves numeracy, sciences and health & wellbeing as well as other skills.

Who is responsible for outdoor learning?

All staff have a responsibility to offer 'regular and frequent' outdoor learning experiences from early learning & childcare, through school and beyond. This includes time spent in classes as well as intervals, lunchtimes and after-school activities.

Literacy, numeracy and health & wellbeing are everyone's responsibility and taking learning outdoors can greatly help develop understanding when the outdoor environment is used in a stimulating and meaningful way. For example, in numeracy outdoor learning could be measuring



angles and calculating bearings and journey times. In health & wellbeing it could be becoming physically active in alternative ways and improving emotional wellbeing and mental health by being outdoors.

Early Learning & Childcare Settings (ELCs) and Schools continue to develop their grounds and outdoor spaces to provide positive learning environments. An audit tool to support settings & schools develop their grounds further, including creating greater biodiversity, has recently been developed and shared.

Where and what will children & young people learn outdoors?

Children & young people will learn progressively through exploration, play, experiences and through planned and structured learning and teaching activities. They will learn about curriculum areas, for example studying the weather for science and social studies. Outdoor experiences take place through all seasons and in a wide range of weather conditions, fostering adaptability and resilience.

Different outdoor learning experiences offer the opportunities to develop skills such as communication, problem solving, digital technology, working with others, creativity and thinking skills. These transferable skills are required to meet the opportunities and challenges of a rapidly changing world. Being outdoors offers challenge and enjoyment through learning about different aspects of the curriculum in an engaging and relevant way.



Parents & Carers

The support and contribution of parents & carers is very important in all aspects of school life, including outdoor learning. Parents & carers help to prepare children & young people for outdoor learning. They can often provide rich outdoor learning out with educational settings, as well as assisting on outdoor visits. Your child's school may ask you to ensure that your child is suitably dressed for learning outside all year round.

Many Parent Councils are actively involved in supporting outdoor learning activities. This may be in providing financial support for resources, equipment and transport, or importantly in sharing the benefits of outdoor learning to the wider Parent Forum. Being enthusiastic about being outdoors is one of the most valuable ways in which parents can help both their child and school or setting.

If you are interested in volunteering in your school please visit www.dumgal.gov.uk for more information or speak to your school directly.

Risk Benefit

Most outdoor learning activities carry no higher risk than in class activities and situations faced by learners on a day-to-day basis. To ensure that the benefits of any planned activity outweigh the risks practitioners utilise a risk benefit approach which is advocated by the Health and Safety Executive. Settings, schools and the local authority have comprehensive guidance in place which teachers and others follow. Risk management is a life skill and learners should be involved in the process from the outset. This will help learners to make good decisions about risks as they grow and develop.

Guidelines are in place for all off-site visits including measures to ensure that: there are agreed ratios of adults to children, staff are competent and emergency arrangements are in place. Children and young people will, where appropriate, be encouraged to manage their own and others' safety.

Working with others

Professionals and specialist organisations, such as Dumfries & Galloway Outdoor & Woodland Learning (DG OWL), Active School Co-ordinators, Grounds for Learning, and Royal Highland Education Trust, work in partnership with ELCs and schools to deliver learning outdoors.

Employers will be able to make a contribution in the school community or offer opportunities for work placements outdoors, for example in forestry, eco-tourism or recreation, that show young people real-life experiences as part of their development. Third/voluntary sector work alongside schools to support young people by offering personalisation and choice through a wide range of learning opportunities within and out with

school. Skills can be developed and personal achievement recognised through awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the John Muir Award schemes.

Further Information

For further information on the benefits of outdoor learning, and examples of outdoor learning taking place in Dumfries & Galloway please visit our Outdoor Learning SWAY.

<https://sway.office.com/qpey6pS9mGzRs8jG?ref=Link>



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