

## **Falkirk Council Education Services' Outdoor Learning Strategy 2014-17**

### **'Outdoor learning – a responsibility of all'**

Falkirk Council's Outdoor Learning Strategy is informed by Scottish Government's 'Learning for Sustainability' and 'Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning' and recognises that learning outwith the classroom is key in contributing to Scottish Government's five strategic objectives to make Scotland:

- wealthier and fairer
- healthier
- safer and stronger
- greener
- smarter

### **Rationale**

In Learning for Sustainability (2012) Scottish Government set out their ambition for all learners:

*"This is a Scotland where learners are educated through their landscape and understand their environment, culture and heritage; where they develop a sense of place and belonging to their local, national and global community, and have a deep connection to the natural world. Here, learners will understand the significance of their choices, now and in the future."*

This is a vision shared by Falkirk Council Education Services and this Strategy document will support all of our establishments in working towards this vision by ensuring that:

*"The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences."*

Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning, 2010

This strategy demands a whole school approach to Outdoor Learning that recognises the diverse range of activities and approaches that outdoor learning encompasses. It aims to move thinking on from an 'outdoor classroom' being a fixed structure within schools grounds, to a realisation the local, natural and wider environment is the rich, varied extension to the classroom. It challenges us to ensure that:

- All practitioners understand that learning is embedded in experience and that learning out-with the classroom offers opportunities to contextualise learning, and make connections across subject areas
- All practitioners understand how learning outdoors can contribute to the physical, emotional, social and mental well-being of all learners
- All of our learners have access to stimulating and challenging outdoor spaces to play and learn
- Early years are prioritised to maximise the opportunity for deep connections with nature to be established.
- We demonstrate the significant contribution that outdoor learning can make in the development of skills for life, learning and work
- We address the risk averse attitude that has permeated our culture

The development of outdoor learning in Falkirk will support the achievement of the ambitions set out in 'One Council, One Plan' Falkirk Council Corporate Plan 2012 – 2017, specifically the aspirations to:

- further develop a thriving, sustainable and vibrant economy;
- continue to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of our citizens and communities;
- increase our efforts to tackle disadvantage and discrimination.
- enhance and sustain an environment in which people want to live, work and visit.

## **Delivering the strategy**

Falkirk Council Education Services has identified 6 areas for development within the 2014-17 strategy:

1. Teaching and Learning
2. Early Years Outdoors
3. School Grounds Development
4. Adventure Activities
5. Procedures for Off-site Visits
6. Monitoring and evaluation

Each of these areas of development are further detailed within the 'Outdoor Learning in Falkirk' blog - <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/fa/OutdoorLearning/>

The 2014-2017 strategy will evolve in response to on-going review and evaluation and to national, local and individual priorities.

### **1. Teaching and Learning**

Curriculum for Excellence recognises that learning is embedded in experience. Outdoor learning is not a subject, or range of activities, but a context for providing experiences focused on learning.

In order to provide quality outdoor learning experiences we need to equip all practitioners with the skills, knowledge and confidence to work in an outdoor environment with appropriate pedagogies.

#### **Authority Expectations**

- All practitioners will use a range of environments for learning, and be able to apply appropriate pedagogies for these environments.
- All establishments and practitioners will be able to evidence outdoor learning in their planning
- Procedures will be in place to monitor and evaluate outdoor learning experiences

#### **We will support this through:**

- Providing a wide range of CPD opportunities
- Supporting and developing the strategic and cluster OL networks
- Providing bespoke support to schools

## **2. Early years outdoors**

Connecting children with nature, and their local environment, in the early years has been recognised as essential if we are to develop deep, life-long connections which could positively impact physical, emotional, social and mental well-being. Connections with nature are also essential in order to develop a generation that understands the necessity to protect and sustain our planet.

The early years are important if we are to embed the expectation (with learners and parents/carers) that learning will take place outdoors, throughout the year, in all weathers delivering all aspects of the curriculum.

### **Authority Expectations:**

- All nursery pupils will have free access to an outdoor space on a daily basis
- All nursery pupils will be accessing a quality/natural greenspace at least once a week by August 2015
- Opportunities for natural play which promote a balanced approach to risk and challenge should be evident
- Planning will ensure that there is no differentiation between outdoors and indoors

### **We will support this through:**

- Partnership working with Development Services to connect establishments with local green spaces
- Providing hands-on support for staff until confidence is developed
- On-going support with planning

## **3. School ground development**

School and nursery grounds are an essential component in being able to provide regular and progressive outdoor learning experiences. We need to ensure that these spaces are as natural, stimulating, diverse and exciting as possible, offering opportunities for curriculum based outdoor learning and creative play.

### **Authority Expectations:**

All establishments will be expected to show planning and progress in developing their outdoor areas, working towards spaces that:

- allow all learners to connect with nature on a daily basis
- provide opportunities for creative, self-directed play
- have seating and shelter
- provide choice
- use a variety of materials to provide a range of textures
- provide elements of risk and challenge

### **We will support this through:**

- partnership project with 'Grounds for Learning' focusing on the introduction of loose play materials
- sharing good practice across the authority
- bespoke support for establishments
- informing schools about external funding opportunities

## **4. Adventure Activities**

Participation in activities that provide risk and challenge are key in the development of essential life skills such as: resilience, communication, problem solving, working with others, assessing and managing risk, and independence. These skills need to be developed and nurtured from the early years and continue to be developed in a progressive way.

Adventure in the early years will typically take the form of opportunities for risk and challenge through play, but as a learner progresses through the education system there should be opportunities to participate in activities which might require specialist equipment and/or a specialist qualification to provide them eg. hillwalking, water sports, climbing, cycling etc.

### **Authority Expectations:**

- All establishments can provide evidence of progressive opportunities for learners to participate in adventure activities

### **We will support this through:**

- Partnership working with external providers
- Building the capacity of school staff through providing and signposting targeted CPD opportunities

## **5. Procedures for Off-site Visits**

We recognise that a barrier to taking learners off-site is the 'required paperwork'. This barrier needs to be addressed to enable regular, frequent and progressive outdoor learning experiences to take place. We will promote and reflect the current Scottish Government and the HSE guidance and ensure that any required paperwork for off-site visits is adequate and proportionate.

### **Authority Expectations:**

- All establishments adopt an enabling approach to off-site visits

### **We will support this through:**

- Adoption and implementation of 'Going Out There' - Scottish Government Guidance for off-site visits
- Training excursion co-ordinators in all establishments

## **6. Monitoring and evaluation**

We will undertake ongoing evaluation of the Outdoor Learning Strategy.

### **We will do this through:**

- Providing a self-evaluation tool to all establishments
- Sharing good practice