

Parkside House Outdoor Learning Policy

Devised September 2019

At PHS we have agreed on ten key outcomes of outdoor learning and have attributed a range of indicators to each one. These indicators can be used to support any improvement work, which will often be enhanced by working closely with partners in the local community, including businesses charity foundations and national organisations.

1. **Enjoyment:** enjoy participating and reflecting in outdoor activities and adopt a positive attitude to challenge and adventure
2. **Confidence and character:** enhancing their overall well-being by gaining personal confidence and developing character and resilience through taking on challenges and achieving success
3. **Health and wellbeing:** developing their self-awareness and social skills, and their appreciation of the contributions and achievements of themselves and of others
4. **Social and emotional awareness:** are becoming alive to the natural local and global environment and understand the importance of conservation and sustainable development
5. **Environmental awareness:** acquiring and developing a range of skills in outdoor activities, fieldwork, exploration, journeys and expedition
6. **Activity skills:** demonstrating increased initiative and innovation, enthusiasm, curiosity, self-reliance, responsibility, perseverance, tenacity and commitment
7. **Personal qualities:** developing and extending their key skills of communication, problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, leadership and co-operation
8. **Skills for life:** learning to appreciate the benefits of physical activity and the lifelong value of participation in healthy leisure activities and reflection
9. **Increased motivation and appetite for learning:** displaying an increased motivation and appetite for self-directed learning that is contributing to raised levels of attainment in other aspects of their development, as well as becoming concerned, responsible and fulfilled citizens
10. **Broadened horizons:** broadening their horizons and becoming open to a wider range of employment opportunities and life chances

<https://www.outdoor-learning.org/Good-Practice/Good-Practice/High-Quality-Outdoor-Learning>

‘A staggering 92% of pupils said they enjoyed their outdoor lessons more and 90% expressed feeling happier and healthier. The project also found a positive impact on teachers’ motivation, wellbeing and job satisfaction, showing that using the outdoors is good teaching and learning practice.’

Natural Connections Demonstration Project

<https://www.tl.org.uk/key-policies-england/>

Rationale

As a school we feel it is important to enable all children to use the outside environment as a context for learning as much as possible. Children and young people will have the opportunity to learn in, about and through the full range of environments that the North East has to offer – physical, historical and built.

Staff have a shared responsibility to provide regular, authentic outdoor learning contexts and to ensure that the environment is used in a stimulating and meaningful way. This includes time spent in class, breaks, lunchtimes and after-school activities. Outdoor spaces are used effectively to promote positive relationships and well-being. Staff take account of research linking benefits of outdoor learning and green space with well-being.

Outdoor learning takes place both as part of discrete subject development and interdisciplinary learning where the 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.

We believe that outdoor learning:-

- is the right of every child;
- can maximise a child's learning across the curriculum;
- supports the personal and social development within each child;
- should be strongly linked to education for environmental sustainability;
- is founded on universal principles of equality and social justice;
- can provide important opportunities for the health and well-being of every child.

When children are closely involved in developing and managing their outdoor environment, it helps foster attitudes of stewardship and responsibility and the grounds can become an important asset both for them and the local community. Indeed school grounds offer valuable opportunities for children to be not just stewards of nature, but also students of nature.

Aims

- To develop outdoor learning within and across our school in order that it becomes embedded within the curriculum and is sustainable for the future.
- To celebrate our outdoor spaces and the rich learning that can take place there.
- To empower children and young people to take ownership of their learning, allowing their minds and bodies to thrive.
- To provide a safe and secure environment that they can take risks in.
- To encourage children and young people to be aware of and take care of their environment.

To provide positive opportunities for active learning, we seek to offer outdoor experiences that allow children to:-

- find space to be alone or interact in social groups of differing sizes;
- plan, build, evaluate and sometimes demolish;
- find similarities and differences, observe and classify;
- be energetic, adventurous and assess risk;
- make marks, use large scale media, be messy;
- plant, grow, harvest and cook;
- hide, explore and discover;
- investigate, make predictions, test theories;
- imagine, pretend and reflect;
- measure, locate, transport and record.

Why does outdoor learning matter?

All learning is important whether it takes place indoors or outdoors. However, sometimes the outdoor environment can be a more effective and stimulating place to learn than inside a classroom. Frequent outdoor learning encourages children and young people to engage with their natural environment and built heritage and related issues of sustainable development.

There is a growing body of evidence strongly indicating that time spent in green spaces brings a host of health and well-being benefits in addition to providing opportunities for children to learn how to evaluate and manage risks. The outdoors provides excellent opportunities to use a wide range of skills and abilities not always relevant in the classroom.

"It follows that if we want people to live well in this world (Orr, 2004), they need to be educated in this world – in our gardens, green-spaces, local businesses and municipal governments. We are not saying "good bye" to our classrooms; we are opening them up to the world outside!"

(Beames, Higgins and Nicol 2012)

Quality learning experiences in real situations have the capacity to raise achievement across a range of subjects and develop personal and social skills. With well planned, safely managed and personalised experiences to meet the needs of every child they can:-

- improve academic achievement
- be a bridge to higher order learning
- develop skills and independence in a widening range of environments
- make learning more engaging and relevant
- develop active citizens and stewards of the environment
- nurture creativity
- provide opportunities for informed learning through play
- stimulate, inspire and improve motivation
- develop the ability to deal with uncertainty
- provide challenge and the opportunity to allow for managed "risk taking" to take place
- reduce behaviour problems and improve attendance
- improve attitudes

Guidelines for Meaningful and Effective Outdoor Learning

i. Learning across the Curriculum

Outdoor learning is an approach to learning which can be incorporated into every area of the curriculum. Being outdoors allows children and young people to engage directly with the environment through a direct, hands on approach, allowing them to make connections on their learning journey. Rather than being infrequent and informal, taking classes outdoors should be seen as an integral part of classroom activities and used to meet both the curricular and non-curricular needs of students.

ii. Learning for Sustainable Development

Learning for sustainability is an approach to life and learning which enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society. An effective whole school and community approach to PHS weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development education, outdoor learning and children's rights to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences.

Our aim is to develop an ethos of care for the planet and to help children and young people foster their own personal ethic towards sustainability. Outdoor learning offers direct physical, sensory, intellectual and effective ways of knowing the planet we depend on for survival, and developing our relationship with it.

iii. Learning through Local Landscapes

By learning about the local environment, children and young people start to make sense of the social, cultural, physical, geographical and ecological make-up of the landscape – how their culture, the land they live on and the living organisms that share it with them has been shaped and is unique to them.

iv. Using Student Curiosity

Children and young people are learning within the parameters of the curriculum but they should also be given plenty of opportunities to explore themes that have high levels of personal relevance and interest. Effective outdoor learning is experiential by nature so helping students to find answers to questions asked through curiosity enables them to “learn how to learn” more independently.

v. Enabling Students to Take Responsibility.

Children and young people learn by making decisions and taking responsibility for themselves and others. Learning outside in your local environment can provide greater opportunities to take responsibility for yourself, others and the natural world. Effective learning happens when children and young people experience situations where they need to consider different courses of action and then make decisions – the consequences of these decisions directly affecting themselves and others.

vi. Community Partnerships

Effective outdoor learning should see children and young people working across such social divisions as age, ethnicity and race. Partnerships with organisations based in their local community will promote the well-being of all involved and the local environment. Genuine, real-life, meaningful experiences provide opportunities for students to learn about what it means to be an active and responsible citizen and an effective contributor and for adults to share their experience, skill and knowledge and be a co-educator along with the teacher.

vii. Risk/ Benefit Management

It is the class teacher’s responsibility to provide outdoor learning opportunities to enhance the children’s learning experiences. Outdoor learning does not require special equipment or resources, expert teachers or complicated risk assessments. However, best practice will involve a risk/benefit plan comprising five basic requirements:-

- risk/benefit assessment
- blanket consent form
- emergency action plan
- outing checklist/register and
- incident monitoring

Students, in co-operation with the class teacher can learn how to evaluate risks by making their own assessments of potential hazards and then coming up with appropriate management strategies before each visit into the school grounds. Any attempts by the teacher to remove all potential risks is not necessary as there is an increasing body of literature stating that both teachers and students should be viewing hazards on a risk/benefit basis.

viii. Outdoor Supervision

Human, environmental and external factors all need very specific management skills when outdoors with children and young people.

- Human factors include ensuring children are suitably dressed, fed and hydrated.
- Environmental factors include consideration of conditions such as temperature, wind and rain.
- External elements might include scenarios such as stray dogs, animal droppings or road traffic – these can be either serious health hazards or simply annoying distractions.

Strategies for overseeing and moving children from one place to another and knowing exactly who is where at any given time should already be an embedded part of a teacher's professional day-to-day practice so, it is more a case of adapting existing practice to the outdoor environment. Systems for making sure that students bring whatever they need to be physically comfortable outside with them, managing the group and maintaining contact and control in a "classroom without walls" should already be in place, prior to leaving the school.

ix. Will children and young people be placed at risk when outdoors?

Most outdoor learning activities carry no higher risk than activities and situations faced by learners on a daily basis. The benefits of any planned outdoor activity far outweigh the risks and staff should use a risk/benefit approach when planning experiences. Risk management is a life skill and learners will be involved in the planning from the start to help them make good decisions about any risks that they may anticipate or that may develop.

Assessment and Recording

Good practice in assessing outdoor learning is no different from assessment elsewhere in school. When possible activities should allow children to demonstrate "performance of understanding" and they should be given tasks that show they can build on existing knowledge and skills and use what they have learned to:-

- generalise
- apply exceptions
- give explanations
- make predictions
- evaluate
- find examples and solutions
- list strategies or argue by analogy.

Assessment may be pupil or teacher led, peer or self-assessment but most importantly it will be used to inform and determine next steps.

The School Grounds

At Parkside House we have areas designated for horticulture, animal husbandry, games and local play parks are easily accessible.

The locality around the school also offers a wealth of opportunities within a relatively accessible distance. Learners can develop their skills whilst exploring their local environment, stimulating both their curiosity and imagination. By learning about the local environment, children and young people start to make sense of the social, cultural, physical, geographical and ecological make-up of the landscape – how their culture, the land they live on and the living organisms that share it with them has been shaped and is unique to them.

Publications

"Learning Outside the Classroom" – Theory and Guidelines for Practice

Simon Beames, Peter Higgins and Robin Nicol
(EBSCO Publishing via GTC for Scotland)

"Messy Maths" – Juliet Robertson (Creative Star)

"Dirty Teaching" - Juliet Robertson (Creative Star)

"Games, Ideas and Activities for Primary Outdoor Learning" –
Paul Barron

"Children Learning Outside the Classroom" – Sue Waite

"Learning With Nature: How to Inspire Children through Outdoor Games" – Marina Robb

"101 Things for Kids to Do Outside" – Dawn Isaac

"gofindit" - an outdoor treasure hunt card game (Sensory Trust)

Notable Dates

World Environment Day – 5th June each year

National School Grounds Week – early June each year.

(Numeracy focus in 2016. Downloadable resources available.)

World Habitat Day – Monday 3rd October 2017 (good links with RRS/UN)