

Outdoor Education

the countryside
as a classroom



THE COUNTRYSIDE
ALLIANCE
FOUNDATION

Outdoors for a change



We believe outdoor learning should be part of every child's education

- An entitlement to outdoor learning should be created within the National Curriculum to ensure the countryside becomes part of every child's education.
- The Qualified Teacher Status standards should include the provision for practical training of teachers in delivering learning outside the classroom.
- The Government should take steps to prioritise the funding allocated for outdoor learning and direct resources to helping schools that struggle to fund outdoor education visits for children.
- A renewed effort is required by Government and education stakeholders to raise awareness among teachers of the low risks and high rewards of well managed outdoor learning.
- The decline in small grants must be halted if charities are to play a continuing role in developing innovative programmes to increase access to the countryside for children and young people.

Our full report can be downloaded at: countrysideclassroom.org.uk

Outdoor education

An introduction

Outdoor learning is good for children and young people. It helps them gain a practical understanding of the world around them, build self-confidence, test their abilities, take managed risks and develop a sense of responsibility and tolerance towards places and people.

The body of research showing the considerable health and well-being benefits of spending time in natural green spaces is growing. Outdoor learning can help children and young people understand subjects, like maths or science, through real world examples and first hand experience. Whilst academic achievement is important, outdoor education can play a significant role helping pupils develop soft skills like good communication, team work and leadership that are essential to the well rounded education that is vital for life beyond the classroom. Despite this, the countryside still remains an enigma for far too many.

The reasons for this are complex but include a lack of opportunity to visit the countryside and parental fears around child safety. It is understandable that every parent wants their child to be safe, but reluctance to let them explore natural places is limiting their exposure to the countryside and reducing their hands on knowledge of the natural world around them. For these reasons, The Countryside Alliance Foundation (TCAF) believes outdoor education must be included in the National Curriculum to give all children the chance to experience the considerable health, personal development and educational benefits of outdoor learning.

In addition, we believe outdoor education has a major role to play in reconnecting children and young people

with the countryside and the many natural resources it provides. By gaining a practical understanding of the countryside, they also become engaged in protecting its future.

Over the past year the Foundation has uncovered huge enthusiasm for outdoor education among children and teachers. In our survey, 85 per cent of children and young people want to take part in countryside activities with their school, and 97 per cent of teachers surveyed believe it is important for children to learn about the countryside within the National Curriculum.

Yet this level of demand and enthusiasm is not matched by delivery on the ground and as a result millions of children are missing out. Over 60 per cent of children polled felt they didn't learn enough about the countryside at school and 76 per cent of teachers said concern about health and safety is the main barrier to outdoor education. Therefore it is not surprising that 53 per cent of children did not go on a single school visit to the countryside in 2008.

Well-managed outdoor education visits pose a low risk to student welfare. Our research on the numbers of legal claims made in relation to children injured on school visits will ease fears around health and safety and inspire greater confidence among teachers to use

the countryside as a classroom. 138 local authorities in England and Wales responded to a Freedom of Information request by The Foundation. We discovered that only 364 legal claims were made over a ten year period and under half of the cases were successful and resulted in a payout. In fact, on average just over £290 was paid out per year by each local authority. These results challenge the widely held assumption that school trips are inherently dangerous and result in huge numbers of compensation claims.

Arguably, media fervour and misinterpreted teacher union guidance following the rare incidents has unintentionally led to a climate of fear surrounding health and safety legislation. As a result children are missing out on valuable learning experiences.

The Countryside Alliance Foundation does not think this is right. Our five point plan shows the way ahead to ensure outdoor learning forms a part of every single child's education.

The National Curriculum

Making sure outdoor learning is part of every child's education

An entitlement to outdoor learning should be created within the National Curriculum to ensure the countryside becomes part of every child's education.

The National Curriculum is changing. The Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) accepted the recommendations of two independent reviews, which included reforming the primary curriculum and making Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education statutory. At the time of writing, Parliament was considering The Children, Schools and Families Bill, brought forward by the DCSF, to bring the recommendations into law.

The countryside is a powerful medium in which to deliver major components of PSHE education, such as healthy living, physical competence and performance, managing risk and developing self awareness. It can also play a significant role in helping primary and secondary students understand subjects such as science and geography by engaging with practical examples outside the classroom. Future legislation should be used as an opportunity to create an entitlement to outdoor education within the curriculum to allow these practical learning opportunities to be fully realised.

In addition to its key role in reconnecting children and young people with the natural environment, outdoor education has exciting potential when it comes to tackling obesity and mental health issues. Innovative action taken here could reduce the substantial

costs of dealing with the consequences of these growing problems.

Countryside activities such as walking, cycling and horse riding can burn up to 380 calories per hour. Green spaces can stabilise anger in young people, which can help prevent anti social behaviour. Outdoor education could therefore play a key role in reducing the 391,960 permanent and fixed exclusions for physical and verbal abuse in schools that occurred in the 2007/08 school year. It could also help reduce the cost of youth crime and obesity – an estimated £5 billion per annum.

Only 47 per cent of 6 to 15 year olds went on a school countryside visit in 2008. By creating an entitlement to outdoor education in the curriculum, schools would have a duty to ensure all children have the opportunity to visit the countryside, improve personal development, health and academic results through linking subjects with real life examples as an integral part of the curriculum. Not only will this deliver the aims of the PSHE area of learning but it would also present an opportunity for government to prioritise resources and funding towards increasing its use across all schools.



Only **47%**
of children visited the
countryside with their
school in 2008

Teacher training



Equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge to deliver outdoor learning

The Qualified Teacher Status standards should include the provision for practical training of teachers in delivering learning outside the classroom.

In 2008, only six of the 27 schools and colleges inspected by Ofsted that showed outstanding, good or improving outdoor education provision, had detailed knowledge of the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto – a Government initiative promoting outdoor education. However, even these six schools were unsure of how outdoor learning linked to other national guidance and programmes. A renewed effort is needed by central and local government to raise awareness among teachers of outdoor education resources linked to the curriculum.

While online resources such as The Countryside Alliance Foundation's Countryside Investigators – countrysideinvestigators.org.uk – can help teachers to link outdoor education to areas of learning within the National Curriculum, the practical delivery of it relies, in part, on the ability of teachers to organise and lead visits. Evidence suggests teachers that receive more training across a range of learning outside the classroom activities, including practical sessions, are more confident about delivering learning outside the classroom.

Despite this evidence, statutory standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and requirements for Initial Teacher Training do not include a requirement for student teachers to spend time with pupils outside the

classroom as part of their training. The QTS standard for outdoor learning requires that trainees should be able to identify opportunities for children and young people to learn in the school grounds and in out-of-school contexts such as museums, theatres, field centres and work settings.

Being able to identify opportunities for outdoor learning is useful, but not as valuable as teachers being able to deliver on those opportunities by possessing the skills, knowledge and confidence, through training, to make learning outside the classroom a reality not an academic exercise.

If schools are to respond to the 85 per cent of children and young people that want to enjoy countryside activities through school, a review of the QTS standards is needed to prioritise practical outdoor education skills within teaching training so all new teachers have confidence in delivering learning in this context.



85% of children want to take part in countryside activities through school

Funding

Securing fair and consistent funding for outdoor learning

The Government should take steps to prioritise the funding allocated for outdoor learning and direct resources to helping schools that struggle to fund outdoor education visits for children.

In 2007, £332 million of funding was announced by the Government for the Music Manifesto over three years. In contrast, the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto attracted just under £4.5 million between 2006 and 2009. Not only is there a massive inequality of funding but there has been an actual halving of investment in outdoor learning from £1.7 million in 2006 to a mere £740,000 in 2009. This cut significantly reduces the support and resources available to help children and young people benefit from outdoor education.

While recognising the constraints on public sector spending, the difference in funding for outdoor learning between 2006 and 2009 represents a small amount in the context of the overall education budget. However, this funding is vitally important in enabling children to experience outdoor learning and the benefits related to it. We believe funding should be reinstated to 2006 levels at the very least.

Given that 89 per cent of teachers surveyed in a National Teacher Voice Survey believe the countryside could play a greater role in learning within the curriculum, the priority and funding the Government now dedicates to learning outside the classroom is derisory. It bears no relation to the clear wishes of teachers and pupils. While cost alone is not the only barrier, the ability of schools to deliver outdoor education depends heavily

on the amount of money allocated within their budget. The cost of school visits can vary from between £5 - £15 per pupil for a day and £250 - £350 per pupil for residential visits. Schools often rely on voluntary contributions from parents to be able to cover the cost of these visits. While local authorities have discretion in allocating central government school funding according to local priorities, it can result in disparities of per capita funding between different schools within the same area.

Most schools allocate their budget in accordance to their own priority areas. This means the disparity in the amount of 'per pupil' funding could mean the difference between taking students on an outdoor learning visit or not, depending on the priority given to curriculum-based outdoor education in the school.

All pupils should be offered a range of outdoor learning experiences as part of their education, including visits to the countryside. With 64 per cent of teachers surveyed citing funding as a barrier to outdoor education, the Government must take steps to meet the needs of schools. Creating an entitlement to outdoor education within the National Curriculum would focus government resources towards helping schools deliver results and so raise the priority of outdoor education within school budgets.



89% of teachers believe the countryside could play a greater role in cross-curricular learning within the National Curriculum in the future

Health and safety



Tackling the myths and fears surrounding risk in outdoor education

A renewed effort is required by Government and education stakeholders to raise awareness among teachers of the low risks and high rewards of well managed outdoor learning.

The myths, misconceptions and anxiety which surround risk assessments and health and safety procedures have contributed to a climate of fear. When examined against the numbers of incidents occurring on school visits and prosecutions against teachers this fear is wholly disproportionate. This is especially so when weighed against the benefits of outdoor education.

The risk of well managed school visits to student welfare is low. However, it was the tragic fatality of a child at Glen Ridding Beck in 2003 that brought the safety of outdoor visits into the spotlight. The incident resulted in the prosecution of a teacher and opened up a debate on the 'fear of litigation' among schools with regard to school visits.

The subsequent inquiry into the fatality, which was found not to be a genuine accident, was damning, yet the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), one of England's largest teacher unions, went on to issue guidance advising its members against certain school visits and to consider organising them with extreme care.

There is no doubt the Glen Ridding Beck incident was the stuff of every teacher's and parent's worst nightmare, but it is also likely that sensationalist media and misinterpreted teacher union guidance on school

visits have contributed to the 'fear of litigation' which still exists among teachers today.

Our research should reassure teachers about the low risks of being at the sharp end of litigation. Of the 138 local authorities across England and Wales that responded to a Freedom of Information request, only 364 legal claims were made over a ten year period and fewer than half of the cases (156) were successful and resulted in compensation payments. The total amount of compensation paid out was £405,000 meaning on average each local authority paid out just £293 per year in compensation between 1998 and 2008.

It is right that teachers should take the welfare of their pupils seriously, but fears around health and safety should not be a barrier to outdoor education. The law protects from liability those who take reasonable care. A renewed effort is needed to highlight the low risks of well managed outdoor education and inspire confidence among those 76 per cent of teachers concerned about health and safety procedures.



Only £293
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incidents on school trips

Supporting charities

Helping charities play a bigger role in providing outdoor education

The decline in small grants must be halted if charities are to play a continuing role in developing innovative programmes to increase access to the countryside for children and young people.

Outdoor education has the proven ability to improve health, education and social benefits for children and young people. We believe it should be given priority within government strategies to increase opportunities for children and young people to achieve their potential in all aspects of their lives.

National programmes and major funding streams exist to improve children's opportunities. However, we believe priority should be given to increasing the number of grants available for charities working at a local level using outdoor education programmes to benefit children and young people.

Charities are capable of delivering innovative outdoor learning programmes. The Foundation funded Fishing for Schools programme is a prime example. This is a nationally recognised course for children with special education needs. Studies have found that learning in the outdoors about fishing and the aquatic environment can increase self-esteem in children and improve their attention capacity. Such programmes offer a powerful medium for helping children achieve their potential and engage in learning linked to the National Curriculum. However, in order to fund such programmes charities require a mix of funding sources, including grants, to underpin their financial viability.

Evidence from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations suggests there has been an absolute as well as relative decline in grant funding. The decline in small grants is concerning and is compounded by tightly specified terms and conditions. While the use of contracts may be appropriate in certain situations, the shift towards contracting can damage smaller charities involved in local education. This is because the process of tendering and contract delivery often favours larger charities that can afford to dedicate time to the process and bear any losses associated with not recovering the full costs of contracts or projects.

The Audit Commission has highlighted a trend towards grants being contract based arrangements in all but name. We understand that Government must obtain maximum value from funding decisions and ensure charities are accountable in the use of any funds. However, the often stifling restrictions on the terms of grants can eliminate the innovation and flexibility that makes charities so well placed to respond to improving opportunities for young people using outdoor environments.

Charities can deliver good value innovative programmes, but overly burdensome grant restrictions must be lifted if the UK is to retain the diversity of the third sector and the solutions they offer to tackle social issues.



10% of primary schools have used The Countryside Alliance Foundation's free web resource Countryside Investigators



Thank you for reading The Countryside Alliance Foundation's summary report *Outdoor education – the countryside as a classroom*. If you would like more information on why outdoor education is important for young people's lives please download our full report at countrysideclassroom.org.uk or contact us at

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The Countryside Alliance Foundation is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales number 5669451 and a registered charity number 1121034. Registered office: 367 Kennington Road, London SE11 4PT.

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Designed and published by GPS Visual Communications Tel: 020 8661 4100 Web: gpsvis.com

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