

# Slaithwaite CE J & I School



# Policy for Taking Learning Outdoors

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# 'Taking Learning Outdoors'

## Policy for use of our School Outdoor Environment

### Rationale

*"We believe passionately that children and young people who miss out on good school grounds miss out on the best start in life.*

*School Grounds play a vital role in every child's learning and development. They are unique spaces, providing safe and diverse opportunities for understanding, achievement, healthy exercise and play."*

If, in addition, outdoor learning is associated with learning about sustainability, it could be viewed as having developed from the pedagogical to being part of a moral obligation to equip children to manage their futures in a sustainable way.

*"As a custodian of future generations, education is uniquely placed to make a significant contribution to a sustainable future for every child, and it has a responsibility to make that difference.*

(Porritt, LTL Founder and Director of Forum for the Future).

Since 1990, Learning through Landscapes has been campaigning on behalf of all children for better school grounds. Surveys of primary schools that have improved their outdoor spaces show: **85% Teachers reporting more creative learning and environmental awareness 73% improved pupil behaviour; 64% reduction in bullying; 65% attitudes towards learning improved; 84% better social interaction; 85% increased healthy active play; 66% increased community/parental involvement.**

Learning is embedded in experience. By taking learning outdoors we remove the barriers that the traditional classroom can create between young people and first-hand, real-life experiences. Outdoor learning is hands-on and direct, and the knowledge that pupils gain from it is real, first-hand and unforgettable.

Outdoors is where many children would rather be, offering children essential multi-sensory experiences vital to their wellbeing, health and development. Fresh air and natural light stimulate the brain.

With a little creativity, the whole curriculum can be taken outdoors and right across the curriculum, concepts and ideas that are abstract in theory, can really be brought to life. Children become highly involved in activities

and there can be real opportunities for children to develop life skills, including teambuilding, responsibility and leadership together with significant progression in personal resourcefulness, reflection, risk-taking and resilience.

Over the last 10 years, many primary schools have actively embraced the potential of using the outdoors as a learning resource in response to government publications, organisations that promote it's inclusion, the focus in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) on outdoor learning and increased focus on environmental sustainability.

In recent years, both the DfES and Ofsted have highlighted the importance of the use of outdoor education and resources relating to this are currently supported on the DfE's website. The recent Tickell review into the EYFS recommends that *'playing and exploring, active learning, and creating and thinking critically are highlighted...as characteristics of effective teaching and learning'* Implicit in this statement is that such activities are carried out outdoors as well as indoors.

There is a substantial list of organisations offering support and initiatives. Our School have worked closely, over the last nine years with *Learning Through Landscapes, Growing Schools, The National Trust, Forest Schools and Eco Schools* to help us to embed the outdoors in our approach to the education of our children. The school has led outdoor learning, EYFS and sustainable schools initiatives in the L.A. This recognition, together with the award of **'Kirklees Sustainable School of the Year'**; our ***Forest School Approach*** (Members of Staff Trained to level 1 and level 3); and the achievement of **Green Flag status** reflects the strength of our Partnerships and Whole School Commitment.

***Eco-Schools Green Flag Award:-***

*"This School is a superb example of fully embracing the Eco-Schools programme throughout the curriculum and encouraging active participation throughout the school."*

**Assessor's comments June 2012.**

## The School's Aims

- To view outdoor education not as just adventure or environmental activities, but *as a teaching approach outdoors which can enhance and integrate a huge range of activities across the whole curriculum-* activities which connect learners with their environment, their community, their society and themselves.
- To help all children to develop their academic, social and physical skills to their full potential through active participation in learning, playing and socialising outside the classroom throughout the year.
- Through effective site development, resourcing and curriculum planning and organisation, ensure that our children are offered the best possible opportunities for investigation, exploration, problem solving, imaginative thinking and creativity outdoors from... *encouraging their innate curiosity about the natural world* through to ...*the enjoyment of growing their own vegetables*. Such early experiences will help our children to value their outdoor surroundings, develop an appreciation of natural beauty and a sense of wonder about the world.
- To give our children the opportunity to relax, enjoy, access, have fun outdoors.
- To advocate a holistic, participative and sustainable approach to the development of our outdoor space. We aim to make our space truly participative so that it takes into account the needs of all users- and not only the people-but the local flora and fauna as well!
- To provide a safe and secure environment that children can take risks in.
- To encourage close links with parents, the local community and the school in celebration and sustainable development of our outdoor space and the rich learning that can take place within it.

## The Learning Environment

We plan to continue to develop and maintain our own school grounds as a high quality environment for the benefit of children's learning. This will in turn provide an asset that can be harnessed to involve and benefit the wider local community.

The grounds can be a showcase for pupil artwork-murals, mosaics and sculptures enhance the environment at the same time as stating the school's pride in its pupils' achievements.

Our outdoors should be flexible and adaptable; focussing on what the children will be able to **do** in the environment. We need to provide opportunities for children to engage in planned and freely chosen experiences and are aiming to offer risk, challenge, variety and fun.

Our Site has developed over the last eight years, always with the children's total involvement. Careful setting up and development in a sustainable way to meet the needs of everyone in school has been essential.

### Our School Grounds Outdoor Environment currently includes:

- A new, well-resourced Field Study Classroom Building: to support outdoor education for our school and community. *Two Gates Nature Cabin* was officially opened on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012. *Green Team* and *School Council*, in consultation with all stakeholders, led developments at all stages.
- A new fenced in *Wildlife Garden and Sanctuary* (50mx56m) situated around the Cabin. This will allow for whole school curricular opportunity to monitor and increase biodiversity within that specific area. *Green Team* originally entered a competition with this aim in mind: The 'Pitch in Project'- sponsored by Huddersfield Town Football Club and Marshalls Building Contractors. Children have sited bird and bat nesting boxes, established a bird feeding station and are planting habitat areas as part of the on-going development and maintenance of this area.
- A fenced-in pond area and viewing bridge. (Now in the middle of the *Wildlife Garden*).
- A *Garden* area demonstrating meadow, grassland, moorland and wetland habitats. Plant identification sheets support this area which includes pathways and dry stone wall feature.

- A woodland area which contains a 'class gathering' sheltered den area; small storage shed; pathways; open-seated area with 'fire pit'; bird nesting boxes; minibeast piles; limited play spaces for younger children; opportunities for children to erect dens and engage in transient art activities.
- 4 purpose-built organic vegetable allotments, tool shed. PolyTunnel.
- Sensory elements. Planted fragrant herbs; colourful & tactile plants; musical washing line.
- A Fenced-in Foundation Stage/KS1 Playground with Safety Surface; Role Play and Storage Sheds. Direct access to EYFS Classroom and to garden/woodland area via stile and allotment area via gate.
- A whole school tarmaced playground with seating areas/ 'Buddy Bench', playground markings and sectioned-off Ball Game Area.
- Adventure Playground-Climbing Equipment, installed on a safety surface
- Large grassed field area with goal posts.

## Sustainable Development of our School Grounds

### Outdoor Learning Environment

A structured process of planning for the sustainable development of our school outdoor environment, meaningfully involving the children, staff and members of the community, is on-going. This process will ensure that the changes truly meet the needs of all users, and will be respected by pupils.

#### The Process Includes:

- **Annual Action Plan** produced by Lead Teacher.
- **School Green Team Committee** led on-going developments to monitor the environmental performance of the school and coordinate whole school involvement for maintenance and development. The committee, of at least two children representing each year group in school, currently meets and develops outdoor related projects through **Green Club**. Green club meets as an After School Club, most Thursday's throughout the year, supported by Staff members, a Parent volunteer and local woodland management professional.
- **Engagement of professional support, currently *Wild Service*** to help us to develop long term Woodland Sustainable Development plans, undertaking necessary professional felling, coppicing, hedge-laying, repairs and path maintenance. Additionally to work directly with staff and children, primarily through **Green Club** to develop skills and knowledge. (See Appendix 1).

- Whole school Curriculum work; Saturday Woodland Tidy sessions, involving parents; Lunch time outdoor development projects, led by Play worker.

## Curriculum Organisation

### Throughout School

- Our Creative Curriculum includes as many practical outdoor opportunities as possible, across the whole curriculum, including Eco-Schools topics for all children in school. Our outdoor curriculum incorporates 'Forest School Principles' through woodland work for all children. A core component is the development of personal, social and emotional skills through to year 6, incorporating initiatives to observe and assess pupil well-being in the outdoor environment. Children are provided with a range of experiences that help develop key life skills, including personal and team learning, enquiry and thinking skills.
- Each class has a dedicated weekly Session Timetabled in our Field Study Cabin.
- Children have the opportunity to explore, grow and nurture plants through class-based work and the school's Friday Gardening Club.

### Foundation Stage

We aim to offer a broad and balanced curriculum following the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage. This includes effective planning for a continuous curriculum outdoors to incorporate all the areas of learning, reflecting the same quality and variety as offered indoors, and offering provision for outside play and environmental areas.

Planning for focussed group activities features outdoor as well as indoor areas, as appropriate.

One afternoon per week is specifically timetabled to take place in the woodland environment, following 'Forest School' principles.

### Foundation Stage into KS1

Continuous Curriculum Activity afternoons-merging Years 1 and 2 with Reception children for *Art/Design Technology/Creative Development* as well as *Science/Knowledge and Understanding* focussed lessons allow for opportunities to develop the outdoor curriculum. Staffing is such that

children can utilise informal opportunities to explore and practice their learning as well as being offered small group teacher led focussed activities. Snapshot observations of children note progression in life skills.

### **Inclusion**

We ensure equal access to and participation in all outdoor experiences and activities by all children, irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity, social circumstances or ability.

Children access the outdoor curriculum at the appropriate level, thus ensuring challenge, progression and differentiation. Suitable resources will be available to enable children access to the learning required.

Many children, particularly boys and some pupils with special needs, learn best through doing. Outdoors, children continue to learn through listening and looking, but there are also many potential opportunities to take part in hands-on learning.

The outdoors can have several advantages for practical learning-there's more space; noise and mess are often seen as less serious issues.

Activities in the school grounds can simultaneously encourage the development of physical skills, the building of confidence by exploration of the environment and the acquisition of social skills through learning to participate and share with others.

Sensory exploration can teach such skills as investigation, problem solving and communication.

### **Implementation: Roles and Responsibilities-**

**The Lead Teacher will be responsible for:**

- Preparation and implementation of the school development plan for teaching and learning in the outdoor environment.
- Working closely with all Teachers to identify and monitor opportunities for outdoor education.
- Developing resources and ideas to support staff in delivering the outdoor curriculum.
- Providing and maintaining appropriate resources.
- Identifying the training needs of staff.
- Offering direct training and support or identifying training opportunities as they arise.

- Planning for specialist support and identifying other adult support opportunities to allow for effective outdoor education.

**The Class Teacher will be responsible for:**

- Looking for curriculum links and opportunities to promote active learning in the outdoor environment when planning lessons.
- Facilitating planned access to the outdoor environment.
- Ensuring that any risks to Health or Safety have been considered and that a 'Risk Assessment' has been prepared and actioned if necessary.
- Familiarisation with the resources available and obtaining training or support in their use if needed.
- Planning and delivery of appropriate activities.
- Ensuring appropriate level of support is available. Brief support staff, specialist, parent or community helpers.
- Allowing children opportunities to plan and assume ownership of their learning outdoors.
- Observing, assessing and recording outdoor learning, ensuring that there is adequate provision for children to extend their learning.
- Liaising with lead teacher concerning resources, support, training etc needed.

## **Training and Support**

- Working with *Wild Service*, we benefit from specialist Woodland Maintenance/ Development support and advice. Occasionally classes have the opportunity to work with the Marsden Moor Warden.
- Provision of training and networking opportunities for all members of staff, including support staff, as the need and the opportunity arises.

## **Resources**

- We consider the outdoor environment itself as a natural resource for learning.
- The grounds will continue to be developed to provide specific features as identified by consultation with children and staff in particular. It is important that the grounds are developed to maximise and support learning opportunities.

- Outdoor areas, with seating and shade/shelter-provide opportunities to gather together a class or group of children, making lesson management outdoors easier.
- Environmental features can be developed to provide fieldwork opportunities for e.g. Science and Geography.
- Learning resources will be purchased/made available to support different areas of the curriculum as identified.
- Resources include necessary waterproof outerwear and wellingtons, suitably stored.

Funding Committee: Raising of Funds; pinpointing initiatives.

Green Team/School Council: ideas and initiatives.

## **Community Partnership**

We advocate using a participative approach to developing the outdoor space. Thus parents, helpers and potential users of the area will be invited to take part in decision making, help with practical projects and become involved with longer term maintenance and evaluation. (The outdoors can offer a valuable way to involve Fathers in a way that they can feel comfortable, helping them to enrich their children's lives by playing an active role.) Successful projects need many different skills and we hope that our improvements will utilise and reflect the skill of its community. We aim to keep everyone fully informed of achievements, fundraising events and interim successes.

## **Care and Maintenance**

- We foster a whole school positive, caring ethos in relation to the school grounds.
- When planning for learning it is important to continue to build in opportunities and revision concerning care and respect for both the outdoor environment and living things.
- Outdoor rules in a positive context are formulated and developed through discussion with children.
- As part of our development plan, we will provide for long term sustainable management and maintenance of the site. This will hopefully include the development of a school-community partnership and be embedded with the full participation of the children.

## Health and Safety

- We will support children in taking risks within a safe and secure environment. The outdoor environment should offer challenge, whilst teaching children how to be safe and aware of others.
- All teachers and outdoor practitioners assess risk. Risk Assessments will be carried out where appropriate. **(See Appendix 2)**
- We enable children to use resources safely and to manage and use the space and freedom afforded by the outdoor environment responsibly, by establishing clear guidelines, safe boundaries and appropriate actions to take if problems arise. **(See Appendix 3)**
- Tools must be used safely and effectively.
- Required Operating Procedures and Safety Rules applying to outdoor activities must be followed at all times. **See Appendix 4)**
- The School Behaviour Policy applies to working in the Outdoor environment.
- Teachers ensure that all outdoor learning activities conform to the School's Health and Safety Policy.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

- Assessment of the children's learning will be valued equally outdoors as indoors and should be part of the same process.
- As the outdoors can enrich all areas of the curriculum, subject leaders will be responsible for monitoring how the outdoors is being used to support teaching and learning of their subject.
- Outdoor learning throughout the curriculum is monitored by the teacher responsible for leading outdoor learning. Curriculum framework monitoring includes periodic scrutiny of Outdoor Education Work.
- Assessment of the effectiveness of Health and Safety guidelines will include monitoring in the context of working outside the classroom.
- Relevant discussions with and formal feedback from- school children, staff, parents and all interested parties will ensure that the aims of the Policy are being realised.

**Reviewed:** September 2018

**Next Review:** September 2019

## **Appendices:**

1. Wild Service: Two Gates Woodland Sustainable Plan.
2. Risk Assessment Template Sheet.
3. *Health and Safety/Code of Conduct Guidelines.*
4. Operating Procedures for Woodland and Wildlife Area Activities.

This Policy refers specifically to outdoor learning utilising areas of our school grounds. Uses of outdoor spaces in other locations are highly relevant to our children's progressive experience, but fall outside the scope of this Policy.