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Warwickshire County Council's Outdoor Education & Learning Strategy 2022 'Life is an Adventure'

Foreword

Welcome to Warwickshire County Council's Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy.

With the publication of our Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy we are making clear the value we place on education and learning that takes place outdoors, and our intention is to encourage and facilitate its further development and growth.

Making connections between nature, people, learning, and skills is a key element of how children and young people develop. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has challenged teachers, parents/carers, and communities alike. Our concern about the impact of the lockdowns on the education attainment, physical, emotional and mental health of children and young people is rightly on our minds. The outdoors, and our access to it, has become a key issue for our communities.

We recognise that education providers seek to integrate outdoor learning into the delivery of the daily curriculum and there is already a significant amount of provision both within Warwickshire, the United Kingdom and overseas for outdoor education & learning. We want all children and young people in Warwickshire to have the opportunity to access the experiences that are best for their development throughout their education journey and beyond. The variety of providers and activities reflect the skills and abilities of different groups of people and are central to the effective delivery of inclusive outdoor experiences for our children and young people.

With the emphasis on and promotion of outdoor education and learning through this strategy, we are seeking to encourage and further equip education providers as they provide the environmental context our children need for their well-being, fulfilment, and success.

Introduction

Our ambition is for all children and young people in Warwickshire to access and enjoy high-quality outdoor education and learning, appropriate for their age, ability and experience throughout their development journey.

For the purpose of this Strategy, 'Outdoor Education and Learning' is an umbrella term for learning through purposeful activities/experiences/challenges, which predominantly take place outdoors and are organised by an education setting.

This strategy identifies how Warwickshire County Council will work with and support, early years, schools, post-16 and other education and skills settings to promote and embed a culture of outdoor activities and challenges that stimulate learning, which is integrated into education provision at every development phase. Its aim is that all children and young people can engage with high quality outdoor education and learning within and beyond Warwickshire throughout their development journey.

This strategy recognises the role of education providers to plan and deliver learning; and builds on an evidence base that outdoor education and learning promotes development, well-being, personal fulfilment, enables engagement with our environment and issues affecting it, and is fun.

Education settings have told us about their pre-COVID offer of outdoor education and learning, including the challenges faced and their thoughts about how Warwickshire County Council might support and enhance their offer. They are already effectively planning for and engaging in activities that enable high quality outdoor education and learning to happen and make use of the range of providers offering valuable outdoor learning venues, activities and experiences both within and outside of Warwickshire. They told us they would value support with training staff; information about outdoor activities, venues and providers; signposting of advice about sources of funding; and a central place where information relevant to Warwickshire education settings could be accessed.

Warwickshire's Children and Young People Strategy (2021-2030) tells us children and young people have identified improving play, leisure and cultural activities as areas they would like to prioritise.

This strategy is an opportunity to promote, support and enable the delivery of high-quality outdoor education and learning. Connecting education settings with information and resources, so that throughout their development children can learn in an outdoor context and through activities that will enable them to grow and flourish into adult life.

The Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy has natural links to other Warwickshire County Council's strategies namely: Health & Wellbeing, Voluntary & Community Sector, Green Spaces, Climate Change, Children and Young People and our support for Employability and Careers.

Who is this Strategy for?

The primary beneficiaries are the planners and deliverers of outdoor education and learning within Warwickshire's education settings, and through them children and young people, their families, and wider communities of Warwickshire.

Our Vision and Approach

Our vision for outdoor learning is that:

- All children and young people have access to and enjoy high-quality outdoor education and learning, appropriate for their age, ability, and experience.
- Educators value and embed outdoor education and learning in their curriculum planning.
- Education settings provide regular, frequent, enjoyable, and challenging opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors.
- A culture of outdoor education and learning is developed within all education settings, raising awareness of the importance of the outdoors for leisure and learning for both children and their families.

Warwickshire County Council believes that the development of children and young people, their life-chances, health and well-being can be enhanced through a varied use of onsite and offsite outdoor locations and activities. This is because outdoor learning has multiple impacts in terms of physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, resilience and personal development, it is of value not only within education settings but in the journey beyond education into the world of work and within the wider community.

Appreciating some children face barriers to their learning and development and require specific support to access outdoor learning, this strategy emphasises inclusion.

We recognise the importance of collaborative working with a wide range of stakeholders to enable, maintain and strengthen high standards of outdoor educational provision for our children and young people.

We commend the frequent use of our local areas including school grounds, local parks as well as opportunities for excursions and residential experiences across the United Kingdom in the delivery of outdoor learning.

Objectives

The objectives, arising from the evidence base and feedback received from surveying education settings, outline what Warwickshire County Council will do to promote, support and enable the delivery of outdoor education and learning by education settings.

1. To encourage, promote and support education settings to deliver their outdoor education and learning by providing information:
 - a. We will develop an on-line directory of outdoor venues and activity providers who offer high quality outdoor education and learning opportunities.
 - b. We will signpost online resources useful for the planning and coordination of outdoor education and learning.
2. To provide an opportunity for education leaders to share best practice and inspire each other and all their children and young people in the pursuit of education and learning outdoors, enabling inclusion.

- a. We will survey education settings, children and young people on an annual basis to understand their needs and wants of Outdoor Education and Learning
 - b. We will establish a collaborative professional development network for Leads of Outdoor Education and Learning/ Education Visit Co-ordinators and encourage all schools to make a commitment to actively engage.
 - c. We will promote access for disadvantaged pupils to outdoor education and learning opportunities by signposting to advice, funding sources and best practice information on promoting inclusion.
 - d. We will help to raise awareness among education leaders of local environmental issues and their relationship to the global climate.
3. To build on the experience of education providers, to enable the development of local services, facilities and activities, and to strengthen the provision of outdoor education and learning opportunities.
 - a. We will act as a link between education settings, County, District and Borough Council teams (e.g. those providing outdoor facilities, or who can offer information and support for learning outdoors), as well as wider stakeholders both within and outside of Warwickshire.
 - b. We will strengthen the links between nature, people, learning and skills.
 - c. We will facilitate the provision by the Council and others of lifelong education and learning opportunities outdoors.

The strategy will be supported by a dynamic Delivery Plan detailing how we will achieve the objectives and identify how we will measure the impact of this strategy.

Measuring Success

This strategy has focused on providing the conditions to enable education settings in Warwickshire to be best equipped to deliver outdoor education and learning. We recognise that measuring the impact of outdoor learning on the lives of children and young people is complex and through the Delivery Plan we will seek to establish base-line data.

We will know the strategy has been successful because:
Education leaders report:

- They feel better equipped and supported to deliver outdoor education and learning.
- Their children and young people are developing the skills they need to flourish in life through the outdoor education and learning opportunities that they provide.

Children and young people report via the annual Child Friendly Warwickshire survey:

- They have increasing opportunities to learn outdoors
- They have had increased positive experiences from engaging in outdoor activities and opportunities

It is anticipated the Strategy will impact on the following Council priorities:

- Reducing health inequalities
- Supporting mental health
- Child friendly Warwickshire
- Climate change

Our intention is to review the strategy in 2024/2025 and to take account of the learning and progress against the Delivery Plan.