

Outdoor Education & Learning Strategy Evidence Base

Introduction

Outdoor learning refers to discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the natural world, and engaging in environmental and adventure activities. It is an arena of education which has been extensively researched and developed over many decades.

Outdoor learning support organisations and providers include specialist organisations (e.g. the Institute for Outdoor Learning); local authorities; voluntary and community sector based organisations and charitable/awarding bodies (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh, Scouts, Brownies); and market based providers. This sector is valued by educators, children and young people, parents/carers, and those who understand its importance in growth and holistic development.

Outdoor learning can be more than structured education opportunities delivered by teachers outdoors or on the site of an education setting. It can encompass the array of opportunities to learn and develop presented by the outdoors and can be delivered by professionals, parents/carers and children and young people themselves through a variety of outdoor environments.

The following evidence base has sought to group together the various elements of insight about the impact of Outdoor Education and Learning. The following provides highlights and links in relation to the impact of Outdoor Education:

Data¹:

- Within Warwickshire the population cohort 0-19 is 129,634 of the total County Population (577,933). The following table breaks this down into age cohorts:

Age Grp	Count	%
0-4	31,870	5.5
5-9	34,051	5.9
10-14	33,308	5.8
15-19	30,405	5.3
Total	129,634	

- 12% of Children are living in low-income families within Warwickshire.
- 72% of children in Warwickshire achieve a Good Level of Development as defined in terms of the Early Year's Foundation Stage. However, within this 64.7% of males and 79.4% females achieve a Good Level of Development, 53% of children on Free School Meals achieve a Good Level of Development and 66% of Black and Minority Ethnic children achieve a Good Level of Development.

¹ Data taken from: <https://data.warwickshire.gov.uk/>

- Around 71% of children reach the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 2 and 47% of disadvantage learners reach the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Within Warwickshire there are 2,785 children and young people with a Special Educational Needs or Education, Health or Care Plan. Of these around 1,544 are in a special school context.

1. Outdoor education, training and recreation promote active learning through direct personal experience and offer excitement, fun and adventure within a framework of safety.

Links to Warwickshire Education(WE) Strategy: Early Years, SEND & Inclusion
Other WCC Links: Children and Young People Strategy (in development)

Summary of the evidence

- Learning outdoors can take place in a variety of environments: rural and urban, local, and more remote.
- Learning Outdoors should have a purpose whether this is discovery, understanding the importance of play or engaging with awe and wonderment of the outdoor environment
- Methods used include skills-focused learning, problem solving, team building, with residential experience an especially valued feature
- The use of outdoor learning within school relies upon the skills and insights of teachers, the support of the school and senior leadership
- However, there are challenges – Skills and experience of educators, space in the curriculum, access to outside spaces, resources, and the methods by which schools are assessed all present challenges in terms of schools making use of Outdoor Education.
- Outdoor education can involve both young people and adults in a wide range of experiences, including with an environmental focus.
- Limited research has been undertaken with regards to Secondary and Post-16 learning. This is likely to reflect the challenges around fit with the curriculum leading up to exams.

Evidence

- In 2016, Natural England produced a report 'Natural Connections' which explored the challenges around delivering Outdoor Education
<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6636651036540928>
- DfE produced a report about embedding Outdoor Education (2012) this was primarily focused on Primary School
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leadership-for-embedding-outdoor-learning-within-the-primary-curriculum>
- Marchant E, Todd C, Cooksey R, Dredge S, Jones H, Reynolds D, et al. (2019) Curriculum-based outdoor learning for children aged 9-11: A qualitative analysis of pupils' and teachers' views. PLoS ONE 14(5): e0212242.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0212242>

- Prince, Heather (2019) Changes in outdoor learning in primary schools in England, 1995 and 2017: lessons for good practice. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 19(4). p p. 329-342.
- Dillon *et al*, (2006) 'The value of outdoor learning: evidence and research in the UK elsewhere', *School Science Review*, 87(320) March 2006.
- <https://www.field-studies-council.org/> - provides an insight into the impact of field work on young people
- <https://www.outdoor-learning-research.org/> overview of key research related to outdoor learning
- <https://happen-wales.co.uk/outdoor-learning-has-huge-benefits-for-children-and-teachers-so-why-isnt-it-used-in-more-schools/> - provides a summary of some of the challenges which are faced in delivering Outdoor Education
- <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/how-play-helps-childrens-development>

2. Challenging experience outdoors supports intellectual, physical, social, and moral development.

Links to WE Strategy: Early Years, SEND & Inclusion, Family of Schools and Employability

Other WCC Links: Careers Strategy

- Use of the outdoors makes a major contribution to physical and environmental education and enhances many other curriculum areas.
- It contributes to personal growth and social awareness and develops skills for life and the world of work.
- Qualities such as a sense of responsibility and a purpose in life are nurtured.
- There is also a great deal of intrinsic enjoyment and satisfaction to be experienced from participation in outdoor activities.

Evidence

- October 2020 Summary of Impacts of Covid-19 on Children and Young People
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/effect-of-pandemic-on-childrens-wellbeing-revealed-in-new-report>
- Report from Outward Bound on Young People and Covid-19
https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/free-report-young-people-and-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR1YIZMDfMIXOoB5J058LwAGQpBYyLjKssW2_6-VN12AxuVAO5_Xmyhk_4o

3. Britain has a long tradition in the field of outdoor education, training, and recreation, reflecting the strong place of exploration and adventure within our heritage.

Links to WE Strategy: Early Years, SEND & Inclusion and Employability

Other WCC Links: Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy 2020 - 2025

- Distinction between formal education and learning outcomes enhanced and augmented by delivery in the outdoors and informal and developmental education that is a result of participating, engaging, and making use of the outdoors
- The work of VCS based organisations as well as Awarding Bodies and Charities such as the Scout and Guide movements, Outward Bound and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award offer an alternative means of delivering Outdoor Education, both outside of the school system and the approach of the County Council
- Whilst Outdoor Education is mostly delivered through schools, the value of outdoor spaces to VCS organisation provides a natural extension to the value of utilising resources such as green spaces outside of a purely school-based environment.
- VCS especially create and manage outdoor ed e.g. football teams, scouts etc and many outdoor places are community assets some of which are managed by VCS
- This presents an opportunity to consider the value of looking at Outdoor Education in relation to elements of civic participation as well.

Evidence

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/activity-passport-to-inspire-schoolchildren-and-boost-resilience>
- Report from Outward Bound on Young People and Covid-19
https://www.outwardbound.org.uk/free-report-young-people-and-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR1YIZMDfMIXOoB5J058LwAGQpBYyLjKssW2_6-VN12AxuVAO5_Xmyhk_4o
- Educating for the Modern World: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Annual Report 2018

4. Building self-confidence and self-esteem is fundamental to development.

Links to WE Strategy: Early Years, SEND & Inclusion, Family of Schools and Employability

Other WCC Links: Public Health, Children and Young People Strategy (in development), Careers Strategy

- Outdoor activities provide valuable alternative, often non-competitive, avenues for achievement, as well as opportunities to develop independence and self-reliance.
- Experience in the outdoors provides rich opportunities for personal and social development through carefully structured group work in challenging situations.
- Trust, care, tolerance, and the willingness to give and accept support are all encouraged and anti-social behaviour is challenged.
- Opportunities are presented to exhibit and develop effective inter-personal behaviour and to work co-operatively and effectively in teams.

Evidence

- Provided in other links throughout the evidence base see under (1), (2) and (5)

5. The purposeful use of leisure time is an important contribution to a fulfilling lifestyle.

Links to WE Strategy: Early Years, SEND & Inclusion and Employability

Other WCC Links: Green Spaces, Public Health

- Outdoor recreation introduces young people to a range of worthwhile leisure pursuits which will enrich their future lives and develops the skills and knowledge essential for safe participation.
- Outdoor exercise contributes greatly to health and fitness and continuing participation in outdoor pursuits encourages the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle into middle age and beyond.
- Warwickshire's recent Public Health Impact Assessment regarding the impact of Covid-19 has highlighted the impact on households with Children in terms of increase need for food parcel and support. Whilst outdoor activities will not help directly with these, the benefits for children and young people can be seen holistically in terms of the child's development and could help to offset some of the wider determinants of health associated with poorer health outcomes.
- Access to Green Spaces is also critical and Public Health England has recently reviewed the importance of these, building on a 2014 review and briefing on the value of green spaces. The main summary from Greenspaces:
 - There is significant and growing evidence on the health benefits of access to good quality green spaces. The benefits include better self-rated health; overweight and obesity levels; improved mental health and wellbeing; increased longevity.
 - There is unequal access to green space across England. People living in the most deprived areas are less likely to live near green spaces and will therefore have fewer opportunities to experience the health benefits of green space compared with people living in less deprived areas.
 - Increasing the use of good quality green space for all social groups is likely to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities. It can also bring other benefits such as greater community cohesion and reduced social isolation.
 - Local authorities play a vital role in protecting, maintaining, and improving local green spaces and can create new areas of green space to improve access for all communities. Such efforts require joint work across different parts of the local authority and beyond, particularly public health, planning, transport, and parks and leisure

Evidence

- NI Direct – Northern Ireland's Government portal highlights the importance of outdoor leisure <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/playing-outdoors#:~:text=and%20young%20people.-,Benefits%20of%20outdoor%20play%20on%20children's%20well%2Dbeing,try%20new%20activities>
- Larson, L. R., Whiting, J. W., Green, G. T., (2013). Young people's outdoor recreation and state park use: Perceived benefits from the parent/guardian perspective. Children, Youth and Environments, 23(3), 89-117.

- Coventry and Warwickshire COVID-19 Health Impact Assessment: Coventry and Warwickshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment July 2020
- <https://beyondgreenspace.net/2020/07/29/improving-access-to-greenspace-a-new-review-for-2020/> & the 2014 review is https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355792/Briefing8_Green_spaces_health_inequalities.pdf

6. Outdoor opportunities enable children & young people to engage with the key issue of Climate Change.

Links to WE Strategy: Early Years, SEND & Inclusion

Other WCC Links: Climate Change, Green Spaces, Public Health

- Active learning and adventure outdoors introduce young people to the environment in a way which develops understanding appreciation, awe, wonder and respect.
- It fosters sensitivity to the environment, helps young people to see themselves in a global context and helps to develop citizens with an awareness of the need for sustainable use of the world's natural resources.

Evidence

- Hill, Allen 'Developing approaches to outdoor education that promote sustainability education', *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 16(1), 15-27, 2012
- <https://www.outdoor-learning.org/Good-Practice/Good-Practice/Climate-Change>

7. Outdoor experiences promote resilience, adaptability, and integrity within children & young people.

Links to WE Strategy: Early Years, SEND & Inclusion, Family of Schools and Employability

Other WCC Links: VCS, Climate Change,

- Challenging outdoor experiences promote the development of communication, problem solving and decision-making skills which have currency across a range of occupations.
- Young people's horizons are broadened, helping to create experiences which can enhance resilience,
- Values and attitudes developed in a context of shared endeavour help to form a sound basis for responsible citizenship.
- The Scottish Government produced an explicit reference to Outdoor learning within its Curriculum for Excellence which linked to the Scottish Government's overarching strategic objectives towards 'creating a more successful country':
 - *Smarter* – Outdoor learning encourages learners to understand the interplay and relationship between curriculum areas. This awareness promotes lifelong learning and develops critical thinking skills.
 - *Healthier* – Learning outdoors can lead to lifelong recreation. Activities such as walking and cycling which are ideal for physical and emotional wellbeing contribute to a healthier Scotland. Scots have a reputation for adventure

activities such as mountaineering and have achieved international sporting success in canoeing, sailing, and skiing.

- *Safer and stronger* – Outdoor learning activities span social divisions and can help build stronger communities. Some organisations have therapeutic programmes where outdoor learning plays a central role. Children and young people have opportunities to develop skills to assess and manage risk when making decisions.
- *Greener* – Frequent and regular outdoor learning encourages children and young people to engage with the natural and built heritage. Scotland's countryside and urban areas provide ideal settings for children and young people to understand the global significance of sustainability issues and inform personal decisions that contribute towards a greener Scotland.
- *Wealthier and fairer* – The outdoors provides excellent opportunities to use a wide range of skills and abilities not always visible in the classroom. Becoming aware of such skills can fundamentally change personal, peer and staff perceptions and lead to profound changes in life expectations and success.

Evidence

- Curriculum for Excellence Through Outdoor Learning, Learning & Teaching Scotland, 2010