



Architecture and Design Scotland Outdoor Learning: The Extended Classroom





Historically, geographically, climatically and culturally, Scotland offers schools and their pupils one of the richest and most varied outdoor classrooms in the world. Our own back yard – whether that is rural, urban or suburban – is one of the greatest resources available in taking forward the aims, principles and values of Curriculum for Excellence.

Outdoor Learning may be seen as an ‘extended classroom’, encompassing all learning environments beyond the school wall. This pamphlet seeks to set out the potential and opportunities of taking this approach.

What is Outdoor Learning?

Outdoor Learning is about creating the richest, most varied and stimulating environment in which to educate our young people. The terms of education are changing, and the spaces and settings within which they learn are significant in shaping their experiences and developing their skills.

Outdoor Learning is of course about play and the development of social, physical, emotional and cognitive skills, but it is also a means of enriching the experiences of every aspect of learning from early years through to secondary school and beyond. Outdoor Learning can take place in the school grounds, but it can also be about creating a network of learning opportunities in the widest sense, and tapping into resources beyond the school gate.

The school is the hub for a range of learning settings, which radiate out from the classroom. However, if we think more broadly about learning opportunities, what happens to the learning picture if we think about mapping in the school grounds, the immediate locality surrounding the school, the wider town and community, and even the wider world? The classroom is no longer the only, or always the best space for learning.

Learning can be a much enriched set of experiences if we take the principles of Curriculum for Excellence – challenge and enjoyment, personalisation and choice, relevance - and look at how the wider environment can be used as a resource to deliver these. Of course there are challenges, but as we'll see in the case studies, there are many ways to achieving this.

Investment in our schools, towns and communities can be an important step to delivering better environments for learning – but before money is spent it is worth investigating and understanding how a whole place can best be used for education. In order to initiate change, and ultimately great spaces for learning, we must begin by having conversations to understand the existing context of a place, and the hopes and ambitions for learning.



Potential: Views of an Educationalist

Learning in the 'extended classroom' takes it beyond the school building into a multitude of new environments; outdoor, indoor, natural, built, wild, cultivated, purposeful or spontaneous. By recognising Outdoor Learning as all learning that takes place beyond the school wall, we can develop a more relevant and enriching series of learning experiences.

There is potential for learning in shops, factories, farms and other workplaces to enrich the learning experience of children as much as gardens, allotments, beaches, theatres, museums and libraries. By recognising this, we can enable deeper and more relevant knowledge and understanding, as well as forging more meaningful links between schools and communities.

Outdoor learning is already associated with environmental awareness, rural skills and physical education, as well as educational visits, outward bound ventures and other outreach and extra-curricular activities. But there is the opportunity to use the outdoor classroom to expand learning in almost every curricular direction. It has the capacity to enhance and embed core elements of the curriculum in ways that complement traditional classroom activities and which provide necessary variation and inspiration for children. Inter-disciplinary learning with an outdoor focus seizes opportunities offered by Curriculum for Excellence to organise learning in different and more integrated ways – no more so than involving pupils in the design and construction of real community projects, including their school and its grounds.

This view of outdoor learning starts to embrace the principles of maximisation of resources coming from strands of work such as the Whole Town Review, and offers ways in which schools can be connected with Community Planning and Place-making. This document aims to provide a re-interpretation of outdoor learning and recognise that the opportunity to create a larger proportion of learning secured by ‘real life’ examples and experiences is both practicable and achievable and has a potentially important place in a broader and more varied curriculum. By enabling a wider interpretation and exploration of outdoor learning we could feasibly start to imagine the local cinema or garage as an extended classroom setting, just as much as we would a woodland or loch.

The key to success is in its sustainability and being embedded in the curriculum as a key component, and it is about strengthening the links between communities who accept their role as partners in learning and teaching.



Policy



The Scottish Government recognises the importance of developing outdoor and civic spaces for the benefit of communities, and increasing the opportunity for outdoor learning experiences.

By better linking investments in the school estate, civic space and national projects to educational outcomes we can achieve more with the money we spend. Not only is this about investing in a better built environment, it is also about improving connections between communities and the decision making process.

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) sets out to provide a ‘totality of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, wherever they are being educated’ (Education Scotland). Part of this ambition is to develop a wide range of capacities in our young people to help them develop knowledge, skills and attributes for learning, life and work.

Within this context, Outdoor Learning is an integral element of the Curriculum for Excellence. The curriculum recognises that Outdoor Learning can provide opportunities for ‘connections with the real world outside the classroom, from school grounds to streets of cities’. Learning can happen anywhere!

Learning for Sustainability and Education Scotland recognises that the term ‘Outdoor Learning’ does not fully encompass the breadth of learning opportunities there are beyond the school gates. It can be more than creating an outdoor garden, but rather is an approach to learning which encourages active participation, global citizenship, and involving learners in meaningful decision-making.

The School Estate also has an important role to play in the development of school grounds, by encouraging a more integrated approach to change, and a more innovative approach to design. The means by which to understand how and what to invest in can be achieved through good consultation.

Civic investment and the development of outdoor spaces in itself and be an educational opportunity, and can be a way of involving our young people in an active decision making process.

In order to create vibrant, sustainable communities, it is essential that services are built around the needs of that community. Where civic investment is being made, from small through to large scale, there is benefit in having conversations with those whose lives it will impact.

A good place to start is with the school and its pupils. Schools are at the heart of our communities and by bringing together those commissioning change with those delivering education we can enhance not only the physical investment, it can also deliver significant educational benefit.

At the heart of briefing for outdoor learning and civic investment is participation. By talking and listening to our communities we can uncover a wide range of possibilities and potential, but it is important to set out the parameters for change and ask the right questions. It’s not about asking for a wish list for investment, it’s about understanding the desires and ambitions of our communities and working with them to create an action plan for change.

Participation



Participation is about placing learners at the heart of decision making. It is about engaging with the everyday users of space and place, as the experts of their environments.

In itself, participation can offer a rich and varied learning opportunity, embracing a range of cross-curricular potential. It also has the power to encourage our young people to be engaged, active citizens who value and enjoy our built and natural environment.

The environment beyond the school wall offers a vast array of learning opportunities – from school grounds, to streets of cities. Participation is one means to unlock its potential, to understand how pupils see their environment and how they want to learn in it.

When considering how to develop approaches to outdoor learning – either at small scale (i.e. in the playground), medium scale (i.e. the schools surroundings) or larger scale (i.e. the whole town, neighbourhood or village) – one way to start is to speak to the pupils. When given the opportunity and space to develop ideas, pupils will provide imaginative and innovative suggestions.

By creating a brief for outdoor learning through participation, it can unlock opportunities for change at a range of different levels;

- Small scale projects, which pupils can lead on
- Medium scale projects, which might require some additional outside support, including local businesses, neighbouring community groups
- Larger scale projects, which might involve a bigger project within the neighbourhood, town or village, and collaboration with external agencies (e.g. local authority)

It is important in the communication with students that realistic parameters are given, whilst still allowing space and freedom to allow creative and innovative ideas to emerge. The context of change is important to convey to students, and providing timescales and financial constraints are crucial to having an open and honest conversation.

Participation can provide a strong mandate for change. It can help to gather evidence of how school users want to learn and teach, and can be a key to understanding the needs of the community.

For more information about examples of participation projects, and opportunities for developing them, look at [A Guide to Participation: What we've learnt so far](#)

Opportunities



A new approach to outdoor learning which sees the school as the hub for learning in the world, and gives outdoor learning a more central place in the curriculum can create opportunities for teachers, pupils and schools. It opens up access to free resources for teachers, creates a platform for schools to build a different relationship with their community and for pupils to be enriched by a greater knowledge of their place and the application of learning in a real life setting.

This range of opportunities can be seen as lying in three concentric rings, of which the school is at the centre. Here are some general ways in which to consider opportunities within these areas.

The School Grounds:

Areas Immediately Surrounding the School

See Case Studies 1, 2, 3 and 6

School grounds offer a range of benefits, for play, socialising and learning. Being outdoors, and having the opportunity to play remains equally important throughout childhood – from early years through to adulthood. It is important that children and young people have the freedom to choose how and when they play, and a good place to start is in the playground (Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision).

In a secondary school context, there is little doubt that children engage much better with creation of space and opportunities, rather than maintenance. So it is important to re-invent or re-create aspects of existing outdoor ‘classrooms’ in order to stimulate interest. This can be challenging, but the phasing of a development and the engagement with different groups of outside agencies or helpers can help with this.

Good practice already exists, (from Grounds for Learning, Eco Schools, Scottish Government and Local Authorities amongst others). The test of innovation, however, is in its sustainability and its being embedded in the curriculum as a key component.

School grounds can also be seen as a stepping stone to venturing further afield, and used as a space where ideas and pedagogy can be tested easily. Some key benefits of learning in school grounds include;

- Convenient immediacy
- Teachers are likely to be familiar with the school grounds
- Schools have control over what goes into their school grounds and how it is arranged
- Risk (or risk/benefit) assessments are more complex once pupils and teachers go off-site adding a layer of complexity to planning

The Streets and Routes:

Connecting Areas in which Pupils Live and Learn

See Case Studies 2, 4, 6 and 7

In order to fulfil the aims of broad general education, pupils should be engaging with the world in which they live. By going out into the community, pupils are able to learn about how plans are made and decisions taken with regard to their immediate environment.

One of the commitments that a teacher and school need to make if they are to take their classes beyond the school grounds, is to learn for themselves what the local area has to offer.

Opportunities exist to engage with residents, community councils, local council departments and businesses. Best practice sees pupils participating in different forums, and taking an active role in influencing decisions, particularly those that affect them. When pupils are involved – in the design and placement of new schools, roads, houses, parks and so on – they are not only understanding and investing in their environment, they are also building relationships with the adults and discovering more about careers and the world of work. Going beyond the school does require more planning, and it would be useful to become familiar with how long it takes to get from one learning space to another, how to get to and from the school safely, and the location of toilet facilities (see section on Planning for Learning).

Some schools have developed ways of making outdoor learning part of the daily routine by ensuring general consents and permission forms are completed at the start of the year, and kept centrally so there is no need to issue extra paperwork. Some key considerations of teaching and learning beyond the school boundaries;

- To embed learning beyond the school walls, planning must happen over the long term
- It should be progressive, more innovative and daring as confidence and competence grows
- Teaching and learning should be planned in the context of what the environment can offer as well as what the curriculum requires

- For a school to engage in environments beyond the school wall the offer must clearly bring additional benefit to the learning experience

Whole Town:

Potential for Connections between the School and other Buildings and Institutions

See Case Studies 2, 5, 6 and 7

As schools look to develop new and more meaningful two-way partnerships with wider communities and exploit existing resources within those communities to complement and enhance school classroom learning, it is useful to include ‘alternative classrooms’ within that vision. Places which have specialist facilities already developed, usually for non-school purposes (e.g. theatres, cinemas, garden centres, churches, courtrooms, galleries).

Additional to taking learning to specialist facilities, it is useful to explore the idea of learning taking place within the community and teaching being undertaken in ‘real’ spaces, and where possible with contributions from specialist experts. Again, this is not talking about the occasional visit that constitutes part of a project or depends on a personal connection, we are looking at the formation of working relationships that benefit both partners: giving schools access to facilities that cannot be created within existing buildings and budgets, and external partners opportunities to promote careers and attitudes that have longer term benefits for communities as a whole.

Learning in the widest context is not dependent only on specialist buildings and well founded relationships, it can also be supported by every outdoor space. Pathways, planting, legends, signage, architectural design and art installations can all contribute to every walk being a learning walk, thereby maximising time resources when travelling between spaces. Some key considerations of teaching and learning within a whole town;

- Timetabling is important. Ensure there are (at least) double periods to help accommodate learning outside the classroom
- Creativity and resourcefulness will stimulate the most positive partnerships, and the involvement of young people themselves in the formation of these partnerships can be part of the learning process
- Allow pupils to arrange their own learning opportunities by creating the structure that lets them plan and arrange a programme of learning

Case Studies

- 1: Kirkcudbright Academy
- 2: Tain Royal Academy
- 3: Perth Academy
- 4: Hillpark Secondary School
- 5: Speyside High School
- 6: Liberton High School
- 7: Gairloch High School

Kirkcudbright Academy: Using the Outdoors for Thematic Learning



Key Facts

Where: Sits on the western edge of Kirkcudbright, Dumfries and Galloway and the east coast of Kirkcudbright Bay.

School Roll: 540 approx.

What: Variety of outdoor spaces developed for curricular use, both in the school grounds and beyond

Summary:

The Beechgrove Garden project provided a catalyst for the Academy's approach to using the school grounds for learning. In the 14 years since this project, the school has gradually claimed different spaces around the school as spaces for learning used by all curricular areas (planted beds, Remembrance Garden, courtyards, greenhouse, outdoor classroom/gathering space with seating on a raised platform, woodland walk amongst others).

The garden project coincided with a review of the schools syllabus. The aim of the review was to maximise the curricular options available to all pupils at a small secondary school. The school adopted a thematic approach to learning and Outdoor Learning became embedded. Pupils are used to seeing staff and pupils outdoors and groups working outside are not a distraction to pupils in overlooking classrooms, as outdoor learning is now a routine experience.

The Academy has worked with a number of partners to achieve the best opportunities and outcomes for its pupils. It has used ASDAN Key Skills schemes of work to support learning in different curricular areas, a local artist has helped pupils create beach art, and the school has worked with charities and businesses (Forestry Commission, the Royal National Lifeboats Institution and West Coast Sea Products) to reflect its setting and the community it serves.

Education Benefit:

- Learning about and experiencing the local environment so that pupils can make the most of the facilities on their doorstep, and recognise the contribution it can make to maintaining their own health and wellbeing
- Pupils learn how to access the environment safely and responsibly
- Thematic approach allows for curricular coverage and the development of progression pathways

Key Messages

- **Make the most of local context and connections for relevant learning opportunities**
- **General consents or block consents kept for blocks of work, and a bank of risk assessments kept on file. Pupils can be involved in creating risk assessments as part of lesson plans, and covered within the Health and Wellbeing curriculum.**
- **Double period lessons frees up the timetable for outdoor learning**
- **Collaboration between departments maximises opportunities for learning, but time must be available to develop relationships and work out shared programmes of work.**

Tain Royal Academy: Community Collaboration to Build a Classroom in School Grounds



Key Facts

Where: In the centre of the small town of Tain on the Dornoch Firth in the Highlands. They share a campus with Tain Royal Academy Community Complex.

School Roll: 480 approx.

What: A class of pupils built a classroom in the school grounds to give themselves dedicated space for their Construction Skills course.

Summary:

Pupils had previously made hour long trips to Inverness College each week to attend the Construction Skills course, however it was decided that this was not efficient use of school time. Space was not available in the school building, so pupils suggested that they build a classroom in the grounds of the school.

A range of local businesses supported the technical detail of the build, however the physical structure was constructed by the pupils who worked closely with their Technical teacher. The work was accomplished during the timetabled periods, as well as two additional afternoons.

The site was treated as a professional working site, and pupils were appointed roles and responsibilities, such as Site Safety Officer. They worked in all weathers in order to build a fully functioning classroom designed to meet the needs of their course.

The outcome is a spacious, well lit classroom which has generous space for class activities. Though it is for use by the Construction class, other departments have asked to borrow the space for other uses.

Education Benefit:

- Real life context and challenges which cannot be experienced in the classroom
- Health and Safety, and Risk Assessments can be integrated as part of the curriculum, and part of the learning experience
- Discuss obstacles with pupils and encourage them to take responsibility
- Pupils learn how to access the environment safely and responsibly

Key Messages

- **Full support from class teacher and management team. A project can build confidence of staff and provide encouragement to take on new challenges**
- **Harness the experience, skills and good will of the local community (including professional bodies)**
- **Take on board ideas of pupils, who use experiences as part of the curriculum**



Perth Academy: A Rich Community Learning Resource

Key Facts

Where: On the south side of Perth, the school shares a campus with Oakbank Primary School and Fairview School.

School Roll: 1000 approx.

What: A dedicated Outdoor Learning Resource was built close to the main school entrance and next to the science department. As a condition of the funding, it is made available to the wider community.

Summary:

The Outdoor Learning Resource consists of a collection of two outdoor classrooms with tables and benches, a school garden, hedging, woodland planting, and a drama space. The area serves as a place to learn, a place to gather pupils who have been working outdoors elsewhere in the school grounds, and as a social space used during breaks and lunchtimes.

The outdoor classrooms can accommodate 20-30 pupils and are used by all departments. One has a canopy to shelter the seating from the rain, and at the request of teachers, a large whiteboard has been mounted outside too. To some extent, both classrooms are sheltered by the walls of the school building, but hedging and tree planting have been added to promote biodiversity and to create a wind barrier.

A triangular stage and seating area have been built – and although originally for the Drama Department, this performance area has a multi-purpose function for learning, teaching and social space. A living willow fence and archways were planted to mark out the area and to screen it from the road. Pupils worked with a sculptor to design and plant the willow after learning about the properties of the plant and researching willow sculptures around the world.

The school garden is used by many departments – home economics pupils plant and harvest herbs and vegetables, and compost waste; modern language pupils have created labels in Italian for parts of the garden; the maths department use the garden as a real life context for learning about measure;

biology have grown plants from seed to use in the garden and in containers and hanging baskets; and the technical department built the equipment shed using an ex display DIY kit. Teachers report that engagement and therefore behaviour have improved as a result of the increased use of outdoor spaces.

Education Benefit:

- Wide cross-curricular educational opportunities
- Competitions raise the profile of the resource, both within the school and wider community
- Business enterprise/fundraising opportunities through cultivation and sale of plants

Key Messages

- **Placing the Learning Resource in a very visible and easily accessed area means that pupils and adults are constantly reminded of its usefulness and availability**
- **Planning for community use, including disabled access, opens up additional funding opportunities**
- **Fundraising within the school community raises the profile of projects and helps develop a greater sense of involvement and ownership**



Hillpark Secondary School: Building Confidence through a Structured Curriculum Programme

Case Study 4: Hillpark Secondary School

Key Facts

Where: Hillpark Secondary School is on the South Side of Glasgow, and is a 20-30 minute walk from the entrance to Pollok Country Park.

School Roll: 980 approx.

What: Using the John Muir Award scheme to drive the extension and development of Outdoor Learning at the school.

Summary:

The John Muir Award scheme has been a catalyst for developing outdoor learning at the school. It provided short term cross curricular targets, with an obvious need to work outdoors. It was also a way of allowing staff who had less confidence to work with the support of colleagues. Condensing the work into one week, and having a shared goal across curricular areas made the task a less daunting one.

A Learning Support teacher, with strong support from the Senior Management team used the Award scheme to stimulate both pupil and staff engagement. For a week during summer term, all S1 pupils were put forward for the John Muir Award at Discover Level. Keeping to the existing timetable, teachers were asked to deliver lessons in support of the Award and were required to teach at least one period outside. The Learning Support teacher supported staff with suggested lesson plans linking the learning to the curriculum.

The week was a success in engaging both staff and pupils. There was an overwhelmingly positive reaction from staff who were surprised by the improved pupil engagement and positive change in interactions between pupils, and between adults and pupils.

As part of the Award, the school contacted the Rangers at Pollok Park, and arranged a trip to support their conservation work. Before going to the park, there were concerns about the behaviour of such a large group walking from the school – however, staff reported that behaviour was good, and allowed an opportunity for staff and pupils to have conversations with each other. Furthermore, pupils were enthusiastic about exploring their local area (some had never visited the park before).

It has sparked further interest in renovating outdoor spaces, having taken ideas from working with local Early Years groups. They have cleared and renovated the overgrown woodland garden, reinstated paths and walls, and made bug hotels. Pupils have brought a space for learning back into use, and are clearly proud of the contribution they have made to the life of the school.

Education Benefit:

- Pupils can demonstrate new skills and strengths which are not obvious in a classroom setting. Outdoor Learning also promotes a sense of self-worth and confidence
- The physical evidence of work accomplished helps instil a sense of pride in the school and their local area
- Working with different outside agencies provides structure, support and resources. It also allows pupils to meet professionals in different fields

Key Messages

- **Develop staff confidence by initiating a short term project with cross curricular targets. Working with the support of colleagues and having shared goals is helpful**
- **Building trust between staff and students is important to have confidence in leaving the school grounds. And have a bank of risk assessments, which reduces the need for each new project or task**
- **Not to underestimate the experience of visiting and exploring the local environment – for some pupils it may be their first opportunity**

Speyside High School: Developing School and Grounds as a Learning Opportunity



Key Facts

Where: Located in the small town of Aberlour, the school has the largest catchment area in Britain and falls within the Cairngorm National Park. The town sits along the River Spey.

School Roll: 480 approx.

What: The school has a strong background in outdoor learning, but with support of a dedicated outdoor learning staff member the school are further exploring the opportunities for learning within the school grounds, and beyond.

Summary:

The senior management team strongly supports the promotion of outdoor learning and the delivery of the curriculum outside of the classroom. This has been developed with the support of a teacher tasked with further developing outdoor learning and leadership.

The school was already doing considerable outdoor adventure activities – mountain biking, kayaking, orienteering – all of which could be done locally, or at a nearby outdoor centre. However, more has been done to develop other curricular opportunities. A number of trees were felled in order to build an extension for the school, but before they were cut pupils from an art class began a project to study trees. The trees themselves were recorded in drawings and paintings, pupils were asked to consider the age of trees, what they would have seen in their life span and the stories they might have told. Faces were created from clay and attached to the trees. Now the trees have been cut, timber has been saved and a chainsaw artist will work with the school to create sculptures and seating for social spaces.

Other spaces are being exploited for learning, sometimes in areas which don't initially appear promising. For example, a sloped and previously overgrown wooded area is being used as a school garden where raised beds will be built and vegetable plots created. Pupils have been clearing the area, and are involved in fundraising for the project.

Links with external partners and businesses have been established, and this enhances the pupil experiences, and provides real life contexts for learner.

Education Benefit:

- Developing partnerships and relationships with community groups and organisations offer real life contexts for learning
- Enriched learning experiences by utilising space within and outwith the school, and seeing opportunities for learning in the process of developing outdoor space
- Involving pupils in decision making

Key Messages

- **Look for the opportunities afforded by spaces however small or awkward, and develop what you have**
- **Create time for collaboration between staff and between subject areas so that teachers can share and extend their practice**
- **Consider double periods to allow more lessons in the grounds and beyond**



Liberton High School: Building Confidence and Progression in Learning beyond the School

Key Facts

Where: On the southern side of Edinburgh with views across the city towards Arthur's Seat.

School Roll: 650 approx.

What: A supported role in Outdoor Learning was created in order to develop opportunities in its extensive grounds.

Summary:

A number of positive programmes of work have been established at the school which look to adopt an approach which builds progression into learning. Geography in particular has begun with work in the classroom and the immediate outdoor environment (school grounds), before taking the learning further afield into the local area (applying and adding to skills and knowledge). Finally, learning is taken into the wider environment on extended trips away from the school (e.g. Arthur's Seat) where the pupils can further apply knowledge and skills gained. This is not regarded simply as a 'day out', but part of a carefully planned and structured learning progression.

Spaces around the school are also being developed for a number of purposes. There is a small enclosed courtyard which is home to the school hens, which are fed and looked after each day by pupils. There is a school garden containing raised beds which is used as a potting shed / greenhouse by the Eco Schools Group. Young orchards, planted to a pupil design, are on the south side of the school on the slopes above the tarmac.

The geography department, whose teacher is the lead for outdoor learning, are driving the use of a large tarmac space at the rear of the school. To develop the space, pupils have designed outdoor classrooms which will be taken forward and built.

Many other opportunities are being made to take learning outdoors throughout the school. As a way of ensuring continuation of their good work, departments and faculties will work together to evaluate what has been done so far, and identify ways to embed and extend outdoor learning across the curriculum.

Education Benefit:

- Pupils who work regularly outside are developing a sense of place and a sense of connection and pride in their school grounds
- Pupils appear engaged with their learning, and are themselves providing feedback to ensure development and progression

Key Messages

- **The role of a lead in outdoor learning was supported by the Council. This provides time and resource for staff development and collaboration**
- **Pupils can build skills in the safe and familiar school environment, which can then be applied further afield, perhaps in more challenging environments**
- **Make Outdoor Learning part of the daily routine. Ensure that general consents and permission forms are completed at the start of the year, and kept centrally so there is no need to issue extra paperwork**



Gairloch High School: Creating Flexibility in the Timetable to embed Outdoor Learning

Key Facts

Where: Situated within the small village of Gairloch, the school serves a geographically extensive area. It shares a campus with Gairloch Primary School, and sits just over a hundred metres from the sea and a few hundred metres from paths to the surrounding hills.

School Roll: 140 approx.

What: The school has made the decision to embed Outdoor Learning across the curriculum, and have ensured space in the timetable to accommodate learning outside the classroom and beyond the school campus.

Summary:

The school rents a building at Slattadale Forest, which is approximately 8 miles from Gairloch – a 20 minute drive in the school mini bus. Part of the building is sound and watertight, and offers classroom facilities, a kitchen and WC facilities. The other half is semi derelict, but in itself this offers the school a learning opportunity – a teacher has suggested the idea of getting pupils to come up with ideas of how they could develop Slattadale, and learn design skills in the process. The aim is for Slattadale to be a resource for all departments to enable them to take learning outdoors, and to open it up to associated primary schools or other visiting groups.

The school also maximises the limited outdoor space they have available. A narrow strip of flat ground behind the school building has been utilised for composting spaces, and an equipment shed built by pupils. Pupils have built raised beds, researched the conditions and seasons, and have devised suitable planting schemes. Produce goes into the local horticultural show and is used in the school canteen.

Education Benefit :

- The school has made a conscious decision to embed Outdoor Learning across the curriculum, to make it sustainable, and to ensure that there is progression and coverage throughout S1 – S6
- Educational opportunities reflect the local context. In Gairloch, there are many outdoor education opportunities offered to pupils, some done in partnership with local businesses engaged in activity tourism

Key Messages

- **Block the timetable so that there are double periods to help accommodate learning outside the classroom and beyond the school campus**
- **Risk assessments are constantly being added to, and these are available to all staff, and they cover many of the regular activities beyond the classroom. Pupils are expected to take responsibility for themselves and others, and to come prepared for work whether in the classroom or outdoors**
- **Work with the local community and local businesses to access skills, resources and support, and to provide real life contexts' for learning in and outside of the classroom**
- **Context is key. As the economics of an area change, so do job prospects. Learning and teaching must reflect that. The local physical, economic and social environments can all be seen as learning resources**

Planning for Learning

When considering the way in which local space might be planned to benefit pupils we must consider the lens through which such spaces would be viewed:

The **teacher** needs a space that is safe and easy to get to, and offers a richness of learning environment for it to be worth their making the effort to take their pupils there.

The **learner** needs to be able to find fascination and wonder in the landscape, to develop a sense of place and belonging, and to feel comfortable. 'Prospect' and 'refuge' are both important concepts, places where children can be hidden and observe what is happening around them without their presence impacting on the natural order.

The **community** (town planner, developer, the council, residents and businesses) need affordable, sustainable and accessible spaces which are pleasant to live and work in and which have effective connections to other communities.

There are many questions for teachers to address when considering the prospect of learning outside – how will it improve the learners' experience, where do I go, how do I get there, what do I do when I am there and how do I manage behaviour in this setting? The school grounds can be seen as a stepping stone to venturing further afield, where ideas can be tested in safety.

Learning beyond the school wall offers a number of benefits - experiential learning, teaching to real world issues and coming up with solutions, higher levels of interest and engagement particularly for less engaged pupils, greater richness of teaching materials and examples, exposure to the working environment and career

opportunities, as well as greater community engagement of pupils into their local spaces.

To ensure the benefits of learning beyond the school wall are sustainable and achievable, there are a number of considerations. Planning must happen over the long term in order to become embedded, and should be progressive and more innovative as confidence and competence grows. Teaching and learning should be planned in the context of what the environment can offer as well as what the curriculum requires.

Managing risk is clearly an issue, but a more rounded approach is to consider both the risks and the benefits through the use of a risk/benefit statement (taking into account the benefits mentioned above). This approach will also consider the potential risks, consider the mitigations and weigh up the value of the benefits against the effort to manage the risk. Knowing how to get from one learning space to another, from refreshment facilities to toilet facilities, to and from the school safely and so on are important, as is knowing where to find the most compelling and engaging pieces of local history, art, biodiversity, landscape, space, planting or structure that will interest and entice even the most reluctant learner.

Within communities every outdoor space offers opportunities for learning. Pathways, planting, legends, signage, architectural design and art installations can all contribute to every walk being a learning walk. Where investments are being made within communities, and spatial briefs are drawn up, it is important to bear this in mind. Improved design enables greater levels of learning by higher numbers of pupils on a more frequent basis. Considerations when planning investments should include access and circulation to and from the school, seating areas in gathering places, access to toilet and refreshment facilities, wayfinding, lighting, QR codes on signage linking technology to teaching and learning, pathways to places of interest, pathways to health, increasing walking miles for fitness. These are but a few suggestions, but more innovative and practical solutions can often be found by asking students themselves.

Collaboration

Unlocking the potential of outdoor settings for learning is about three things: first, mapping the potential for learning and learner participation; second, linking these opportunities directly to the curriculum needs of the school, and community; third, conversations between the individuals, groups and organisations with responsibility for the space, its management and development. It is about collaborative discussions on benefit, and collaborative working on action. Collaboration builds the best opportunity to ensure that outdoor settings for learning are relevant, useful and sustainable, not one off experiences.

— Mapping potential

Active use of outdoor settings for learning is an opportunity for 'sense-making', a way in which to make, change and engage with the environment. Exploring the learning potential of spaces within and beyond the school ground is a learning opportunity, which could be organised as an active participation process by students working within and between year groups. Capturing the potential as film, mapping, stories, drawings, performances can draw on the resources and capabilities across the departments of the school. This act of mapping potential needs to be backed up with feedback to students, which could be one or all of the following; a recognition of effort, some possibility that the ideas gathered will be realised, clear links to their study. This is about collaborating between students, teachers, communities and decision makers.

— Linking to the curriculum

Thinking of outdoor settings as an extended classroom is about thinking through how learning outcomes might be achieved through creative use of space. This is about clear definition of the learning objectives, the why, what and how of taking learning and teaching outside. It is also about cross departmental collaboration on project working and peer to peer support. In other words, conversations need to be had amongst teachers on how best to collaborate for learning, and what the best spaces would be to create the richest experience.

Sometimes this might be a tree and a grassy area for a collaborative Religious Education and Drama project, or a wall space outside to draw on for a joint English and Science venture. Perhaps it is using an alternative building which is best suited for a specific Art project, but requires creating space in the timetable and a bus to access it. In each case, it is about clear articulation of the learning benefit and the appropriate teaching methods.

— Space management

How people are enabled to connect with and use these spaces is important. A learner participation driven approach to using outdoor settings for learning, linked to a measureable means of linking the learning to achievement provides rich data and evidence of spatial need. The narrative of who used the outdoor spaces for what learning, and what their experiences were is important to inform investment decisions in the school estate, and in the spaces people may use for learning in the wider community. This is about understanding the culture of space use. It also provides a clear framework to share the lessons on what works and how to get the best out of using outdoor settings for learning.

Using this evidence to inform decisions about how spaces are changed or improved is about smart decision making. Sometimes, the evidence may highlight the need to leave space alone, and allowing space to test things. It may inform masterplanning decisions of how the school and grounds change. It may inform the brief of new or refurbishment schools, so the spaces needed for the culture of using outdoor settings for learning are considered from the outset.

The most important aspect of outdoor settings for learning is using them. Tackling the barriers or preconceptions to use is as important as the design of the space itself. This is about conversations between learners, teachers and the people responsible for the space, including asset managers, building managers, planners. A shared ambition for use will inform a brief for change which links learning and investment priorities, to create a sustainable culture of making the best of the opportunities to use outdoor settings for learning.

This document was a collaboration between Dugald Forbes, retired Headteacher of Kirkcudbright Academy and Juno Hollyhock, Director of Learning through Landscapes.

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Outdoor Learning

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