



The Benefits of Outdoor Learning

Prepared by the School Travel Forum

Purpose of document

This paper has been compiled following the recent meeting between the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, and Ian Pearson from the School Travel Forum. At the meeting Michael Gove asked if the School Travel Forum would pull together a document with evidence on the benefits of learning outside the classroom to support the Government's Pupil Premium policy. Since its inception the School Travel Forum has won widespread recognition and support for the way it simplifies and provides essential reassurance for leaders looking to organise study, sports & ski trips.

School trips are one of the things school children look forward to during their school life and the experiences and memories from them are extremely durable. A school trip with its natural dynamic environment provides a learning venue that matches their natural inclination to know more about things, engages even those with short attention spans and puts the learning subject in context. In addition to the multitude of evidence, there is much anecdotal support about benefits of outdoor education experiences; teachers, for example, often speak of the improvement they have in relationships with students following a trip.

School trips are an important part of the wider family of outdoor learning opportunities, all of which provide beneficial outcomes to children with a wide range of abilities and issues.

Disadvantaged students

Disadvantaged students in particular will go to places, experience events and engage socially in new and positive ways; they will learn in the real world in a manner that is not possible in a classroom.

Ofsted's 2008 report 'How far should you go?' concludes that well-planned out-of-classroom activities, which includes trips, not only enhance pupils' learning, but can also re-engage those who are hard to motivate. Additionally, that it was necessary to ensure equal and full access for all learners by removing any barriers.

However the schools in the survey relied very heavily on contributions from parents and carers to meet the costs of residential and other visits.



Examples of the benefits of school trips and residential visits

The above Ofsted report concluded that learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development. In addition, there are a great number of research papers and evidence which highlight the benefits of taking students on trips, particularly abroad. These apply to a wide range of subjects, for example:

Primary Schools

Within successful Primary Schools curriculums are enriched by first-hand experiences, including visits locally and further afield, contributions from adults with knowledge and skills that could enhance pupils' learning, and an extensive range of extra-curricular activities.

(Ofsted, 'The curriculum in successful primary schools' 553. 2002.)

History

Wide ranging out-of-classroom activities, including school trips, are cited as examples of outstanding teaching. Students are able to appreciate their studies from a different, and usually more active, perspective. Trips to Berlin and the battlefields of Belgium are named as examples.

(Ofsted 'History for all' 0902232, March 2011)

MFL

Being able to actually visit places in the countries that speak the languages students are learning is one of the best ways to immerse children and young people in the language itself. There is no doubt that it is far removed from being taught in a classroom. Young people are able to spend some time in the other country, learning much more about how the people live, work and speak as they do so.

Ski Trips

The key benefits of skiing trips for young people include:

- physical skills and knowledge
- personal and social development
- the opportunity to set and achieve personal goals
- environmental awareness
- health and fitness

(Source: Teaching Expertise)

House of Commons Select Committee findings

The Education Committee undertook an inquiry into outdoor learning which recognised the cross-curricular nature of out-of-classroom learning. It found that outdoor education contributes to learning in a range of areas, including:

- science and geography fieldwork;
- physical education;
- learning through outdoor play, particularly in the early years;
- history and citizenship, through visits to museums and heritage sites;
- art and design, through visits to galleries and experiences of the built environment;
- environmental and countryside education, and education for sustainable development;
- practical or vocational skills that cannot be practised in a classroom environment;
- group activities that build self-confidence and social skills; these may include adventurous activities that teach students how to deal with an element of risk;
- the use of the environment as a tool to enrich the curriculum across subject areas.

Evidence taken by the Committee strongly indicated that education outside the classroom is of significant benefit to pupils. Academic fieldwork clearly enhances the teaching of science and geography, but other subjects such as history, art and design and citizenship can also be brought to life by high quality educational visits. Group activities, which may include adventurous expeditions, can develop social skills and give self-confidence. Furthermore, the committee concluded that outdoor education has a key role to play in the social inclusion agenda, offering children who may not otherwise have the opportunity the simple chance to experience the countryside, or other parts of our heritage that many others take for granted.

The broad extent of this inquiry has convinced the Committee that outdoor learning can benefit pupils of all ages and can be successful in a variety of settings. We are convinced that out-of-classroom education enriches the curriculum and can improve educational attainment.

Source: House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, *Education Outside the Classroom: Second Report of Session 2004–05*,
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmeduski/120/12005.htm>

General benefits relating to School Trip activity

Confident Individuals



School trips can change attitudes and raise aspirations, through participation in new activities. Rising to new challenges and living alongside their peers helps pupils to become more adaptable and confident which is critical to so many areas of their development.

Successful Learners

School trips have the potential to lay strong foundations for encouraging successful learning and building positive attitudes which subsequently lead to improvements in achievement and motivation in all areas – including academic. Children also enjoy themselves so much they often don't even realise they are learning which can help produce the greatest achievements.

Responsible Citizens

Schools trips provide powerful learning outcomes for young people which contribute to a sense of belonging, feeling valued and the ability to make a positive contribution in their community and society at large.

A Smoother Transition

Supporting children through points of transition in their school careers can be challenging, our courses promote personal, social and emotional development, standing them in good stead to make smooth and trouble-free transitions, whether from Primary to Secondary school, or between later key stages.

(Source PGL)

- Fulfilling the educational mission set out by the Government and many museums, visitor attractions and destinations
- Inspiring students to re-visit with their families or come back in later life with children of their own.

(Source: Tourism Insights)

Improved personal and emotional well-being

Young people become more resilient and optimistic, and their emotional health and self-esteem improve. 93% of teachers agree that Outward Bound influences their pupils' personal development, in particular their confidence and self-esteem.

Improved social well-being

The quality of young people's relationships improves, in particular with their friends, family and teachers. 93% of teachers observe better relationships between pupils on return to school.



Improved connection with the natural environment

Young people's knowledge, awareness and appreciation of the natural environment improve. 72% of teachers observe improved awareness of the natural environment in their pupils on return to school.

Improved enthusiasm and confidence in learning

Their attitude towards learning improves, and they become more confident, capable learners in the classroom. 60% of teachers observe an improvement in their pupils' performance in the classroom on return to school

(Source: Outwardbound.org.uk)

Outdoor learning can 'Connect learners with their environment, their community, their society and themselves'

(Source: http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored/research/taking_learning_outdoors.pdf)

Good for health and wellbeing – outdoor learning inevitably involves physical activity, if not through the learning itself then in travel to the activity

(Source: *Let's Make Scotland More Active – A Strategy for Physical Activity, Scottish Executive*)

There is substantial evidence that links the natural environment with good physical health and psychological wellbeing. It indicates that nature can make positive contributions to our health, help us recover from pre-existing stresses or problems, have an 'immunising' effect by protecting us from future stresses, and help us concentrate and think more clearly.

(Griffin, M, Hine, R, Peacock, J, Pretty, J, Sellens, M, and South, N, *A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise*, Sheffield: Countryside Recreation Network, 2005.)

An *Improving Scottish Education (HMIE, 2006)* report says that in primary school 'learning experience often lacks relevance, engagement and excitement', in secondary school we need to be 'improving learning by engaging, challenging and motivating all young people better, and encouraging them in a greater sense of responsibility and independence' – 'increasing pupils' awareness of their potential contribution to their community and environment'

A Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive 2006) says outdoor learning improves: the challenge and enjoyment of learning; the breadth, depth and coherence of learning – drawing on different experiences; relevance of learning – by contextualising experiences; expression and creativity – responding imaginatively to stimulating settings.

- Outdoor learning can have a positive impact on **long-term memory** – there can be reinforcement between the affective and the cognitive, with each influencing the other to bridge higher order learning.
- There is substantial evidence that outdoor learning has the potential to **raise attainment** – improved engagement, achievement and motivation to learn.
- Outdoor learning is able to improve the development of responsible citizens – renewed pride in community with greater sense of place, of belonging and responsibility
- Impact positively on children and young people’s interpersonal and social skills – effectiveness, communication skills, group cohesion and teamwork.

(Rickinson, M, Dillon, J, Teamey, K, Morris, M, Choi, M Y, Sanders, D, and Benefield, P, A *Review of Research on Outdoor Learning*, Field Studies Council, London: National)

Clear evidence that outdoor learning increases knowledge and understanding of the natural world and environmental systems and processes – related to responsible attitudes towards the environment

(Higgins, P, ‘Outdoor education in Scotland’, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 2002, 2 (2), pp149–168.)

Overseas examples

Outdoor learning improves: ‘confidence and self-esteem, positive relationships among students and reduced discipline and behaviour problems’,

Also English Language Learners demonstrated gains in cooperation, leadership, relationship with peers, and motivation to learn that were significantly larger than the gains shown by non English learner students in those environments

Outdoor learning caused marked increase in scientific knowledge, based on interaction with environment

(Source: *American Institutes for Research, Effects of Outdoor Education Programs for Children in California*)



What does the School Travel Forum want to see?

The STF welcomes the Coalition Government's commitment to a Pupil Premium to provide additional funding for more disadvantaged pupils to ensure they benefit from the same opportunities as pupils from richer families. The Children, Schools and Families Committee has found that pupils from poorer areas are still much less likely to access school trips and have argued that there is a danger of children becoming "entombed" in their homes.

We specifically endorse Schools Minister Nick Gibb MP's recent Parliamentary Written Answer which states that "school may in future wish to consider using the pupil premium funding to enable such children to benefit from out of school educational activities." We are aware that the Department for Education is exploring options for supporting disadvantaged pupils and we would like to highlight our concerns about the access that pupils from low income families have to school trips and visits; for these children school provision may be the only opportunity they have to experience different environments from their immediate locality. The Department of Education should ensure that outdoor learning experiences are included in Government guidance to schools so that every pupil eligible for the Pupil Premium has the option of using it to fund an experience.

Who are the School Travel Forum?

Since its inception in 2003 the School Travel Forum (STF) has won widespread recognition and support for the way it simplifies and provides essential reassurance for leaders looking to organise study, sports and ski trips. The STF, which includes the major companies in the school travel business, has estimated that around 40% of all school visits are organised through our members. Our members are required to adhere to a rigorous Code of Practice and Safety Management Standards and are externally verified each year by a leading Health and Safety Consultancy.

Our Objectives include:

- Promoting best practice in educational school travel and support the principles established by the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto
- Designing and promoting sector-specific standards that will be periodically reviewed and adapted to reflect changes in education, health and safety legislation and any other relevant influence.
- Ensuring the needs of schools and teachers are understood and adopted into our standards by regularly meeting bodies such as the Learning Outside of the Classroom Council (LOtC), the Department for Education (DfE), the Outdoor Education Advisors Panel (OEAP), Head Teacher Associations and Teacher Unions.



- Ensuring that independent assessment of travel companies offering educational travel in line with the requirements of the LOtC Quality Badge and the STF Code of Practice.
- Providing a forum for members to discuss non-competitive issues of common interest and concern.

www.schooltravelforum.com