



POLICY: OUTDOOR LEARNING

Adopted on: April 2013

Member of staff responsible: Headteacher

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OUTDOOR LEARNING

Outdoor Learning is a broad term that includes all learning outside the classroom. The Department for Education has found that “there is evidence that when learning outside the classroom, children:

- attain higher levels of knowledge and skills
- improve their physical health and increase their motor abilities leading to a healthy body and healthy brain
- socialise and interact in new and different ways with their peers and adults
- show improved attention and enhanced self-concept, self-esteem and mental health
- change their environmental behaviours and their values and attitudes.

At Barrow 1618 we will spend a significant part of the day learning within the natural environment. Whilst specific hour-long Forest School lessons will be delivered to every class weekly, this is considered only the beginning of Learning Outside the Classroom within the curriculum and not the entirety. Meaningful opportunities to learn beyond the classroom are planned for regularly as part of the school’s curricular and extra-curricular offer.

Wrapping the curriculum around these activities is what makes us unique in our locality and in the Country. Being innovative in our approach to how we teach in this way, we believe, could provide a model of practice that demonstrates that an experiential, exploratory and investigative mode of learning can and does foster excellent academic standards as well as allowing children to explore their talents and interests in creative, technical, scientific, practical, emotional and active modes. Barrow 1618 seeks to deliver a learning environment of excellence within which children, regardless of background, ability or additional learning needs, can prosper, own and deliver the vision of Barrow 1618 and in so doing drive standards and realise their own potential.

The outdoors can provide space and freedom for a type of learning that is difficult to replicate indoors. All children have the right to experience the unique and special nature of being outdoors. At Barrow 1618 we believe it is very important to enable children to use the outside environment as a context for learning throughout the year. It is an important part of our philosophy and is in line with our mission statement.

There is a substantial list of organisation's offering support and guidance on best practice, that the school will engage with, such as ‘Play England’, ‘Forest Schools’, ‘Learning through Landscapes’, ‘The National Trust’, ‘The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom’ and ‘Growing Schools’. Although Outdoor Learning does not have a clearly defined boundary it does have a common core, which is that it provides a dramatic contrast to the indoor classroom. Direct experience outdoors is more motivating for many pupils and has more impact and credibility. The results from outdoor learning can be instantaneous as well as active and therefore impact on behaviour as well as tapping into the learning styles of the more kinaesthetic learner. Through

skilled teaching, interpretation or facilitation, outdoor experiences readily become a stimulating source of fascination, personal growth and can lead to breakthroughs in learning.

Active learning readily develops the learning skills of enquiry, experiment, feedback, reflection, review, communication, problem solving, an enterprising attitude and cooperative learning – to name only some of the benefits.

Outdoor Learning can help to bring many school subjects alive as they focus on real results and consequences. For that reason the outdoors can have an impact on areas of the curriculum as diverse as imaginative writing and moral education (personal search). Outdoor learning also provides experiential opportunities allowing pupils to respond positively to opportunities, challenges and responsibilities, to manage risk and to cope with change. At Barrow 1618 we are privileged to have the surroundings that we have. These surroundings will enable the creation and maintenance of an exciting and inclusive outdoors space within or around the school. This can pay enormous dividends in terms of social capital and community involvement. We are again privileged to have a community with a huge variety of skills. Individual members are more than happy to offer, very often for free, their time and skills. Some have been involved with the children in designing landscapes around the school including raised beds; Polly tunnels for growing our own fruit and vegetables and the development of our wonderful 'Outdoor Classroom'. 'Friends of Barrow' are also vital contributors to the development of outdoor learning, providing funds, publicity and labour. In short, parents and members of the community are providing time and expertise for what is often a complex process.

Outdoor Education contributes to children's:

Personal Development

- Some kinds of outdoor adventure can cause short-term enhancement of aspects of self-concept (including gains in self-esteem and self-efficacy), and can cause short-term improvements in internalisation of locus of control. These gains appear to be more significant on longer adventure programmes as for example residential visits.
- Various developmental benefits are associated with regular physical exercise (such as regular outdoor adventure experiences can provide), e.g. humour, patience, energy, optimism, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-assurance, emotional stability, improved body-image, etc.
- Direct experience of the natural environment, such as outdoor adventure can have significant mental and physical health benefits, can enhance self-esteem and self-confidence, and can provide opportunities for spiritual development.

Social Development

- Strong anecdotal evidence indicates that outdoor adventure experiences can enhance interpersonal relationships and improve socialisation, and can facilitate group bonding and co-operation.

- Outdoor adventure can help to reduce formality in relationships and develop more human relationships and awareness between young people, and between young people and staff.

Much has been learnt in recent years about how the brain works and the different ways in which we prefer to learn. Research suggests the need to re-engage learners with the world as they actually experience it- 'experiential' or 'authentic' learning. It provides a framework for learning that uses the child's own environment to enable them to construct their own learning.

There is strong evidence that good quality learning outside the classroom adds much value to classroom learning. It can lead to a deeper understanding of the concepts that span traditional subject boundaries and which are frequently difficult to teach effectively using classroom methods alone.

Quality learning experiences in 'real' situations have the capacity to raise achievement across a range of subjects and to develop better personal and social skills. When these experiences are well planned, safely managed and personalised to meet the needs of every child they can:

- improve academic achievement
- provide a bridge to higher order learning
- develop skills and independence in a widening range of environments
- make learning more engaging and relevant to young people
- develop active citizens and stewards of the environment
- nurture creativity
- provide opportunities for informal learning through play
- reduce behaviour problems and improve attendance
- stimulate, inspire and improve motivation
- develop the ability to deal with uncertainty
- provide challenge and the opportunity to take acceptable levels of risk
- improve young people's attitudes'.

Managing the delivery of Outdoor Learning

Through the monitoring of teaching and learning e.g. forward planning meetings, classroom observation, teacher's self-evaluations, summative assessment records and other school procedures we closely monitor the use of outdoor learning as a key element of the learning experience at Barrow 1618 Church of England Primary Free School.

In some cases, staff may feel that they lack the confidence, expertise or knowledge base to adapt their practice to include learning outside the confines of the classroom. The leadership and management will provide support and offer guidance in how staff could look at curriculum delivery in different ways, involving the wealth of free and commercial expertise that exists in our own school community and further afield.

The school leadership takes an assertive stance towards encouraging the children to be more resilient about weather conditions, and will take a firm stance against reducing the time allocated to outdoor play and learning, to ensure it remains a key feature of the day throughout all seasons. The

development of outdoor learning is a priority for the school as specified in its philosophy and aims. Whilst, as a relatively new school, we acknowledge that there is more that can be done to develop the school's grounds and the role that learning outside the classroom can play in our curriculum, we are strongly committed to its development and it will remain at the heart of whole-school development.

Playground improvements need to be continually on the agenda – including access to playground, the range of games to ensure that all pupils receive their entitlement. To promote the development of meaningful, incidental play we have provided 'Sports Ambassadors' with training to take a leading role in promoting play amongst younger peers. Children have access to both hard-standing playground areas, as well as expansive filed space. Sports equipment is on offer at playtimes, but so too is scientific equipment (like bug hunting jars) and creative equipment, like role-play toys. Children are empowered with the responsibility to uphold the school's high standards in their independent, outdoor exploration and ensure that their own actions have a positive impact on others, the environment and the things within it.

The leadership will advocate firmly that the pace of learning can be enhanced by using the outdoors and that children who may find the classroom too constraining will perform and behave better outdoors, reducing the time spent on explanation and behaviour management. It should also be noted that there is clear evidence that 'boys in particular, are more active in their learning in an environment where there is natural light'.

The school leadership, with the involvement from relevant staff, will help to support practitioners to use learning outside the classroom confidently and routinely raising the issue to identify and support staff where any concerns may exist.

Training opportunities that meet the needs of teachers will be sought out and teachers will be encouraged to use these as a basis for developing their skills base and acquire knowledge and understanding as to how this approach to learning and teaching can impact on pupil overall attainment and achievement.

Procedures that can quickly become arduous and therefore become a deterrent e.g. keeping safety related paperwork such as risk assessments will be routinely evaluated by the school's leadership, to take account of recent recommendations. This should be kept to the necessary minimum so that they do not discourage staff from becoming more creative in their thinking. Staff will receive timely, relevant and practical training in the preparation for outdoor learning and will receive the induction and support they need to ensure administration is not a limiting factor. To this end, a number of 'standing' risk assessments will be in place, to cover routine outdoor activities.

Staff within the school will continue to be given an opportunity to share expertise and best practice e.g. through forward planning meetings and observations.

The school will regularly communicate the benefits to parents and the wider community of outdoor learning so that there is a greater understanding of its value and importance and provide a greater awareness of the safety standards the school adopts.

The school will continue to encourage parents and carers to actively support learning outside the classroom and to get involved in school led activities with the school for example through a parents support group and Friends of Barrow.

Where should Outdoor Learning take place?

The school grounds

We are extremely privileged to have a large outdoor area. These grounds offer excellent opportunities for both formal and informal learning and play. School buildings can also provide a useful resource for learning about energy use and waste for example – tying in with the schools Eco school programme and our *green energy* and sustainability as an integrated theme throughout our curriculum and evident in all aspects of the life and work of the school. This will be in exactly the same way health promotion should and will permeate our school.

The local environment

The locality around school with its large surrounding grounds offers wealth of opportunities. Learners can develop their skills to explore their local environment. This can enrich all areas of the curriculum, for example through land and sites of special scientific interest, heritage sites, places of worship, theatres, live music events and involvement through citizenship activities like local volunteering projects to mention but a few.

Places further afield

As young people mature, they are able to gain confidence in and appreciate the benefits of more distant and challenging environments. For example, through visits to contrasting, in our case, urban areas, field study and environmental centres; theatre workshops and places of worship e.g. the Mosque, Synagogues, Temples in Telford; local farms and gardens; museums and galleries and many more places.

These can be planned into all aspects of the curriculum and, by taking learners out of their immediate environment, stimulate their curiosity and imagination. The principles of the E.Y.F.S. curriculum should and will permeate all learning throughout the school.

Residential places

Staying away from home is a powerful way of developing key life skills for example, building confidence, self-esteem, communication and team working. For instance, through staying at outdoor adventure centres provides children with an opportunity to widen their range of experiences and find new skills and

interests in which they may excel, enhancing their ability to attain, achieve or simply improve the aesthetic or health aspects of their later life.

Other benefits we have witnessed as a school are improved pupil/pupil and pupil/staff/adult relationships and the improved resilience and independence of the children.

At Barrow 1618 Church of England Primary Free School we value the importance of using the natural environment for the stimulation of learning and the promotion of health and well-being and we will work hard to continually develop this as a key feature in our school.

We will continue to develop the excellent transition we have established between our nursery class and Reception, learning from and building on the good practice undertaken here, using the documents '*the 3-5 curriculum*' and '*the child at the centre 2*', as appropriate.

Curriculum for Excellence

Evidence from the [National Foundation for Educational Research review](#) shows that outdoor learning offers an ideal framework for achieving the four capacities of *A Curriculum for Excellence*.

Successful outdoor learning:

- helps learners to develop knowledge and skills in ways that add value to everyday experiences in the classroom
- has a positive impact on long-term memory
- reinforces links between the affective and the cognitive, with each influencing the other and providing a bridge to higher order learning
- fosters the development of specific academic skills, as well as improved engagement, achievement and stronger motivation to learn
- impacts positively on young people's attitudes, beliefs and self-perceptions, for example independence, confidence, self-esteem, locus of control, self-efficacy, personal effectiveness and coping strategies
- yields benefits in the promotion of positive behaviour and improved physical self-image and fitness.

Responsible citizens:

- Outdoor learning has a positive effect on social development and greater community involvement.
- It raises learners' attainment, improves attitudes towards the environment, develops resilience and creates more positive relationships between pupils, with teachers and with the wider community.
- It renews learners' pride in their community and fosters a greater sense of belonging and responsibility.

Effective contributors:

- Outdoor learning impacts positively on young people's interpersonal and social skills, such as social effectiveness, communication skills, group cohesion and team work.
- Pupils recognise how their skills, talents and efforts can positively contribute to the good of the environment and its community and gain a desire to play an active and practical role.

Pupils with Additional Needs including those with Special Education Needs

- Outdoor learning can also overlap with the teaching of life skills. At Barrow 1618 we will be supporting our children by using life skills training as a motivational tool, encouraging our pupils to use a range of interdisciplinary skills to meet certain targets and objectives. Helping to meet their needs is enhanced by the development of Personal, Social, Health Education Programmes to support learning, to include a range personal skills.
- Such programmes have been reflected in the SEN Provision maps, which outline the support that individual learners receive.
- We will continue to develop a range of skills even further through after school clubs which will offer cooking clubs using our own produce grown in the school grounds as part of our healthy eating status. This is also an excellent tool to teach children a range of skills akin to those they develop through learning in the outdoors, as well as others including sequencing and personal creativity.
- The objectives of any statement of educational need (EHCP from September 2014) will be implemented. Necessary support will be put into place in order to achieve these.
- The school's accessibility plan includes it's outdoor locality and aims to ensure that all areas of the school grounds can be enjoyed and appreciated by all users, including those with SEN and/or physical disability.

The More Able Pupils

- Outdoor learning offers opportunities to include personal, independent research and develop a personal understanding of their place in the natural world, further developing an understanding of learning processes, enquiry and thinking skills that deepen and enrich subject knowledge.
- The above issues also allow opportunities to access discussion with peers about, for example; a moral code, ethics, humanity, sustainability, and science in its widest sense, problems pertaining to globalisation and philosophical enquiry. Philosophy for children plays a role in the school's Outdoor Education.
- Outdoor Learning acts as a bridge to higher order learning and opportunities to challenge misconceptions and ways of thinking.

Links across the curriculum

- Health and well-being is an obvious link. We work hard to encourage pupils to use their lunch break to be as active as possible. We have established routines to ensure that whilst the dining room experience is not hurried, and is a pleasurable time for coming together, that there is also the maximum time for being outdoors.
- We also encourage resilience by making the children dress appropriately so they are not restricted by the weather typical of the local climatic conditions.
- We ensure that there is adequate adult cover so that children have a safe, secure play area in which to develop the wide variety of skills the outdoor environment affords them. This is ever more important when parents restrict outdoor activity after school on the grounds of safety or lack of daylight. Furthermore, sedentary lifestyles are also having an impact on obesity levels. We therefore use our playtime as a period of activity and creativity, also encouraging Physical Education (PE) and active sports clubs to be conducted outside whenever possible – as well as developing this theme across the curriculum, making ever more links through the implementation of '*A Curriculum for Excellence*' in Barrow 1618.

Some key ways in which exposure to the natural environment is beneficial to human health:

- enhanced personal and social communication skills
- increased physical health, supporting the development of healthy, active lifestyles
- enhanced mental and spiritual health
- enhanced spiritual, sensory, and aesthetic awareness
- the ability to assert personal control and increased sensitivity to one's own well-being

Learning and Play outdoor:

Contrary to prevailing views among a growing number of politicians and school boards, play promotes child development and equips children for academic tasks. In other words, play does not steal from reading, writing, and arithmetic, but rather enhances the social and cognitive bases for such skills. Play is a fundamental right of all children and must be preserved.

Joe L. Frost, 2005.

Imaginative Play:

We at Barrow will continue to purchase outdoor resources over time to help build on the work we currently undertake through for example Forest School

and further enhance and develop children's skills. We will use our use outdoor environment to develop for example skills such as co-operation and communication and active learning. We also link the outdoor resource with developing the imaginative skills that also impact on creativity in general, but which can have a particular impact on boys, particularly in the development in their writing skills.

Benefits of Out of School Visits and Trips as outlined above:

- develop self-esteem, take personal responsibility, co-operate with and respect the needs of others;
- extend their personal horizons through greater appreciation and understanding of the world and its peoples around them;
- understand the need for sustainable relationships between people and their environment;
- enhance practical problem solving and team work skills.
- promote a positive and knowledgeable response towards personal health and well-being.

Also see section on '*residential trips*' - Regular attendance at the Outdoor Centre means our staff are well aware of the extremely positive impact this has had on our children's self-confidence and achievement – to name but two aspects. Children participate in a minimum of two residential visits during their time at Barrow 1618. They will also have opportunities to camp overnight within the school's grounds. We will support those children/families who have financial difficulties as we fully appreciate that these are often the children who receive the greatest benefit from such opportunities.

Government guidelines are consulted with before our children embark on any activity for reasons of health and safety, to teach social responsibility and citizenship. In itself this can be used effectively as learning and teaching resource.

<http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/>

Health and Safety

We need to strike a reasonable balance between the value of experience and levels of acceptable risk.

In the first instance the schools policies relating to Health and Safety and Risk Assessment will be referred to and applied prior to any outdoor learning activity that may require additional support beyond the reasonable activities one would normally apply within the classroom. It is also important that we at Barrow 1618 apply robust safety to effectively manage and minimise risks. It is equally important, however, that all involved, including parents acknowledge that a degree of residual risk remains. It may therefore be prudent to discuss with parents their views regarding outdoor learning – and the degrees of risk that apply to the varying activities. Parents are currently asked permission prior to any trips/sessions if they agree to their children taking part in outdoor activities.

We will ensure that the place where children go will be contacted prior to any out of school trip such as the Outward Bound Centre.

Disability Discrimination, Equality and fairness

The school has guidelines in line with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 our school will be taking measures to include the views of parents and children who have a disability.

These will be used to make any necessary changes to our school policies, promoting positive behaviour/discipline procedures and other aspects of the life and work of our school.

At Barrow 1618 we will work hard to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- promote equal opportunities
- eliminate disability related harassment
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons encourage participation by disabled people.

We at Barrow 1618 actively ensure that all involved are treated with dignity, fairness and equality at all times. The school community prides itself in our successes in this area.

Barrow 1618 Aims:

- to raise the profile of outdoor learning
- to encourage close links with parents, the local community in celebrating our outdoor space and the rich learning that can and does take place within it
- to ensure the school provides a safe, secure and stimulating outdoor environment that children can take risks in
- to encourage children to care for their environment
- to allow learning to be “hands on” and allow children to apply skills “first hand”.

Implementation

- from Reception to Year 6, children are provided with opportunities for both formal and informal outdoor learning and play
- in Early Years, free flow enables children to choose to use the outdoor areas throughout the day, regardless of the weather. The Reception class joins with the Nursery on site enjoying its strong partnership work in Early Years, the outdoor areas are well resourced and these resources are easily accessible to all children.

- Classes have decked areas, accessed by bi-folding doors, which provide constant access to the outdoors. There is an element of 'bringing the outdoors in', by using this design feature of our building, which maintains links with the outdoor environment even when children are working indoors.
- from Reception to Year 6, activities using the outdoors are evident in planning in a variety of subjects. The outdoor area is used as a context and a natural resource for learning
- children are provided with a range of experiences that help develop key life skills, including personal learning, enquiry and thinking skills
- children have the opportunity to explore, grow and nurture plants through class-based work and the school's 'Welly Boot Club'.
- children have the opportunity to engage with imaginative, investigative and creative play, using the outdoors
- the school grounds enable children to explore a variety of habitats outdoors, investigating indigenous flora and fauna, adaptations and life-cycles linked with, for example, our science curriculum.
- the locality around school harbours a wealth of opportunities within relatively accessible distance (e.g. the woodland areas). Teachers plan for children to develop their history, geography, science and environmental skills through exploring their local environment
- children have their wellies in school at all times. This enables teachers to plan for a full week of activities using the school grounds and the local environment
- a residential trip is a powerful way of developing key life skills, building confidence, self-esteem, communication and team working
- trips out are planned in every year group.

Health and Safety

- children are supported in taking risks within a safe and secure environment
- the outdoor area offers challenge and teaches the children how to be safe and aware of others
- teachers ensure that all outdoor learning activities conform to the School's Health and Safety Policy
- the school applies robust safety to effectively manage and minimise risks in all activities and trips
- Risk Assessments are always carried out when visiting places off site or for activities within the school environment which have potential risks. Standing risk assessments are in place for commonly conducted outdoor learning activities.

Monitoring and assessment

- Assessment of the children's learning is valued equally indoors and outdoors and is part of the same process
- as the outdoors can enrich all areas of the curriculum, subject leaders monitor planning to see how the outdoors is being used to support the teaching of their subject

- outdoor learning throughout the curriculum is monitored on a termly basis by the teacher responsible for leading outdoor learning.

Our School will not be going where the path may lead, but it will go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

Adopted on: April 2013 by the Curriculum Committee

Member of staff responsible: Headteacher

Review Date: April 2015