

Norham St Ceolwulf’s

C of E First School

**OUTDOOR LEARNING POLICY**

2021-2024

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| Date | March 2021 |
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| Head teacher | Mrs S Dimond |
| Signed: |  |
| Chair of Governors | Mr D Watkin |
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**OUTDOOR LEARNING POLICY**

Our Outdoor Learning Policy aims to foster children’s love of learning. At Norham St Ceolwulf’s C of E First School, we believe that all children have the right to experience the unique and special nature of being outdoors. We further believe that it is important to enable children to use the outside environment as a context for learning.

The Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Manifesto, launched by the government in 2006, provided a breath of fresh air for the educational agenda. With the aim of persuading teachers to make the most of outdoor learning opportunities, the Manifesto states that ‘Every young person should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and personal development whatever their age, ability and circumstances.’

**What do we mean by Outdoor Learning?**

Outdoor Learning is a broad term that includes: outdoor play, school grounds projects, environmental education, recreational and adventure activities, and personal and social development. Outdoor Learning does not have a clearly defined boundary but it does have a common core.

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

Direct experience outdoors is powerful, motivating and has 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, 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 co-operative learning – to name only some of the benefits.

Outdoor Learning can help to bring learning alive. For that reason, the outdoors can have an impact on areas of the curriculum as diverse as imaginative writing and personal and social development. Outdoor learning also provides experiential opportunities allowing pupils to respond positively to opportunities, challenges and responsibilities, to manage risk and to cope with change.

**Benefits of Outdoor Learning**

Outdoor learning:

* Helps to ensure that children are successful learners enabling children to develop knowledge and skills in ways that add value to their everyday learning experiences.

* Enables children to be confident individuals and impacts positively upon young children’s attitudes beliefs and self-perceptions.

* Contributes towards creating independent learners with high self-esteem and self-sufficiency.

* Can have a positive impact upon children’s behaviour.
* Contributes towards the promotion and children’s understanding of the importance of developing a Healthy lifestyle.
* Impacts positively upon children’s personal and social development. It can also bring about community cohesion and allow children to develop as responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to their wider community. It can create pride in the school and wider community and promote community involvement, renewing children’s pride and creating a sense of belonging and responsibility.

* Raises learner’s attainment; promotes and strengthens communication skills, team work and sense of cohesion.
* Motivates boys to be more active in their learning.

**Aims and Objectives of this Policy**

Practice described in this Policy aims to:

* Raise the profile of Outdoor Learning.

* Empower children to take ownership of their learning, allowing their minds and bodies to thrive.

* Encourage children to develop the skills to solve problems, developing resilient and reflective learners.

* Develop skills of communication, cooperation and collaborative learning.

* Provide a challenging, safe and secure environment within which children can take and manage risks.

* Encourage close links with parents and the school in celebrating our outdoor space and the rich learning that can take place within it.
* Encourage children to care for their environment

**Health and Safety**

We will support children in taking risks within a safe and secure environment. Pupils will be taught to manage risks. Staff ensure that the outdoor environment offers challenges and teaches the children how to be safe and aware of others.

Outdoor learning opportunities will be grasped when available and teachers will assess risk. In the first instance teachers will refer to and apply the school’s policies relating to Health and Safety, and Risk Assessment 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 the school applies robust safety measures to effectively manage and minimise risks. It is equally important, however, that all involved, including parents acknowledge that a degree of residual risk remains.

We therefore discuss with parents their views regarding outdoor learning – and the degrees of risk that apply to the varying activities.

Our children are taught to manage risks in regard to outdoor learning. All pupils are regularly reminded about the importance of staying safe. ‘Be Safe’ is a school expectation and children are reminded of the importance of keeping themselves and members of the school community safe.

There is a shared understanding of how pupils safeguard themselves and others when undertaking outdoor learning. The following expectations are understood by all pupils:

* Outdoor Learning is an important part of our learning journey.
* We must uphold our school expectation to be safe at all times when we participate in outdoor learning.
* When moving to our school field, we must walk across the car park area with care and always under the supervision of an adult.
* We must stay with our group in the area we are all working and learning in.
* We must be sensible and ensure that we achieve our learning objectives.
* If we follow the expectations above, we will enjoy learning and stay safe.

**Managing the Delivery of Outdoor Learning**

Through the monitoring of teaching and learning, for example 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 Norham St Ceolwulf’s C of E First School.

We provide support and professional development to enable staff to feel confident developing the expertise or knowledge base to adapt their practice to include opportunities for learning beyond the confines of the classroom.

**Where does our Outdoor Learning take place?**

**The School Grounds**

We are lucky to have grounds which offer 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.We have a basic Solar panel on the roof and energy production/processing can be monitored in the school.

Children are encouraged and enabled to find things out for themselves through play, for example games, stories, creative expression and sharing. Through play the children develop their initiative and imagination (problem solving), learn resilience and resourcefulness (perseverance and determination), how to give and ask for help and support from peers (emotional intelligence and teamwork), and how to appropriately self-manage risk in an increasingly risky world.

Our outdoor learning might include den building, cutting firewood and fire building, crafts such as dream catchers or clay work , games, rope swings, flora and fauna identification, as well as stories, songs,prayers and sharing.

The obvious benefits of improved co-ordination and physical health from doing activities outside are enhanced by opportunities to develop imagination and initiative; problem solving and perseverance. Children are encouraged to try things out and learn from experience, rather than rigidly following a set of instructions. This often involves learning to work as a team to get something done, feeling comfortable with asking for and offering help, and learning how to cope with failure or setbacks -all crucial emotional skills to take with them into the adult world.

**Gardening Opportunities**

Children from Nursery to Year 4 have access to outside gardening areas. We have a poly tunnel/ greenhouse to germinate seeds, cultivate plants and store tools. Additionally, the garden areas are equipped with beds for growing flowers, vegetables and fruits. The harvested foods are shared in many ways with the children. Traditionally each year we have a sunflower growing contest and the seedlings are nurtured at school before they are sent home with each child. The school has also been part of the village in bloom initiative so flowering plants are grown and taken care of also in and around the school grounds. We are very proud of our beautiful gardens and they attract many positive comments from villagers and visitors alike.

**The Local Environment**

We have access to the village and surroundings in Norham which includes the castle, the riverbank and the fields and farming around the school. Many are within short walking distances and all able to be accessed safely with risk assessments in place and due care. There are many aspects of village life such as local trades and shops, the ancient Norham Church which are both accessible and welcoming to school visits and trips out and about.

**Further Afield**

We actively encourage teachers to plan opportunities for children to engage in learning beyond the school. There are yearly visits to the local Countryside Day at Wooler and other opportunities such as day visits to a local Field to Fork organisation, the Border’s donkey sanctuary, the local historical Holy Island of Lindisfarne and the many places of interest both near and far.These are planned into many aspects of the curriculum and, by taking learners beyond their familiar environment, stimulate their curiosity and imagination and motivate children in a powerful way. Being a small school, we can often fit everyone on a coach to visit nearby cities such as Edinburgh and Newcastle to help provide yet more appreciation of environments.

**Residential Visits**

Staying away from home is a powerful way of developing key life skills, building confidence, self-esteem, communication and team working, for example. Children have the opportunity to widen their range of experiences and find new skills and interests in which they may excel. Year 4 children enjoy a stay at a wonderful outdoor centre at Kielder where they take part in a wide range of outdoor and adventurous activities including climbing, abseiling, and bell boating. Residential visits offer so many benefits including the opportunity to participate in first-hand learning.

**EYFS Provision**

There are few boundaries to outdoor learning within the EYFS. Outdoor learning is integral part of our day and the range of activities can be endless. Children have free access throughout the sessions, with range of free flow and planned activities. Children wear wellies and appropriate protective clothing. Children can choose from a wide range of resources and activities, including a mud kitchen, school field with it’s growing trees and plants a growing garden and climbing equipment. Sessions are planned with the children’s next steps in mind and challenge and enjoyment are key to the activities and resources provided.

**KS1 Provision**

In KS1, we endeavour to utilise the outdoor space as much as possible. In the school’s outdoor classroom, just off the main Puffin classroom, is a large sandpit, covered rainproof area and access to outdoor toys and equipment. There is also ample space for deconstructed role play experiences and gross motor skill activities. Opportunities to take learning outside are seized and taken full advantage of and access to the school’s main playground with it’s learning markings is within easy reach. With supervision, KS1 also have access to the garden areas around the school, the quiet area, the front of the school and the poly tunnel and field gardens. Here they can grow plants and participate in seasonal/topical outdoor activities. Outdoor learning in these areas is mainly carried out during weekly whole school outdoor learning days ( see later)

**KS2 Provision**

KS2 can also faces barriers to outdoor learning. However, teachers frequently take lessons outside whenever possible. For example, science lessons involve studying the weather, and geography lessons may involve work in the locality, river studies, orienteering, and following maps. Additionally, our older children in Lapwing Class enjoy the garden environments and all that they provide as for KS1 .

**Cross Key Stage Provision**

Often we send time together as a whole school outdoors.

We provide weekly, full day outdoor learning sessions which involve a range or experiences often surrounding a theme or story or topical issue and include links to many areas of the curriculum in maths, literacy, science, geography and design and technology. These are planned to allow for child led learning as much as possible within carefully crafted structure and initial stimulus. Activities such as den building, pond dipping, wildlife observations, maths through measurement and shape with natural resources, digging and moving soils, simple orienteering and map skills. All children spend all day outside if at all possible during these times and clothing and footwear is provided to ensure they can fully engage with the outdoor conditions happily.

**Our Commitment to Outdoor Learning**

We regularly invest in the development of the outdoor learning area. The school gardens are under constant review and additions such as the school pond with its plant and animal life have provided another source of interest for the children. We have recently planted saplings to develop a small copse of deciduous trees for future forest school development and have enjoyed the addition of a poly tunnel, willow dome, planting area, climbing equipment and mud kitchen,

The mud kitchen has been particularly popular. Mixing soil, water and a range of other natural materials has a foundational role in early childhood which has deep importance, and endless possibilities for well-being, development and learning. Mud kitchens provide something quite different to a simple soil digging patch. A mud kitchen includes elements of the much-loved domestic corner and cooking from indoor play, which are then hugely enriched through the special nature of being outside.

As noted earlier, the school field has recently benefited from the construction of extensive climbing equipment which can also be utilised as part of den building activities and a structure for role play equipment for imaginative play. A small hide has made it possible to both wildlife and bird spot and at times be utilised as a home corner or shop structure again for role play outdoors.

We advocate that the pace of learning can be enhanced by using the outdoors and those children who may find the classroom too constraining will perform and behave better outdoors, reducing the time spent on explanation and behaviour management. There is clear evidence that boys in particular, are more active in their learning in an outdoor environment.

**Children with Additional Needs**

Moving beyond the classroom has been found to have a range of advantages for children of all abilities and backgrounds. A particular benefit for those children and young people with learning difficulties or SEN can be the new, and sometimes therapeutic, visual and sensory stimulation they experience when learning in an outdoor environment. This can be liberating for those who struggle in a structured school atmosphere and is often demonstrated through improvements in children’s social skills and behaviour.

**Able Children**

Outdoor learning offers opportunities to deepen and enrich subject learning, for example through conducting research and developing enquiry and thinking skills, and a personal understanding of their place in the natural world.

The above issues allow opportunities to access discussion on a moral code, ethics, humanity, sustainability, science in its widest sense, problems pertaining to globalisation and philosophical enquiry, for example. We believe that Outdoor Learning acts as a bridge to higher order learning and opportunities to challenge misconceptions and ways of thinking.

**Disability Discrimination, Equality and fairness**

The school has guidance in-line with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and takes 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 Norham St Ceolwulf’s C of E First School, we work hard to:

* Eliminate unlawful discrimination
* Promote equal opportunities
* Eliminate disability related harassment
* Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons

* Encourage participation by disabled people

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

Assessment of the children’s learning will be valued equally indoors and outdoors and should be part of the same process.

**Policy Review**

This policy should be considered alongside other relevant policies, particularly the PSHE Policy. It will be reviewed by the Governing Body as part of its schedule of policy review.