

Building your Curriculum: Outside and In



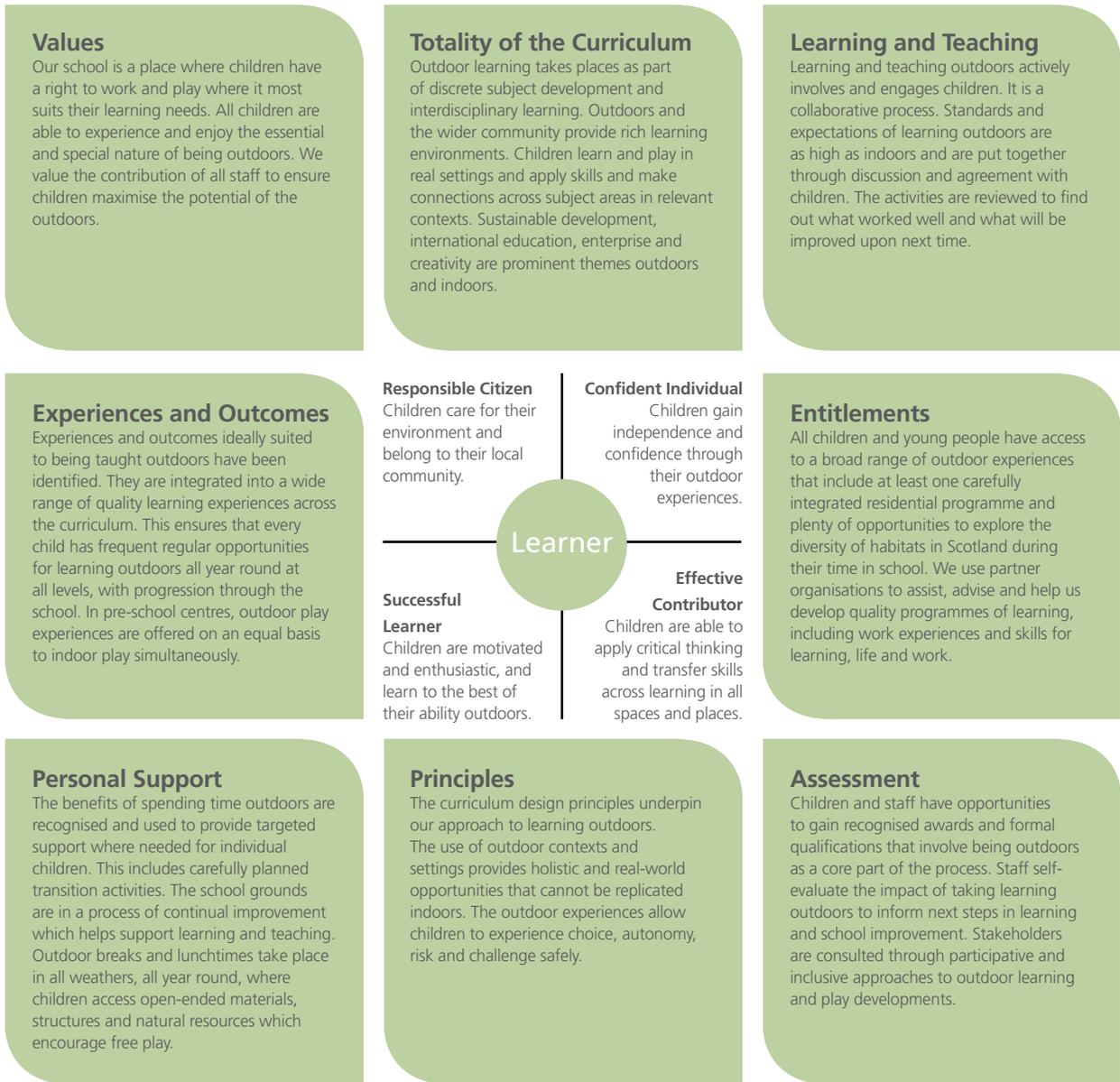
Introduction

Outdoor learning is an integral part of good practice within learning and teaching. Schools need to take a strategic approach to developing outdoor learning. Building your Curriculum is a collaborative and participative process which can be used to involve and engage pupils, parents and other partners in the school community when reviewing and redesigning a school or centre curriculum. The Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) website has a specific section that outlines different ways of doing this.
www.LTScotland.org.uk/buildingyourcurriculum/index.asp

There are at least two ways of considering outdoor learning within the context of strategic planning:

First, schools and centres may look at the role of outdoor learning across the different components of Curriculum for Excellence as outlined in the diagram on page 13 of Building the Curriculum 3 and use this to construct a strategic curriculum plan. The advantage of this approach is that outdoor learning can be comprehensively embedded into the school's vision for the future. Figure 1 demonstrates a vision statement for outdoor learning within this framework. The aim of this vision statement is to allow practitioners and professionals from partner organisations to see potential for outdoor learning as a natural part of a school's ethos and approach to learning and teaching. Schools and centres may wish to use some or all of the elements illustrated.

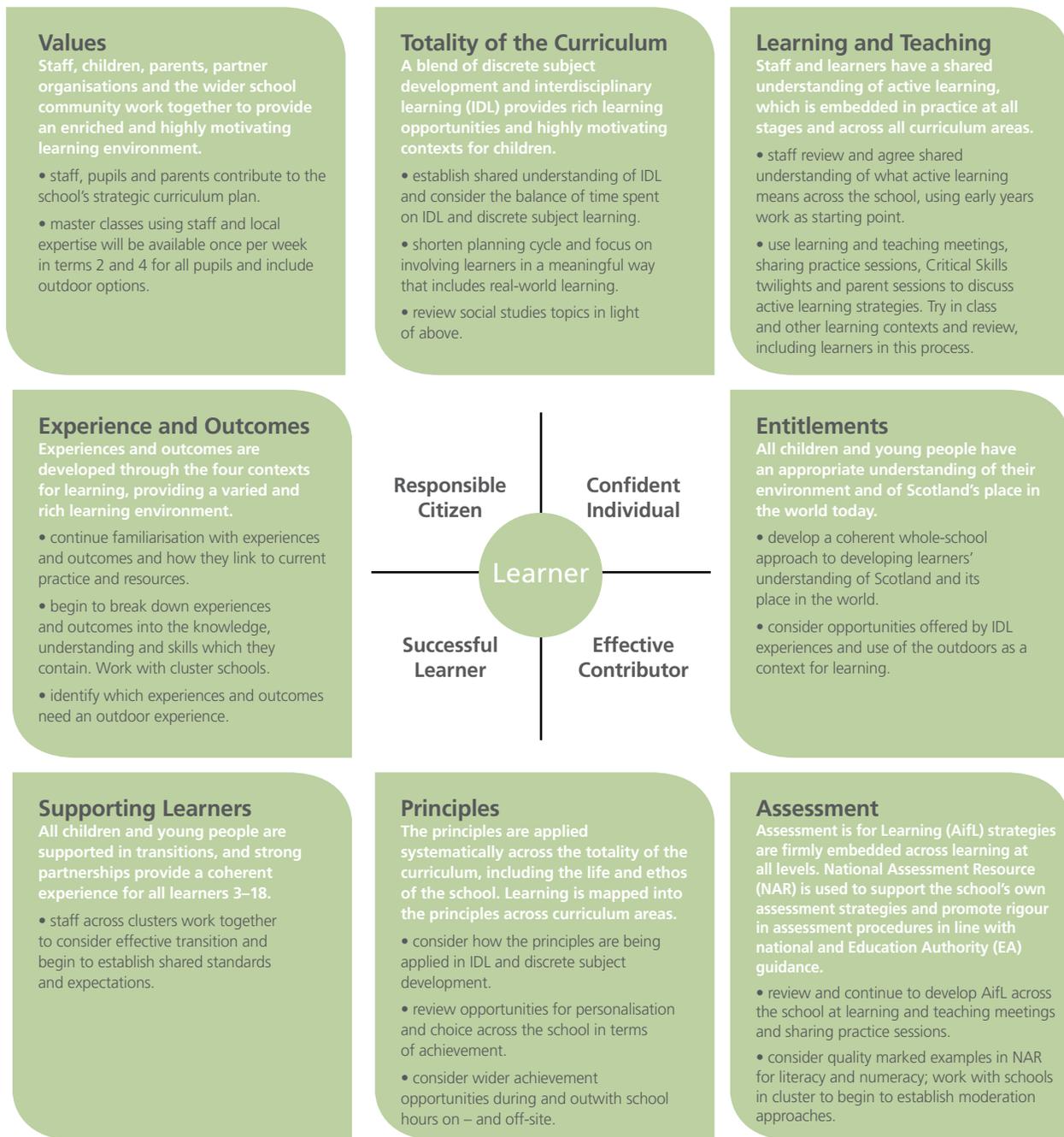
Figure 1: Outdoor learning – Where do we want to get to?



Learning outdoors is not an end in itself. It is a means to enable learning and deliver outcomes across the whole of the curriculum through developing the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence. Outdoor experiences provide a rich learning context that enhances other ongoing improvement work. Schools and centres can look at the components of Curriculum for Excellence and identify the opportunities that exist where taking learning outside benefits the learners and contributes to the vision for that aspect of school life.

For example, a school that is developing the responsibilities of all in terms of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across learning should consider the opportunities presented to achieve its vision for this, through taking learning outdoors. Figure 2 illustrates this process, where outdoor learning is part of the steps outlined in black text in each component.

Figure 2: Outdoor learning as part of the practical steps taken towards the vision for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in a school.



White text describes the school's vision for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Black text summarises the steps the school plans to take towards its vision in the current session.

Outdoor learning – How do we get there?

The suggestions below can be used as a flexible checklist for schools who are looking at improving their learning and teaching approaches through the use of the outdoors.

1) Where are you now?

In conjunction with staff, pupils and other stakeholders, complete a curriculum strategic planner to audit where your school is currently at, in terms of embedding outdoor learning. Next outline the steps your school intends to take towards embedding outdoor learning. This can be completed on a blank curriculum strategic planner form. Tweak the contents of the planners above to meet your specific needs.

2) Use How Good is Our School 3 to audit how effectively outdoor learning is embedded into all aspects of school life

As part of Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning a self-evaluation toolkit, based upon the key quality indicators, is available on the outdoor learning section of the LTS website www.LTScotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/outdoorlearning/about/selfevaluation.asp

This can be used to consider the impact on the learners' experiences of integrating outdoor learning into the school or centre. It can help to provide a more in-depth baseline audit. The main points are:

- find out what outdoor learning is taking place – how, when, where and why – map it out.
- examine how good it is and how pupils are benefiting. Provide clear evidence.

- consider a rigorous approach to planning and evaluating outdoor learning.
- build on strengths and identify gaps in provision or approach. Use the strategic vision planner in Figure 1 as a guide.

3) Integrate outdoor learning into the school improvement plan

Almost every initiative or development can be enhanced by the contribution of taking learning outdoors. Look at each curriculum area as well as themes across the curriculum and approaches to learning and teaching.

4) Communicate with and consult parents and carers about improving learning and teaching through outdoor learning

Many parents are enthusiastic about outdoor learning. To ensure understanding of what is happening, keep parents informed and involved. Discuss matters and seek the advice of the Parent Council. Use transition meetings and other events as well as informal opportunities to consult and reassure parents about the benefits of taking learning outdoors. Look for the factfile on outdoor learning on the LTS website and share this with parents and staff. Invite parents and carers to participate in or volunteer to assist with outdoor learning activities. Get permission at the start of the academic year for local non-adventurous outdoor learning activities that take place within school time and within walking distance of your establishment. Where possible communicate and showcase outdoor learning and other opportunities through your school website and other communication channels.

5) Include reference to outdoor learning when reviewing a school policy

Whenever a school is revising, updating or creating a policy or guidance on any aspect of school life, include reference to outdoor learning. There is no need for a separate outdoor learning policy, unless this is part of the school and local authority guidance on off-site visits. It should be part of a school's approach to learning and teaching, sustainable development education, health and wellbeing, Eco Schools, meeting the needs of children, involving parents, etc.

6) Identify children with additional support needs who could benefit from more time outside

Incorporate outdoor learning into Individualised Education Programmes and partnership work with other agencies and partner organisations using the Getting it Right for Every Child approach. Consider simple local activities outdoors as well as more in-depth approaches that may have financial implications.

7) Plan outdoor activities together

Allocate a shared planning time each term for practitioners to bounce ideas off each other in relation to their projects, subject specialisms and wider work within school. It is best to plan a series of activities or an interdisciplinary project rather than fragmented opportunities. Early years practitioners can plan their sessions to ensure an equal balance of activities is offered outdoors and in. Senior management teams may request to see outdoor work clearly highlighted in termly plans or use this as a focus for professional discussions. Support for Learning and Visiting Specialists can be included here.

8) Encourage practitioners to support each other

This is helpful when developing the habit of going outside frequently. Time to reflect together after staff have undertaken a series of outdoor lessons can be useful. Local teacher learning communities (TLCs) can have a focus on outdoor learning. TeachMeets can be organised on outdoor learning themes. Use Glow and other forms of social media as a tool for sharing, support and networking. Remember, the best form of outdoor learning professional development happens outside.

9) Share outdoor successes

Where possible allocate collegiate activity time for each teacher to give a quick feedback or demonstration about an outdoor activity they have undertaken recently. This helps with the support and sharing of ideas and solutions to issues that arise. Share outdoor learning experiences that learners have participated in with the school community via newsletter, email and your school website. This is particularly important in a large establishment. All staff should be aware of the outdoor learning experiences of the young people they work with, and should talk with them about those experiences. This should include experiences that young people have participated in within their own time.

10) Create opportunities to access continuing professional development about outdoor learning

Keep all staff informed about outdoor developments and opportunities happening through the local outdoor learning networks and listed on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Find. Use partner organisations and outdoor professionals to provide advice, ideas and training that further develop the confidence and skills of practitioners to develop quality outdoor learning experiences for children and young people. Capitalise on the experiences and expertise of staff to develop internal CPD opportunities.

11) Make outdoor learning a focus of classroom visits

Observations of teaching, for purposes of moderation, support and evaluation, should take place outdoors too. Use the same criteria as for indoors. Consider too how the outdoor session complements and extends the learning inside and vice versa, and the impact of being outdoors on the learners.

12) Involve partner organisations to help enhance the quality of experiences offered outdoors

Work out who can help with what projects in the school grounds and local neighbourhood. Use outdoor professionals and interested people in the local community where there is a gap in knowledge or skills amongst staff. Create a database of the skills and interests of staff, parents and the wider school community so that their expertise in different areas can make a contribution. Remember the skills and interests of staff, parents and the wider community will change on an annual basis.

13) Get to know your local environment and use it

Encourage staff to set aside time to walk around your neighbourhood and explore the learning opportunities offered. Visit shops, businesses, cultural and historic sites, places of worship and greenspace. Build up a collection of activities that can be undertaken across all ages and stages. Look for collaborative projects with local organisations, including community learning. This is an ideal activity for new staff induction.

14) Develop the habit of going outside regularly and frequently

It will take a concerted effort to develop the habit of taking learning outdoors, just like any other school improvement. Raise the profile of outdoor learning through CPD sessions, outdoor social events (staff and PTA), and mentions in channels of communication within a school.

15) Enthuse the children and young people about being outside.

Involve children and young people in planning and reviewing the activities and making the connection between indoors and outside. Involve them in key decisions, such as buying outdoor clothing, deciding on school trips, developing the school grounds or outdoor space and curriculum developments.

16) Take a broad view of outdoor learning experiences offered across the stages, including the transition points

Progression and continuity of experiences are important. Think about opportunities for expeditions, farming/rural skills, field and urban studies, adventure activities and exploring natural habitats. The main focus should be on using the school grounds and local area to make outdoor experiences a regular part of learning and teaching, but the value of residential outdoor experiences make them a unique way to extend and develop skills and knowledge. A variety of outdoor experiences is important. Use the experiences and outcomes guides on the LTS outdoor learning website to assist staff in ensuring that all experiences and outcomes that have an element of outdoor activity are accounted for. www.LTScotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/outdoorlearning/about/experiencesandoutcomes.asp

- look at the outdoor learning offered to learners and the totality of their experiences.
- do learners have frequent and regular opportunities to learn outdoors in every subject?
- are there interdisciplinary projects that include outdoor activities?
- are there options for learning outdoors to meet the specific needs of pupils?

- is there provision for informal learning through outdoor activities offered during and beyond the school day?
- where do skills for life, learning and work fit into the progression of experiences?
- where are partner organisations and youth workers involved?
- can learning indoors be consolidated, progressed or enhanced through taking learning outside?

17) Compile generic and specific risk – benefit assessments (RBA) for outdoor learning which takes place within the outdoor space and for local or day trips

This can be a useful cluster activity or collegiate activity time for all staff to work together on this within a school or centre. Check with your corporate health and safety team and outdoor education service to ensure you have not missed any local guidance. Check the LTS outdoor learning website health and safety section for further advice too. Remember that although generic risk assessments are useful they should still be reviewed before and after an experience.

18) Organise the resources needed for outdoor work

A good variety of resources for learning as well as play needs to be easily accessible by staff, children and young people. For example, have a shed with gardening tools beside your garden or inside near the exit to the garden area. Develop a storage system that allows learners to take resources to and from the classrooms easily. Where possible children and young people should be involved in helping to organise and look after resources.

19) Ensure learners have appropriate outdoor clothing and footwear

This enables classes to go outside all year round, whatever the weather. This may involve an enterprise activity by a class or group of learners, fundraising or the setting up of a scheme for donating unwanted outdoor items.

20) Develop your school grounds year on year

Developing school grounds for play and learning is a continuous process. Schools with beautiful, engaging grounds consistently develop them every year and have this approach embedded into the life of the school. Include this in your school improvement plan under a linked priority. Refer to Section 2 of the practical guidance pack.

21) Consider intervals and how to facilitate free play outside

Children and young people of all ages need time to play and do their own thing outside. Work with the children and playground staff to find out which resources and activities work well in different places. Look at ways of enabling all children and young people to access outdoor intervals all year round, in all weathers. This applies to all sectors.