

Bitterne CE Primary School



Outdoor Learning Policy

Headteacher – Jen Johnson

Chair of Governors- Amanda Humby

Last review December 2023

Next review December 2026

Introduction

Excellent teaching gives children the life chances they deserve. Enjoyment is the birth right of every child. Children learn better when they are excited and engaged – but what excites and engages them best is truly excellent teaching, which challenges them and shows them what they can do.

When there is joy in what they are doing, they learn to love learning. Excellence and Enjoyment (DCSF-2003)

Our outdoor learning policy aims to foster children's love of learning. At Bitterne CE Primary, 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 and develop a sense of awe and wonder. This in turn reinforces key aspects and values as part of our distinctive Christian ethos

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

It can provide a dramatic contrast to the indoor classroom. Direct experience outdoors is more motivating 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.

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.
- Outdoor learning enables children to be confident individuals and impacts positively upon young children's attitudes, beliefs and self-perceptions. Outdoor learning contributes towards creating independent learners with high self-esteem and self-sufficiency.
- Outdoor learning can have a positive impact upon children's behaviour.

- Outdoor learning contributes towards the promotion and children's understanding of the importance of developing a Healthy lifestyle.
- Outdoor learning has a positive impact 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.
- It raises learners' attainment, promotes and strengthens communication skills, team work and sense of cohesion.
- There is clear evidence that boys in particular are more active in their learning in an outdoor environment.

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.

With this in mind the school runs a woodland based nurture group every afternoon. The curriculum for this group is broad and balanced and includes working outside of the classroom as much as possible.

Aims and Objectives of this policy

- To raise the profile of Outdoor Learning.
- To empower children to take ownership of their learning, allowing their minds and bodies to thrive
- To encourage children to develop the skills to solve problems, developing resilient and reflective learners.
- To develop skills of communication, cooperation and collaborative learning.
- To provide a challenging, safe and secure environment within which children can take and manage risks.
- To encourage close links with parents and the school in celebrating our outdoor space and the rich learning that can take place within it.
- To 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. It is important to 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 the school's policies relating to Health and Safety and Risk Assessment should 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 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.

Woodlands nurture group have their own risk assessment for when they are learning in the woodland area and this is revised for specific activities and takes into account the risks related to a child's own individual behaviour response plan. Assessing the risk for the Woodlands group is the responsibility of the Woodlands HLTA lead and the Inclusion Leader AHT.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Assessment of the children's learning will be valued equally indoors and outdoors and should be part of the same process. Through the monitoring of teaching and learning e.g. forward planning meetings, classroom observation, teachers' 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 Bitterne CE Primary 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. We encourage children to be more resilient about weather conditions.

Where should Outdoor Learning take place?

The school grounds

We are fortunate to have grounds which offer excellent opportunities for both formal and informal learning in a variety of habitats and environments. School buildings can also provide a useful resource for learning about energy use and waste for example – tying in well with the schools Eco school programme and our efforts to have ecology and sustainability as an integrated theme throughout our curriculum and evident in all aspects of the life and work of the school, in exactly the same way Health promotion should permeate our school.

The local environment

The locality around school harbours a wealth of opportunities within relatively accessible distance. Learners can develop their skills to explore their local environment. As a school, we actively encourage teachers to plan opportunities for children to engage in learning beyond the school grounds. Each year group has a planned programme of educational visits which complement and extend learning. This schedule is shared with and agreed by governors annually.

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, rural areas, field study and environmental centres; theatre workshops and places of worship e.g. farms and gardens; museums and galleries; and places that reflect the world of commerce and technology that complement our work in enterprise education and our desire to develop more business links. These can be planned into all aspects of the curriculum and, by taking learners out of their normal environment, stimulate their curiosity and imagination.

Residential places

Staying away from home is a powerful way of developing key life skills, building confidence, self-esteem, communication and team working, for example. For instance, through staying at outdoor and adventure centres such as Stubbington Outdoor Education Centre in Y4 or Marchants Hill PGL Centre in Y6, 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.

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

EYFS Curriculum

The children in the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) have daily access to the outdoors, in the safety of the Reception area.

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 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 our school. The school actively engages with the ‘SCC Healthy High 5’ initiative to promote physical and mental well-being and includes the daily mile, nurturing nature and mindfulness inside or outside the classroom.

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.

We, Bitterne CE Primary School already have a number of resources and we use these resources and our outdoor environment generally to develop 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.

Children with Additional Support Needs

Challenge for all is integral to our teaching and we aim to encourage all pupils to reach their full potential through the provision of varied opportunities. Work must be differentiated to aid children’s learning. Also, more-able children should be given open-ended tasks and be given opportunities for further research and more challenging studies. We recognise that our curriculum planning must allow pupils to gain a progressively deeper understanding and competency as they move through our school.

Outdoor learning offers opportunities to including personal research and develop a personal understanding of their place in the natural world, further developing an understanding of learning processes, enquiry and thinking skills; and that deepen and enrich subject learning. 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. Outdoor Learning acts as a bridge to higher order learning and opportunities to challenge misconceptions and ways of thinking. Any specific individual’s needs must be identified in their individual plans.

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 Bitterne CE Primary School 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

Within our school we have staff and pupils who would fall within some of the aforementioned categories and who we actively ensure are treated with dignity, fairness and equality at all times. The school community prides itself in our successes in this area.

This policy should be read alongside the

- Off-site activities policy
- Site security Policy
- School Accessibility Plan
- Single Equality Policy