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# Learning Outdoors - everyone's included!



Examples of best practice for promoting inclusion of all young people in real learning opportunities in school grounds and outdoor environmental centres.





**the only UK organisation representing professionals employed in teaching, developing and promoting field studies**



**provides a web site with: “members only” area, resources & centre directory**



**informs members through newsletters, conferences, annual journal & publications**



**represents members’ interests nationally**



**works in partnership with governments & other relevant organisations eg. Growing Schools and IOL**



**aims to disseminate good practice**

**nafso members:**



**are outdoor educators creating high quality, safe & enjoyable learning experiences for young people & adults**



**raise educational achievement & contribute to lifelong learning for a more sustainable future**



**develop young people’s skills & confidence, raise appreciation of the natural world, & help create responsible citizens**



**teach a variety of subjects in diverse environments**



**are freelance or based at local authority centres, charitable or independent field study centres**

**The membership fee is £40.**

**If you would like to join please download the membership form from the web site [www.nafso.org.uk](http://www.nafso.org.uk) or contact Nafso at Stibbington Centre.**

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### Foreword

I am honoured and very happy to endorse this publication, the result of co-operation between the National Association of Field Studies Officers (NAFSO) and the Department for Education’s Growing Schools Project (GS). This is an initiative I wholeheartedly support.

NAFSO is the only organisation in the UK representing professionals employed in teaching, developing and promoting field studies as a key means of learning outside the classroom. For several years NAFSO has formed a strong partnership with Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) and GS and fully supports the Growing Schools objectives that are set out on their website:



*“Growing Schools aims to give all children the opportunity to connect with the living environment, whether it is an inner city window box or a vast country estate, a school veg plot or a natural woodland. Interacting with living plants and animals provides a very rich, hands-on learning experience in which both formal and informal education can flourish.”*

These clear, vital and inclusive aims for all children are not only about motivation and experience but essentially about the need in all of us to connect with nature and to recognise and appreciate the life that is so close to us and essential for our well-being. This new publication will make a valuable

contribution to the sharing of good practice more widely and will encourage more outdoor environmental and field study centres to develop more inclusive programmes. It will also encourage more schools to use every learning opportunity in their grounds and to visit these centres. In addition Children’s Services can gain a fuller understanding of the role that learning outside the classroom can play in creating and delivering their inclusion policy. I believe very strongly that the wonder and inescapable benefits of learning outside the classroom must be accessible to all, no matter who they are or where they are.

It is inspiring that so many individuals and organisations have contributed to this publication, the second resulting from the fruitful cooperation between Growing Schools and NAFSO. It is hoped that in its electronic format it will grow with you, its readers, inspired to add to its portfolio. This electronic publication has been funded by the Department for Education’s GS programme, which is administered by Farming and Countryside Education (FACE), and further case studies are invited to be added to this on-line document.

At a time when many centres are facing closure or serious budget cuts, NAFSO members have an opportunity here to highlight and celebrate a very important and significant area of their work with young people. However there are challenges here for everyone so that “Learning Outdoors - everyone’s included” becomes common practice not rosy policy.

**Professor Simon Catling**, Oxford Brookes University, Honorary Secretary, International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education.



### Growing Schools

Growing Schools is about looking at education in a different way. It’s about getting out of the classroom and into the living environment, and it champions learning through real-life, hands-on involvement with food and farming, gardens and green spaces, and wildlife and the natural environment.

NAFSO, along with a number of other key organisations, plays an active role in the Growing Schools Development and Delivery Group. This role provides NAFSO members with opportunities to support and promote the Growing Schools agenda, while also making the network available to help Growing Schools develop and flourish.

During 2009/10, Growing Schools planned to develop a range of curriculum materials and practical guidance that could demonstrate and share more widely the role that Growing Schools can play in promoting inclusion in its widest sense, and particularly for young people with special educational needs and behavioural difficulties.

The case for learning outside the classroom, of real-life learning in the living environment, has now been powerfully made. We know of its impact on young people and schools and children’s services. However, far too many young people are missing out. The Children, Schools and Families Select Committee’s 2010 report into Transforming Education Outside the Classroom makes clear that pupils with special educational needs “have particularly poor access to learning outside the classroom”. This is despite widespread recognition that these young people are often the ones who have the most to gain from frequent opportunities to get out into their school grounds, the local community or further afield. Young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties also experience and present particular challenges in schools and for children’s services. National guidance on the education of such young people advises schools to take note of initiatives where young people are making progress in developing skills through practical learning outside classrooms.

With this in mind, NAFSO was asked to write this best practice publication - a wide range of case studies which highlight the ways in which outdoor ‘growing’ activities are being used by its members to promote inclusion for all young people. It is hoped that these case studies will inspire NAFSO members and other providers to develop their activities and continue to share good practice.

**Peter Carne**

[www.growingschools.org.uk](http://www.growingschools.org.uk)



### Editorial: A brief introduction to inclusive education

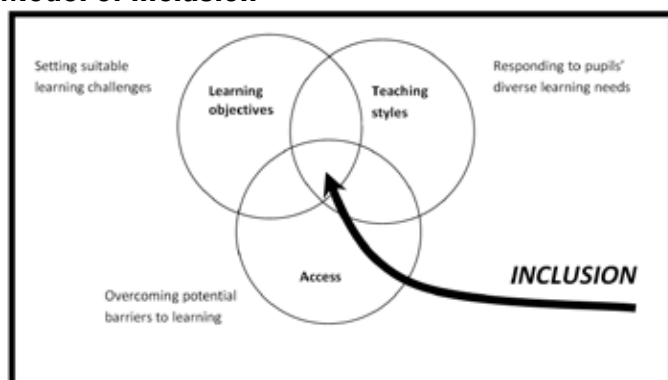
Inclusive education has come to mean the provision of a framework within which all children – whatever their ability, gender, language, ethnic or cultural origin – can be valued equally, treated with respect and provided with real learning opportunities. Inclusive education is about participation and equal opportunity for all – in other words full membership of school, and later, society.

The DfES Excellence and Enjoyment: social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) guidance aims to support schools and non-school settings (such as field study and environmental centres) in promoting the progress and achievement of all learners. It is underpinned by the three principles of the National Curriculum inclusion statement:

- Setting suitable learning challenges
- Responding to pupils’ diverse learning needs
- Overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils

The Primary National Strategy model of three circles of inclusion illustrates these three principles in practice.

#### Model of inclusion



Physically disabled pupils, those with visually or hearing impairment, speech language and communication needs are included in mainstream schools as far as possible. A few young people with very specific social, emotional and behavioural

development needs attend short stay schools such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) or special schools or units.

#### What does inclusive education mean in the context of learning outdoors?

The Learning Outside the Classroom website states that:

*“Every effort should be made to ensure that learning outside the classroom activities and visits are available and accessible to all, irrespective of special educational or medical needs, ethnic origin, gender or religion.”*

The aim of LOTC is to offer all young people a wide range of experiences outside the classroom and points out that providing these experiences for the majority of young people is achievable but the real challenge is providing them for all. It also says that the young people who will reap the greatest benefits from participating are often the same young people who are not offered these opportunities. The case studies presented here reinforce that message.

#### What does this mean for outdoor educators, tutors, teachers and leaders?

The reasons why it is so important for young people to experience the natural world outdoors are clearly explained by Drs Chris Loynes and Kate Rawles in their article “Natural Values – promoting outdoor experiences for all children”. The articles and case studies in this Nafso electronic publication illustrate how educators in the outdoors are responding and providing outdoor learning experiences for as wide a range of young people as possible, whether day use or residential centres or independent schemes. Children learn not only through formal education but also informally in holiday times, evenings and weekends and the way in which the John Muir Award scheme promotes inclusion for people to experience and learn in wild places in Cumbria is described here in one article and two case studies.

A broader range of young people from a wider

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background now access outdoor learning with really positive results that impact on their lives as described by Cathy Preston in the “Eco Challenge” article. The challenge to every outdoor educator is to raise one’s game and provide for this wider range of young people on the courses at their centres and consider how their practice could become more inclusive. This response is discussed in 3 articles from Annie Duckworth in the Lake District, Natalie McLucas in Northern Ireland and Clare Shorter in Hampshire.

How to prepare courses for pupils with specific needs is described in the by Simon Hunt in the Explore programme from the Lee Valley and the pond dipping article by Nick Walford at Lepe, Hampshire. Winter Dotto describes how to adapt one’s teaching style and way of working in her article about creating opportunities for Visually Impaired children to have fun exploring marine environments in South Wales The case studies from the Townsend centre describe how to adapt both courses and centre buildings to become more inclusive.

One stumbling block for outdoor educators can be unfamiliar medical and educational jargon applied to young people and how this may affect their ability to fully join in an outdoor learning experience. A helpful suggestion from three centres (Lepe Country Park, Townsend Centre in Dorset and FSC Brockhole) is to consult professional organisations with the necessary expertise and advice about specific care issues. Also the web site [www.lotc.org.uk](http://www.lotc.org.uk) has a section on Inclusion which is a useful resource about how to plan a day or residential visit for pupils with special needs.

### What does this mean for outdoor learning?

Lifelong learning is a useful phrase to remind is that the outdoors is for everyone and we adults can all learn, however old we are, given the right conditions. In fact we all need to learn a lot more and more quickly if we are to live more sustainably. A number of NAFSO members work with the general public at weekends and holidays, others

often interact with parents of young people as well as the youngsters themselves. The importance of interaction with school communities and wider communities is mentioned in a number of articles (Eco Challenge, John Muir Award) and case studies (Green Heart Den; Cedar house school).

This electronic publication is a work in progress and more case studies are invited from:

- Special Schools and Units (day visit and residential),
- Pupil Referral Units (PRU)s
- NEETs (not in Employment Education or Training)
- young offenders,
- BEM groups (e.g. Muslim girls),
- disadvantaged groups,
- Gifted & Talented
- family learning schemes,
- carers, etc

*Please contact the editor, Clare Shorter, [clare.shorter@nafso.org.uk](mailto:clare.shorter@nafso.org.uk) or the Nafso Chairman Chas Matthews, [chas.matthews@nafso.org.uk](mailto:chas.matthews@nafso.org.uk).*





### **Natural Values: promoting outdoor experiences for all children**

An innovative educational proposal to reconnect young people with the natural world was unveiled by the UK Sustainable Development Commission as a potential “**Breakthrough for the 21st Century**” in June 2009. This was one of 19 best ideas, selected from 300, to really inspire and motivate policy makers and others to catalyse change and accelerate the pace of progress on sustainable development over the next 3 to 5 years. Promoting outdoor experiences in school curricula to support changes in society’s values were selected by SDC as one of the 19 best ideas which could transform the UK into a sustainable society. The SDC’s Breakthroughs project set out to identify the ideas with the most potential for tackling climate change, resource depletion and inequality. Natural Values, an idea promoting outdoor experiences for all children in the UK, was submitted by Dr Kate Rawles and Dr Chris Loynes of the University of Cumbria.

#### **The Breakthrough idea**

‘All children and young people will be offered outdoor experiences as a consistent element of their education from early years to secondary schools. Across these phases, teaching and learning would be structured to enable children to experience and connect with nature and develop the values, knowledge and understanding that underpin a sustainable lifestyle. Outdoor experiences in natural settings would also be promoted through informal education and other services such as Children’s Centres and residential care homes and through play spaces and youth activities.’

#### **Why it is needed**

If we are to manage the transition to truly sustainable lives, our children must understand the intrinsic importance of the natural world and

the interconnections between nature, their own well-being and the well-being of others. Childhood experiences of the outdoors are the single most important factor in developing concern for the environment. Yet children are increasingly urbanised and many cannot access nature. As a result, they are often detached from the natural world and their relationship with it. For example, one out of five British children has never visited the countryside and thousands don’t know where their food comes from.



#### **Why this idea is really great**

No one planned to create a world where children are detached from birdsong and trees. Yet we know that many children spend more time in cars, indoors and in front of electronic screens than they do outside. This is an opportunity to reverse our children’s ‘nature deficit’ by providing consistent and developmentally appropriate outdoor experiences for all children in ways that encourage celebration of nature and a sense of wonder. In delivering this idea, we will address many of the contributing factors that result in poor access to nature that we have inadvertently created.

#### **What difference it would make to individuals and/ the sustainability of the UK**

By embedding outdoor experiences in the education system, structured to encourage pro-nature

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attitudes, we could create a generation of children who see themselves as custodians of nature. Teaching for young children would focus on enjoyment and experiences of nature. For older children, teaching would incorporate critical thinking to encourage exploration of the relationship between contemporary values - including the values embedded in consumer societies - our negative impacts on nature, and our own well-being and identity. In this way, we lay the foundations for the societal change necessary for lifestyles and economies that are more sympathetic with nature.

### Risks and stumbling blocks

Significant policies are in place to support children’s outdoor experiences such as DCSF’s Play Strategy, Early Years and Foundation Frameworks, the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto, Sustainable Schools and Eco-Schools initiatives, the rapid growth of Forest Schools, and curriculum developments on sustainability and healthy lifestyles. However, teachers need the commitment, confidence and competence to integrate outdoor experiences into teaching and learning which they do not consistently obtain from current training. They also need training to incorporate critical thinking and self-reflection similar to interactive approaches used in PSHE. Furthermore, whilst the benefits of outdoor experience far outweigh the risks from accidents or other concerns, this may not be well understood by some parents (who themselves may not have been provided with such opportunities in their own childhoods).

### Making it happen

Frameworks: An ambitious target would be to develop a sixth objective for the Every Child Matters Framework on the environmental contribution to child wellbeing, supported by a national indicator set which enables access to natural places (for instance an indicator on the existence/accessibility of local green space in addition to NI199 which assesses children’s views of the quality of local parks). Linked to this would be strong and consistent incentives for children’s services and local partners to provide frequent and varied outdoor experi-

ences and promote positive attitudes to nature.

Entitlement: Ensuring that early year’s settings and schools offer outdoor experiences as an integral part of their provision, with a minimum level agreed in the form of an ‘entitlement’. The quality of this provision would be assessed as an integral part of Ofsted inspection.

Teacher development: A deliberate focus on outdoor experience within government standards for newly qualified teachers, CPD programmes for existing teaching staff, and qualifications for early years and youth workers.

Environmental organisations as part of the children’s workforce: An alliance between children’s services and environmental organisations to support teachers and parents and develop methodologies to address fears and concerns.

Recognising and rewarding good practice: A programme to identify, promote and reward exemplar practice in teaching and learning and teacher training could also help to embed outdoor experiences in education and children’s services.



### March 2010 Update:

*“We were delighted and a little overwhelmed by the responses to the initiative. We are just beginning to review what we have learned and to plan what we might do next.*

*1. We will write a summary of what we have learned about what we know about outdoor education in relation to education for sustainability. We will also keep in touch with ongoing studies in order to continue to build an evidence base for good practice in this field. Please let us know if you have anything in hand.*

*2. We will add our weight to the lobbying that is taking place with the aim of supporting the use of outdoor education as a vehicle for education for sustainability. Our next step will be to meet with some of the other NGO’s in this field to explore the best ways forward with the lobbying effort.*

*3. A number of excellent websites provide case study and resource material in this area. We plan to support these with case studies and resources on this specific theme.*

*We would like to hear from anyone active in this field. It seems to us that this Initiative has created an opportunity for us to lend our effort to existing activities in both policy and practice. Please let us know if you think we can help or have any further ideas about what should be done.”*

**Dr Kate Rawles and Dr Chris Loynes**

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*Find out more from the SDC Breakthroughs report downloadable at:*

*<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/breakthroughs.html>*



### **Rising to the Challenge of Inclusion** – a learning experience for all educators

Waiting for a new school group to arrive is always an exciting, albeit slightly anxious, time for tutors:

*“What will the students be like be like?”*

*“What will the weather be like?”*

*“Will the activities be pitched appropriately?”*

*“What will they think of me?”*

*“Will I be able to remember all their names?”*

*“Have I forgotten anything?”*

In September 2005 these thoughts were certainly in the forefront of the minds of FSC Brockhole staff. We were awaiting the arrival of 60 year 6 pupils from Newcastle, coming to Borrowdale Youth Hostel for a 4 day geography fieldtrip. The school – Kingston Park Primary has been working with the education service for the past 5 years, however this year there were some additional challenges for us all to consider. The school is highly regarded in terms of its positive and forward looking approach to inclusive education, and this is clearly reflected

in the range of abilities and backgrounds of the children attending the school. Of the 60 children due to come on the field trip, 5 were wheelchair users with physical and/or medical difficulties – and we had agreed to put together a fully inclusive geography field trip in some of England’s most stunning – yet inaccessible mountain landscapes.

The first challenge we faced was at the early planning stage: we were just a fraction outside our area of professional expertise yet it felt like a huge canyon that we needed to bridge. We were absolutely determined to put together a quality course that would be fun, informative and appropriate for all, but we just weren’t quite sure how to make it happen. Uncomfortable questions that we wanted to ask but didn’t quite know how to phrase, physical barriers that we didn’t know how to overcome or work around, and a realisation that this was going to take a lot more “thinking outside the box” than we initially anticipated. So we sought the advice and expertise of staff from the Calvert Trust Centre in Keswick. We talked at length with staff from the school, visited some potential new sites and thought through different options. We were introduced to the world of mobile ramps and thought through the pros and cons of manual versus electric chairs – but perhaps most poignantly of all, we began to look at things from a different perspective and saw how a few simple changes such as wider footpaths, or gates instead of styles would make a huge positive difference to a large number of people wishing to access the countryside.





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Our efforts paid off -on 19th September 60 children took part in an afternoon of team building, camp cooking and orienteering in and around the grounds of Borrowdale Youth Hostel, followed by an evening drama session looking at issues in a National Park. The next morning was spent exploring the Borrowdale Valley using maps and compasses, and the children took inspiration from the stunning mountains to create some fantastic poems. In the afternoon, one group headed off up towards the source of the River Derwent to investigate how the river changes as it flows downstream, while the other half stayed lower down on the more accessible sites, to investigate the diversity and abundance of freshwater organisms in the river and on the final day the whole group visited Keswick – to study a contrasting locality.

All in all, the course was a success. As educators we had to think long and hard about how to ensure everybody was getting a quality learning experience. It necessitated a complete re-think about where we would go and what we would do, and despite the changes we put in place, it was still, at times, hugely physically demanding for the chair users themselves. Not all the children did exactly the same activities, but crucially, nobody was excluded from participating altogether. We had safe, happy, environmentally-enthused students at the end of the course – and if they gained even half as much as we did from the experience then it was certainly worth it!

**Annie Duckworth**  
*Tutor, FSC Brockhole*

### Approaches to Inclusion at Magilligan Field Centre

What is Inclusion? How do we, at Magilligan Field Centre in Northern Ireland, make sure that we engage and include as many pupils as we can through our teaching? What strategies do we use? How do we know if they are successful or not? The following article aims to answer these key questions and features one case study.

What is inclusion? The very nature of field work can promote inclusion but may result in exclusion. Take river studies for example where there are those individuals who come to the centre with the self-exclusion attitude expressed as “I’m not doing this.” Or when they get to the river it’s a case of “I’m not getting in there!” On the other hand there are always the pupils who lead the way. They are the first to get into the river and usually the last to get out. These hearty souls by way of example prompt the less willing to join in, even shouting words of encouragement. Therefore, without much input from others, there are some pupils who exclude themselves at the beginning and by the end of the fieldwork have taken part in some small way.



Fieldwork is a group experience. Pupils need to communicate with one another and with teachers

in an out of classroom experience. The sight of their teachers climbing over a barbed wire fence is enough to reassure pupils that although this is a learning experience, it is one that they may never have had the chance to have before. Usually it is an experience that they may not get again.

The recent ETI Report of Evaluation on Effective Practice in Education for Sustainable Development in a Sample of Primary, Post Primary and Special Schools on Northern Ireland, published in February 2010 stated that: “Environmental initiatives help schools deliver the Northern Ireland Curriculum requirement to foster attitudes and dispositions such as community spirit, concern for others, inclusion and respect.” Field work meets all of those requirements.

A friendly atmosphere brings out the best in pupils and staff. This first contact aims to put any pupil (or teacher!) at ease with the fieldwork experience, from the getting to know the building, if it is a residential group, or the layout of the day and what lies in store for them. The pupils pick up on the ease (or the unease) of the staff so it is something that we target and we aim to make everyone as comfortable as possible.

The case study focuses in on an all boys secondary school which would use the centre as often as possible for any fieldwork that they do. The teachers are familiar with the centre and how it works so the main task at hand is to get the pupils settled, familiarised and ready for some fieldwork. In the course of a visit students may come into contact with a variety of field centre staff and they are always greeted in a positive way, whether it is a good morning or a smile. That’s not to say every group is perfect or responsive but we do have high behavioural expectations.

**The whole fieldwork experience.** We just don’t take them out into the field! There is a classroom based element to their field centre visit. Once the group are settled and they have their bearings the real work begins. The whole field trip experience is revealed in an interactive classroom session

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structured around a power point presentation. The aim is to involve the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learner. There are opportunities to get the pupils out of their seats to help demonstrate the use of the equipment, especially when it comes to explaining any health and safety issues e.g. how to carry ranging poles. Maps are used to illustrate the study area and this is the perfect opportunity to ask questions and ease any concerns that the pupils may have.



### Asking better questions – asking questions better!

All of this is new to the pupils. Whether they have been to Magilligan before or not, the fieldwork that they will be undertaking is new. The fact that it is new does help to engage the pupils right from the word go. Understandably pupils are hesitant at the beginning but one of our main aims is to help pupils feel comfortable so that they can carry out their tasks to the best of their abilities. A calm and reassuring attitude seems to work best and helps to build up their self esteem.

In the introductory classroom session asking questions and responding in a positive way to their answers can do wonders in easing any tension. In the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum at KS3 effective questioning is promoted as one of the strategies for **Assessment for Learning**. This is a key feature of the approach adopted by staff in the Field Centre classroom setting and in the outdoors. There are no wrong answers, students are given time to think and time to answer, they are encouraged to elaborate on their answers, to take risks and treat each others contributions with respect.

We usually get teachers to organise the groups as they know the pupils best. Group work is an important transferable skill. In groups those that are less confident in the class setting have a chance to contribute to the work.

Our strategies so far have been:

- staff to have an open, friendly approachable manner
- a support system is set up from the word go and staff are there to help in any way;
- allow the pupils to ask questions and get comfortable in the centre;
- work pitched at the appropriate level for the visiting group, constant reassurance;
- clear achievable targets with the emphasis on group work and trying to build up a team mentality;

### How do we know if we have been successful?

This is difficult to measure. If we look at it from a recording point of view we have the pupils’ results that they collect in the field to go on. However it is their comments at the end of the fieldwork that is the real measure of success. Many pupils are disappointed when the fieldwork is over. They so rarely get out these days to do fieldwork that when they do they really enjoy it. Pupils are never asked to do anything on fieldwork that would make them feel uncomfortable and they are told that. They respond to this in a positive manner. Another measure of success is when they ask if they can

come back. Some have asked if they can stay. Some have asked how they can get a job like this!

Fieldwork does not appeal to everyone and we know a few pupils, and some teachers, dread it! However here at Magilligan we try our best to make sure that all targets are achievable and in doing that we make sure that all of the pupils are included. Some pupils are surprised at how much fun they had on field trips and how much they have learned without realising it. Surprising yourself by what you achieved out on a river, on a sand dune or walking down a mountain, by pushing yourself to new limits may not be the main aim of the day but it is a valuable lesson that can be carried on from school and into day to day life.

Inclusion is getting everyone focused on the field work, carrying out the fieldwork and taking some learning away with them. That’s what we do at Magilligan and so far we believe we have achieved our results by our whole team approach and positive attitudes.

### **Case Study**

In the course of the last year a local Special School brought five of the classes to the Centre for a day visit. Each visit involved 10 to 15 students aged between 11 to 16 years old with moderate to severe learning disabilities. The visits, each involving a beach study, proved hugely satisfying and enjoyable for staff and students alike. In discussion with the teachers afterwards a number of points were made highlighting the value of the trips for the students and aspects of the Centre’s approach that made it a positive experience. While these students were in many ways different from the mainstream school students that the Centre staff work with on a more frequent basis, the principles behind the design and delivery of a fieldwork programme remain the same. The students responded positively to the experience of being outdoors and learning about the environment. The key to their successful inclusion in the day’s activity and the learning process was an appropriately designed programme of activities, effective communication and the ability to build

and develop a rapport with the students.

**Natalie McLucas**

*Advisory Teacher*

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### Inclusion at Sparsholt Schools’ Centre for Environmental Education

This day-use centre hosts visits from approximately 5000 school age pupils each year from both mainstream and special schools from all over Hampshire. It is located at Sparsholt College, Hampshire, which has an estate with a working dairy farm & pig unit, woodlands, and fishing lake as well as specialist facilities for student use such as a fish hatchery, an aquatics centre and a tropical glasshouse. A different school or a different class from the same school visits each day of the school year for a wide variety of outdoor courses from KS1 to KS4 so there is often a rapid change over of courses and age range of pupils from one day to the next for the small staff to accommodate.

Over half the courses use the dairy and many visit the pig unit for pupils to experience touching the animals. In the warmer months of the year the wider estate is used for habitat work and those pupils will collect and look at minibeasts. Some lucky visitors do both! Every child meets animals because the teachers here recognise that a visit to Sparsholt Schools’ Centre must be uniquely memorable and fun. Courses are as active and hands-on as possible and are designed to cater for pupil’s different learning styles within the constraints of health & safety on a busy working and teaching farm.



The model of inclusion describes **access** as overcoming potential barriers to learning. At Sparsholt we believe that inclusion starts with good planning and preparation right from the start of the booking process. Good preparation is essential for a mainstream school visit and even more important for a successful visit from a special school or unit. The courses are curriculum based (mainly science or geography) and often are a significant part of a half term’s work. The **learning objectives** or outcomes are planned with the school staff to ensure that suitable learning challenges are designed and that the day visit and the follow up work back at school are successful. Teachers visiting the centre for the first time are always invited to a pre-visit meeting which will include touring the farm/campus to see where their pupils will be working. It is essential that the teacher leading a visit from a special school/unit comes to carry out a pre visit, particularly if their pupils are going on the farm. As this is not a petting farm but a real working farm with genuine health and safety hazards it may not be suitable for a very small number of immature pupils. Subsequent visits are often arranged over the telephone.

Access to the working sites and the activities and pupil mobility will be discussed at this meeting. The potential barriers to learning are initially concerned with practical issues such: can the pupils get there and will they be able to see or touch? Most teachers share their knowledge of the pupils’ previous learning, past experiences, behaviour when faced with new situations etc. and say what they hope the outcome of the visit will be in terms of both curriculum and wider education about life, such as pupils discovering where their food really comes from (not a shop!) Centre staff use a range of questions to ensure they know what kinds of pupils to expect on the day and to provide a suitable learning environment for them. Careful questioning is particularly important when discussing individual pupil’s particular needs and how this may affect the running of the day visit.

Over the years good relationships have been built up with a few mainstream secondary schools with

## Learning Outdoors – everyone’s included!

PD (physically disabled) units such that the school staff is confident that those “PD” pupils will be included in all activities. Most “PD” pupils integrate well with the others in their class. However particular issues can arise with wheel chairs and the adults who may be pushing them on the hilly Sparsholt site which is exposed to wind and rain.

Here are a few tips to make life easier for using wheelchairs outdoors:

- **Carry extra waterproofs** to keep the wind and rain off their legs.
- **Plan the route** - soft grass is difficult to push over, so choose a downhill route on grass (and return up hill on a hard surface taking a different route).
- Manual wheelchairs will fit more easily through **narrow doorways** than electric wheelchairs (eg the narrow Dairy milking parlour door way at Sparsholt.)
- If there is a choice, **manual chairs are easier** to use as the whole group of pupils can keep together. (However some pupils need the greater support that an electric wheelchair provides). Electric wheelchairs cannot usually go up or down steps and cannot be assisted by pushing.
- **More adult helpers** may be needed overall as at least one may be fully occupied with the PD pupil.
- **PD adapted minibuses need extra space** at the rear to raise and lower ramps.
- The wheels of wheelchairs can get quite dirty after going around a farm all day. **Wheels need hosing down** for the same reasons that wellies are washed in a boot wash ie harmful bacteria in animal manure must be washed off.
- **Hand washing basins** may not be accessible so carry antiseptic wipes or sanitising hand gel.



Occasionally conflicting interests may arise such as should the whole day revolve round the PD pupil, even if it means the rest of the group miss out on a unique experience? School staff normally resolves this potential problem pragmatically and the disabled pupil, perhaps with one or two friends, go one way and the rest of the group go the other more challenging way then meet up for lunch. Centre staff normally asks the smaller group to carry out a task to share with the bigger group back at school so everyone feels involved and nobody feels they have missed out.

There are also cultural and economic potential barriers to learning. This centre hopefully overcomes those problems in the following ways:

- The centre has been free and a “first come first served” booking system ensured equal access to all schools. (A small fee has recently been introduced.)
- The implementation of the DDA at Sparsholt College means that there is wheel chair access over most of the site with ramps beside most of the flights of steps. Also there are large blue signs with white writing helping visually impaired people navigate around the campus. There is a disabled toilet near the Centre which can be used by pupils in wheelchairs. In the event of a fire in the Centre there is an emergency evacuation plan for both mobile pupils and those in wheelchairs.

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- Recording sheets and even power point displays are enlarged as required for visually impaired learners
- Staff may wear special equipment to assist hearing impaired pupils and try to ensure they are looking when ever anything is demonstrated
- Waterproof coats and wellington boots in a range of sizes are always available for pupils and adults use.
- A separate room is made available for blood tests and injections on request.
- All pupils are treated equally and encouraged to join in but ultimately the choice is their own. For example some Muslim pupils prefer to watch and choose not to touch the piglets. If requested, alternative activities can be provided for such pupils. Plymouth Brethren families normally choose to eat separately from the class. Special requests such as these are dealt with sensitively by school and centre staff.

**Teaching styles**, as shown in the model of inclusion, are varied as far as possible in order to respond to different types of learners.

- Much of the learning takes place as pupils work in small groups or pairs with equipment to find something out. Team work provides opportunities for pupils to use their strengths and often allows everyone to have a role and feel included. School staff is encourage to plan the groups before the visit.
- Information is accessible to both auditory and visual learners as the introduction and lunchtime information is verbal and also written on white board with pictures and symbols used for specific groups.
- Appropriate language is adjusted to the age and ability of the class. The level of words (simple or challenging new words), use of recording booklets or picture stickers instead, size & style of fonts are all considered to make

the reading and recording accessible to pupils.

- Displays are tactile which suits kinaesthetic learners and younger children. Occasionally pupils are reluctant to handle soil, for example, or stroke an animal as they are concerned about getting dirty or scared of the animal. Sometimes older pupils are not prepared to risk the chance of not succeeding in a new experience. Generally encouragement works!
- On rare occasions foreign languages have even been spoken in the classroom!



### **Flexibility and adaptability during the visit**

So the classroom is set up, displays are out, recording sheets ready on clipboards, timetable on the board, equipment ready in the garden – what can go wrong? Lots of pitfalls lurk for the unprepared field work teacher! The pupils can arrive late and need to leave early, with too few adult helpers, insufficient warm clothing. Worst of all is pupils arriving unsettled and not fully prepared by the school staff, and possibly not the types of group that was anticipated, which is when the centre staff need to rapidly adapt the course. Flexibility is the next most important quality an outdoor teacher needs after good preparation.

Working with pupils from special needs schools or units requires even more flexibility and readiness to adapt than normal. General guidelines for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs are:



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- Clear instructions
- Short-timed tasks
- Frequent feedback
- Minimal writing

Practical activities All the activities at the Centre are inclined towards these anyhow as this is an unfamiliar environment for pupils. Also centre staff are keen to maximise the practical activities, hence using stickers and camera to record activities rather than writing. The activities can then be revisited back at school via the web site and photos.

Working pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs one has only just met can be tricky. The best advice is to ask the teacher for advice on when to move on to the next activity etc. Centre staff often find they have to “go with the flow”, have a relaxed teaching style and respond to the pupils’ interests but keep referring back to the planned outcome of the visit. How does inclusion work with a wide range of behavioural and physical needs all in one small class? Pupils in special schools now tend to have more complex needs than some years ago. In the last few months the centre has catered for a variety of pupils. To quote some of the descriptions teachers have used to explain their pupils needs at the pre-visit meeting:

*“Behaviour problem – may kick off”*

*“Severe medical – haemophiliac, tube fed”*

*“Social/ autistic, behavioural difficulties & some on autistic spectrum”*

*“They are all special needs pupils, they are mixed ability, we need to engage and fire them up”*

*“vulnerable girl and some aspergic boys”*

*“Non verbal, working towards KS1, level1, age Y5/6, Walking frame/ wheelchair, two with behaviour issues, need ending activity, respond to pictures, show programme for day in a series of pictures including washing hands.”*

*“Two classes of 16 divided into a group of 7 and a group*

*of 9.pupils with 5 wheelchairs, working on fundamental skills P1-4”*

*“Short attention span, - short bouts of work”*

In the above examples of various special school groups of pupils who recently visited the centre and farm, suitable learning challenges were set for each group by discussion between school and centre staff. Experiential activities were modified for them and the days were successful.

**Clare Shorter**

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Working with special needs groups can feel quite daunting and need even more careful planning.

### Three useful tips are:

**Good planning**, even micro-management of time. Teachers must visit the site and consider how their pupils will react to unusual stimuli such as loud noises. Ask specific questions about conditions and how to deal with them during the day visit. Ratios of centre staff :to pupils is much higher (1 to 12 at Sparsholt Schools’ Centre). These groups usually need more adult supervision than in school. Lots more recording sheets and stickers are often required than normal as pupils often work 1 to 1 with a member of school staff.

**Flexibility** – prepare for plan B and “what if...” situations. Remember that the pupils have particular needs and respond to individual questions. It is rare to get the attention of the whole group. Watch and listen to the teachers and classroom assistants and model the same language etc. Ask the teacher what he/she would like to do as the day goes on. Lunch usually needs to be very prompt. Expect the unexpected and carry wipes/ gel etc.

**Extra activities ready** to use if some of group lose interest, whilst other are slower etc. The pace of activities can vary wildly – some adult helpers become intensely involved and slow the group down whilst other pupils quickly lose interest, which is when extra activities are so important.



### Eco Challenge

Learning outside the classroom can have real benefit and meaning beyond the residential experience by extending it into the “home” setting. Funding from the BIG Lottery (2007-2010) for the Eco Challenge project has given the Field Studies Council (FSC) the opportunity to develop a programme combining residential and local experiences which focus on school pupil’s personal development and increased understanding of the natural environment. The funding has enabled schools to offer this opportunity to students who do not usually get included in residential experiences. The project targets 11-14 year old students (Key Stage 3) from schools in 22 urban local authority areas of England. Selection of participating authorities was based on disadvantage and performance of the authority.



Outdoor providers are used to working with inner city students who have rarely experienced the countryside, let alone experienced the challenge of walking up a mountain and the subsequent pride which blots out all pain. However combining personal development and team skills with increasing environmental understanding and practical conservation activities is something a bit different. Helping kids who may have ‘attitude’ engage with these activities is one step further.

Schools have the freedom to select students and are using a wide range of criteria:

- rewarding pupil’s good behaviour
- rewarding pupil’s effort
- rewarding pupil’s increased attendance
- students with difficult home circumstances
- economically disadvantaged students

There is huge diversity between and within Eco Challenge groups as mixed groups from years 7 to 9 are common. All these factors mean that over the last 2 years the Eco Challenge programme has been well and truly tested and seems to be robust enough to meet the needs of a wide range of students and staff.

Residential courses are provided at FSC Centres where team building, eco awareness, a personal challenge, practical conservation, an environmental module and a team challenge are the main components of the Eco Challenge course. Careful integration of all activities during the residential programme and regular reviewing helps increase students’ knowledge and skills which are then built upon during follow up sessions on return to school and their local community. The follow up sessions are delivered by local environmental organisations such as Wildlife Trusts, Groundwork, Local Authority Education and Ranger teams, community groups and other local organisations

The response to the practical conservation session has been overwhelming. Students get a real buzz from learning how to use tools and then putting their knowledge into action: tree planting; coppicing trees; learning how to make stiles; building footpaths; and building bird boxes. Their enjoyment and enthusiasm often translates into schemes back in the school grounds or in local greenspaces which far exceed original plans. This is all due to increased interest and confidence of students and school staff. These plans often ripple out to engage and involve the wider school community.

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Developing the Eco Challenge residential programme and working with such varied groups has not been without its pitfalls and challenges. Centre staff training has been important and bringing together staff from the different centres who deliver the programme to share ideas and resources has been very worthwhile.

Support by dedicated Eco Challenge project officers working closely with schools throughout the programme also helps teachers to plan and organise the residential courses and the follow up sessions. This support has given schools with no track record of residential visits the confidence to participate and there is some evidence that the barrier has been broken and ‘non believers’ see the benefit of learning outside the classroom, whether on a residential or involvement at a local level.



Around 220 schools are actively engaged in the project and about half have completed the residential and follow up sessions in their school grounds or with a local environmental or community organisation. FSC is gathering evidence that this integrated approach is having real impacts on the students and staff. The best way to demonstrate this is in their own words:

### **The teachers say:**

*“As a PE teacher I learnt a lot about the environment and how ideas can be transferred to the school site. The students relayed information learnt throughout the sessions and constantly drew comparisons between Grays and Wales”*

*“The residential provided a lot of ideas for integrating science and ecology with outdoor education and adventurous activities and the follow up activities have provided a wealth of ideas for new conservation/ecology activities that can be used in the future”*

*“More staff are now taking students out during lessons to look at the habitats around school and using the facilities at the school’s eco lodge. A school gardening club has been set up”*

*“Focussing on work in our school grounds students are more aware of the issues relating to the balance between manmade areas and natural. The orchard they planted will be their legacy”*

*“Working in a wood near school students realised that they did not have to go far to be in nature and to make a difference”*

### **The students say:**

*“I got along with people and got to know and work with people I haven’t before”*

*“I can’t put it into words how this experience has changed the way I see life”*

*“I’m more careful in woodland areas now I know about the different species”*

## Learning Outdoors – everyone’s included!

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*“Eco Challenge has given me a sense of achievement – because you achieve small things that make a big difference”*

*“Eco Challenge made me realise how much fun the outdoors can be”*

*And finally from a member of FSC Staff:*

*“I was uncertain about delivering Eco Challenge at the beginning and it is now my favourite type of course - it is so worthwhile.”*

**Cathy Preston, Project Manager**

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[www.fsc-eco-challenge.org](http://www.fsc-eco-challenge.org)





### Developing the confidence of Visually Impaired Children to explore marine environments

Dale Fort Field Study Centre started running their Visually Impaired (VI) courses in 2004 and has since been awarded a grant by the Big Lottery Fund to help fund these courses in conjunction with Action for the Blind. The main aim of the V. I. course is to provide opportunities for children with a range of visual impairments to develop their confidence in an unfamiliar environment whilst learning about rocky sea shore and estuary life.



Children with visually impairment are often excluded from field trips and their parents can become overprotective and worry about their children getting hurt in the outdoors. As a result they can be excluded from exciting activities such as

a visit to the sea shore and miss out on the fun. These courses aim to include the visually impaired children and bring environmental understanding to all of them.

Dale Fort is a specialist educational marine centre that has been running for 60 years. Over 3500 sighted children visit each year. The visually impaired children receive the same opportunity that sighted children have - to study marine life first hand. They now know what a spider crab feels like, the sound bladders on seaweed make when they are popped and have the confidence to put their hand in a rock pool.

The children come from a variety of backgrounds in the Welsh Valleys and in most cases have never explored rocky seashores before. The course includes a rock pooling activity followed by some close up work with collected specimens back in the lab. The FSC staff usually take the children down to the estuary to do some seine netting, a take trip in

the Dale Fort’s own RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat), and do some crabbing along side the Dale pontoon.

Visually Impaired children and their families continually tell us that the courses are extremely beneficial and that they can’t wait to come back the following year. Sam loved going on the boat as he had never done this before. He said:

*“I never dreamt that I would ever do that in my life, it was brilliant!”*

Angharrad’s mum said:

*“She enjoyed rock pools and the speed boat because she learnt a lot about marine life.”*

However the courses are not only for learning formally about the marine environment but they are also about learning to be more independent and developing children’s communication and social skills, as quite often these children can become ostracised in schools. On the course everyone is accepting and everyone has their own problems to deal with. Seeing other children dealing with their particular visual impairment is important and as one parent commented:

*“Tom has realised that there are others the same as him and that there is no need for it to hold him back”.*

I have found working with young visually impaired children really rewarding, especially being able to give them an opportunity to do things they might otherwise not have been able to do. It is amazing to see how they cope with their disabilities and achieve something they never thought they could do. Simple things like clambering over rocks and walking on narrow cliff-top paths can be achieved with just the right amount of help.

**Winter Dotto**

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### The Explore Programme in Lee Valley Regional Park

The Youth and Schools Service are the outdoor and heritage education team in the Lee Valley Regional Park. The 10,000 acre Park stretches 26 miles along the lower course of the River Lea from Ware in Hertfordshire, through Essex and into London, down to the River Thames at East India Dock. The Park Authority has managed this area since 1967 to provide a wide range of opportunities for leisure and recreation with a mixture of sporting venues, heritage sites, farms, gardens, nature reserves and open spaces.

The Youth and Schools Service offers a range of high quality education programmes to all types of school and youth groups in a number of locations throughout the Regional Park and are able to help teachers, lecturers and youth group leaders utilise the Lee Valley Park’s huge potential as an outdoor educational resource. The Service has always welcomed visits from special schools by adapting mainstream programmes to suit the needs of this type of client. Although verbal and written evaluations had always indicated that special school teachers were happy with the activities and resources, such as large print worksheets, that were provided to them, the staff felt that the Service should devise and promote a programme aimed specifically at special needs clients.



In 2007 the Explore Programme was launched through an introductory project week. This allowed tutors to choose two or three different half hour activities from a list of options covering a range

of sensory, art, or environmental lesson plans as part of a two hour visit. By offering a diverse mix of activities teachers were able to choose a unique programme that not only related to their curriculum requirements, but was also varied and interesting, and therefore more likely to retain the attention of students with a wide range of learning needs.

The project week was fully booked and feedback suggested that teachers and students had enjoyed the programme and were likely to make a return visit to the Lee Valley Park. It was also clear from evaluations that teachers liked the idea of choosing a combination of activities that allowed their students to explore the Park in ‘bite size’ portions rather than just concentrating on one topic for two hours.

Visits from special schools have increased each year since 2007 as a result of this programme launch, and the activities offered in the programme have also been successfully used for mainstream educational group visits and also family events taking place in the Park.

The Youth and Schools team are constantly continuing to improve the activities they offer to special schools with the introduction of farm animal discovery sessions at the Lee Valley Park Farms, new sensory bird watching activities tailored for special needs students and the purchase of a monopod to make bird watching easier for wheelchair users.

The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority is committed to improving access for all visitors and the majority of the Park is fully accessible to those with mobility issues. Most of the Park has hard paved paths running throughout and many of the sites benefit from easy access gates and ramps.

Further details are available from [www.leevalleypark.org.uk](http://www.leevalleypark.org.uk) or telephone the Youth and Schools Service on 01992 702 227.

**Simon Hunt**  
Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

### Inclusive Pond Dipping at Lepe Country Park

In October 2009 the Ranger team at Lepe Country Park offered our first ever outdoor activity session especially aimed at children and young people with disabilities. This was part of our aim to open up our education service to people of all abilities and make our outdoor activity sessions inclusive to all. This was advertised as a fun session and took place during the half term holiday.



The park has a good track record of accessibility, with designated parking spaces for disabled badge holders, all-access paths for wheelchair users, and disabled toilet facilities all available. We are already a popular location for informal visits by groups with learning difficulties and mobility problems, and we felt that the next step was to offer organised activities to cater for specialised groups. We also have excellent resources for education sessions with a range of habitats on site including woodland, meadows, seashore, and the recently completed pond. We chose to offer a pond-dipping session as our inaugural inclusive event since there is easy access to our pond and our experience is that pond dipping appeals to a wide range of ages and abilities. We also felt that it would be fairly easy to

integrate disabled youngsters with their siblings in this setting.

Whilst staff at the park are well-versed in providing a welcoming environment for all visitors and already having a well-established education service, the particular needs of groups with disabilities were a new challenge to us all. We had particular concerns about the more specialised needs of children with profound disabilities, such as toileting, medical care, and the possibilities for challenging behaviour. Working in partnership with Sport Hampshire’s Outdoor Activities Inclusion Officer we were able to make contact with a professional care agency, and to access funding from the Aiming High project to cover the costs of providing professional specialised care support staff. This meant that parents would be able to leave their children on the session and enjoy a ‘short break’, and also left the Ranger team more able to play to our strengths and concentrate on providing a well-organised activity session. We were also able to set up a network of contacts that provided opportunities for vital publicity and allowed us to reach our target audience.



As we have run pond-dipping sessions already we had a firm foundation on which to build, and we began to look at how we would need to adapt the session that we already offered. One of the issues we faced was that we had not specified a particular type of disability – for example mobility impairment, or learning difficulties – so we had to be prepared to

accommodate a wide range of development levels. In some ways this was a benefit, as it allowed us to use elements of our usual session ‘verbatim’ – for example, whilst wheelchair users needed pond dipping equipment such as nets to be lighter and longer in order to be accessible, children with no physical impairment could quite happily utilise our existing nets and equipment. Inversely, while some people with physical disabilities might have no problem with our usual instructions and verbal interaction, children on the Autistic spectrum need a particular kind of direction, and we had to make sure we catered for their needs.

We also had to deal with the logistical issues that arose. The pond has five dipping platforms, and with mainstream children we usually have three children per platform. However, with the increased space used by wheelchairs we had to figure out how many people we were going to be able to fit on each platform, depending on how many wheelchair users we had attending – much complicated maths ensued! Since we were also expecting children with shorter attention spans we realised that if we offered additional ‘arty crafty’ activities we not only had an alternative option if we had too many people to fit on the dipping platforms, but also something to keep the attention of those who had exhausted their interest in the pond dipping.

This trial session was completely booked and many parents at the time of booking expressed their delight that this was on offer and asked what we would be doing next. The feedback from participants, care workers and parents was very positive. This has led us to seek further training so we can prepare more effectively to run inclusive activities whether via our schools or events programme.

All staff are attending disability awareness training specifically geared to working in the outdoors – we hosted one of these training afternoons recently and will be looking for further opportunities to expand our knowledge and share best practice ideas with others.

### **Some of the key points we learned from our pilot include:**

- The need to obtain good information about participants particular needs at the time of booking, in order to be sure that you don’t get any nasty surprises!
- Working in partnership with care professionals & others opens doors to greater experience than staff may already have, which in turn allows staging of more, different, or better events. Partnerships of this type can also allow access to funding for these kinds of events.
- The integration of disabled children with their siblings was particularly welcomed – all too often children with disabilities are separated out from mainstream kids and can feel isolated or excluded, so having an inclusive activity helps to redress the balance and gave the session an extra selling point.
- Plan, plan, and plan some more, and then be ready for all your plans to be thrown into disarray by some unforeseen circumstance! Children with disabilities, particularly those with learning difficulties, can be unpredictable so be flexible, adaptable, and ready to think on your feet.
- While the amount of preparation needed may seem daunting at first, the activity itself and the response from both parents and children make these sessions particularly rewarding for all those involved.

**Nick Walford**

*Lepe Country Park*

*Hampshire County Council Countryside Service*



### Inclusion and the John Muir Award

The John Muir Award (JMA) aims to encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to discover, enjoy and care for the planet’s wild places. Read on to find out how the John Muir Award reduces barriers to engagement with wild places in Cumbria. The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme focussed on wild places. It encourages awareness and responsibility for the natural environment in a spirit of fun and adventure. In order to achieve a John Muir Award pupils have to do a range of activities that involve the following four challenges:

- **Discover** a wild place
- **Explore** it,
- do something to **Conserve** it
- **Share** their experiences.

There are three levels of the John Muir Award:

#### Discovery Level

4 days (or equivalent) minimum time commitment

#### Explorer Level

8 days (or equivalent) minimum time commitment

#### Conserver Level

over at least 20 days over at least 6 months

For each Level of Award the same four challenges are repeated, with increased involvement in terms of time, activity, responsibility and ownership. The John Muir Award is open and welcoming to all, regardless of age, sex, race, class or ability. Participation can be through involvement in an organisation, as an individual or small independent group or family. It is completely free to take part in the John Muir Award.



### Reducing barriers to engagement

- **Accessibility** – it is free to participate, can be done locally and focuses on individual achievement rather than attaining a required benchmark.
- **Structure** – can be used to complement established programmes and a focus for achievement.
- **Challenging yet achievable** – by concentrating on individual achievement, it celebrates personal achievements which are within reach. The John Muir Award focuses on the quality of the participants input (effort, enthusiasm, progress, commitment) rather than a set output.
- **Ongoing support** – from John Muir Award staff to help individuals develop ideas by understanding their organisation’s aims and culture in order to identify ways in which the John Muir Award can contribute to what people are trying to achieve.

### Where does the Award activity take place?

Wild places are places that have some natural character, and where wildlife can be found; places that give people a sense of wildness. These can be from mountain top to coastal edge, or shady wood to local garden, or anywhere nature prevails. One area can be used for Award activity or multiple areas.

*“Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.”*

John Muir

*“The John Muir Award isn’t about record keeping but all about the feelings they get when they are part and parcel of nature -to see their faces, their smiles...”*



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The John Muir Award in Cumbria is hosted by Cumbria Youth Alliance, an umbrella organisation for voluntary youth sector groups in Cumbria. For more information visit [www.cya.org.uk](http://www.cya.org.uk)

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### Case Study: Cedar House School and the John Muir Award

Students at Cedar House School, a residential school for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties based in Kirkby Lonsdale, Cumbria began using the John Muir Award in 2006 to offer students a nationally recognised certificate whilst gaining valuable work experience. With the help of their dedicated teacher, and Mark Birchall of the Forestry Commission, current students Shane and Megan, have achieved Discovery and Explorer Awards and are presently working towards their Conserver Awards. Since Shane and Megan began their John Muir Award activity their commitment, knowledge and enthusiasm has noticeably developed throughout each of the Award levels.



Beginning at the Discovery level, the introductory level of the John Muir Award, Shane and Megan explored a network of paths and mountain bike trails throughout Grizedale Forest, and helped maintain

way-markers and footpaths, including step renewal tasks. This gave Shane and Megan the opportunity to get their hands dirty whilst talking about the feelings they had while immersed in nature. Visiting the site each week throughout the seasons, they experienced the forest in all weather conditions. Having spent a substantial time in the forest Shane now seems to feel part of it, commenting;

*“The forest talks a lot, I like to listen to what it says.”*

Progressing on to their Explorer Award, they have focused on a specific area of forest which had previously been set aside to monitor the impact of deer grazing. The students were handed this area

in order to learn about woodland management, identifying tree species and learning how to thin and space trees in order to encourage a more natural woodland ecosystem. Having learned how to maintain and use appropriate woodland tools, Megan commented;

*“I like using tools...  
Pens I struggle with.”*

Teacher Fritz has noticed that his group: *“really gets to grips with the hands on work, digging, hammering, cutting, planting etc, as it gives immediate results, is long lasting and something tangible that they can put their names on. It is also something that will last”.*

**Self confidence** within Shane and Megan appears to have increased since the beginning of their John Muir Award journey.



In November 2008, Shane answered questions in front of a large audience at Cumbria’s John Muir Award gathering, and more recently, both Shane and Megan visited a local old people’s home in order to share their experiences further. Their contact here has led to an opportunity to create a wildlife garden for residents as part of their Conserver Award.

**Influencing Others**, John Muir Award participants have taken a lot from their experiences, but others have benefited too. The newest member of the

## Learning Outdoors – everyone’s included!

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Grizedale team, Holly, has so far benefited from an introduction to the site via a guided walk with Shane and Megan, and has received valuable advice from them in the build up to her recent ‘Share’ challenge. Having been working towards her Discovery Award for the past six months, Holly recently completed her Award by leading a group of adults to Grizedale, sharing her expanding knowledge of woodland habitats and management techniques with a captivated audience. Since getting involved with the John Muir Award group, Holly has noticed a substantial change in the way she looks at herself and the natural environment:

*“Now that I’ve started coming out here I’ve taken a shine to it...my mum’s got a garden back home and I love to help her with it now... if someone six months ago had asked me if I wanted to come out to Grizedale I’d have said no way but now if you ask me I say yeah definitely!”*



Holly plans to continue through the John Muir Award levels and has firmly told mentors Fritz and Mark that she would like to continue to set time aside to

*“Stop and see how beautiful nature can be sometimes”*

There are also plans for Holly to fulfil the role of mentor for future groups visiting Grizedale Forest to take part in their John Muir Award, ensuring that

as each John Muir Award participant progresses, others benefit.



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### Case Study: The Green Heart Den – ‘Urban Oasis’



The Green Heart Den is managed by the Marsh Street Arches and Garden Community Interest Company and is based in Barrow-In-Furness. This group of local champions have been working with ‘Junior Wardens’ to achieve their John Muir Award whilst transforming an area of derelict land into a community garden. The land and buildings proposed for continued development have been derelict for almost 30 years, and until the recent clean up had been used as an area for fly tipping, arson, under age drinking and drug abuse.

This area has now been transformed into an ‘urban oasis’ which is used and valued by local residents, with seating areas, water feature, raised beds full of diverse plants and trees, and resident hedgehogs, butterflies and slow worms. This has been a real community endeavour, with huge support from Central and Hindpool Neighbourhood Management team, the fire service, police and local residents.

This ‘urban oasis’ is proving to be a great outdoor classroom for students from local schools, who undertook the task of deciding upon the name for this area and who are undertaking the role of ‘Junior Wardens’ to manage and protect this site. Colin Smith, Head teacher of one of the local schools involved commented on the work of the junior wardens saying:

*“It’s a brilliant scheme. It encourages children to take responsibility for their environment and work cooperatively for the good of the community.”*

The Green Heart Den have gained much interest from outside organisations, teaming up with Cumbria Wildlife Trust, who have provided some fantastic workshops for youngsters on wildlife identification, including evening workshops introducing the local bat population, roosting in neighbouring railway arches, to local residents.

For more information visit [www.johnmuiraward.org](http://www.johnmuiraward.org) and [www.greenheartden.blogspot.com](http://www.greenheartden.blogspot.com)





### **Case study: Residential course for looked after children at Townsend Outdoor Education Centre**

For the past 5 years Townsend Outdoor Education centre has been hosting a week long programme for looked after children from the London Borough of Greenwich. This holiday camp for children with social and emotional disturbances was facilitated by external providers, Mango ([www.mongocic.co.uk](http://www.mongocic.co.uk)).

The programme has been evolving over the years and comprises a mix of adventurous activities, sessions designed to increase self confidence and inner strength, reflection activities and trips out to the local area. Careful planning was required to ensure that the activity programme was as inclusive as possible due to the specific needs that many of these vulnerable young people are dealing with, particularly regarding emotional and social barriers.

Catherine Mittins, centre manager of Townsend, highlights the importance of giving the young people time to reflect on their feelings and thoughts throughout the week and ensured downtime was incorporated into the programme to allow this to happen. She highlighted how important partnership working was in ensuring that the young people gained as much as possible from this experience. The team working with the young people included social workers, SEAL practitioners, Townsend staff, and mentors who were themselves young people who had previously been in care.

### **Case study: Adaptations to enable a physically disabled child to attend a residential course at Townsend Outdoor Education Centre**

This second case study focuses on the way Townsend Centre adapted the programme and their facilities to include a boy who used a wheelchair to get around. The centre’s adaptations include a bedroom with a hoist, a caving system in a shed and an underground purpose built quarry site with disability access. Planning was also required to ensure access to various areas such as the beach and to Corfe Castle was possible. The Centre borrowed a beach buggy style wheelchair for this particular boy to help him access tricky terrain such as sand dunes.

Teaching staff need to be flexible and imaginative to adapt activities to ensure that everyone feels included. Ensuring that wheelchair users have a role in activities, even if they can’t physically take part is vital. Catherine Mittins, centre manager of Townsend, described how the team building programme was adapted slightly to ensure that more mental type challenges were used for the boys group, and that the physical challenges were accessible by wheelchair. The group were also encouraged to ensure the boy in question was included in the planning stages and perhaps had an additional job such as photography, encouragement etc.

The importance of planning the programme with those people who know the child best were discussed, however the importance of ensuring the programme remains challenging and interesting for all party members is equally important.

The nearby Durlston country park use a ‘tramper’ for guests as an alternative wheelchair for uneven terrain. For more information see:  
<http://www.tramper.co.uk>, and  
<http://www.allterrainwheelchairs.co.uk/home>