



SUPPORTING OUTDOOR LEARNING AT SCHOOL

OUTDOOR LEARNING GUIDE

School grounds are a perfect environment to extend your classroom teaching in a safe and controlled manner. We have included some tips to get you started but we also offer a [consultancy and training service](#) (free for Waltham Forest schools).

Always ensure you apply these suggestions in line with current guidance regarding the use of shared spaces and resources.

GENERAL TIPS

- Your teaching skills are just as relevant to outdoor learning as classroom contexts so trust yourself and work with your strengths.
- Be realistic: start with short, simple activities and build slowly. Rather than committing to an hour per day, perhaps begin with just twenty minutes once a week, as part of your normal lesson planning.
- Pupils may need time to adjust to outdoor learning routines. However, pupils will soon become quicker at getting ready, moving between spaces and gathering back in on your call. Your first session may be primarily focussed on 'how we learn safely outdoors', as you set expectations and practice routines.
- Outdoor learning lends itself well to cross curricular work such as projects, but there will also be many opportunities for incidental links within a main theme.
- You could involve pupils in planning and managing the outdoor space to increase guardianship.

PREPARATION

- Check the weather forecast when planning your session and discuss with your class what clothing is appropriate. You may need to decide whether to postpone, but children are often willing to go outside in 'poor' weather. However, always have a plan B for classroom learning if you do need to postpone. Consider which area will provide the best shelter in wind/sun/rain.
- Discuss or formalise your plans with other teaching staff that may also be using the space. You can agree zones or a rotation of areas used.
- Put together some individual outdoor learning kits for pupils, containing commonly used items (see our [Pupil Outdoor Learning Pack](#) for some simple suggestions.)
- Decide how you will manage essential medications and double check you have what you need.

CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION

- Set up the outdoor time as learning time and be specific. Refer to it as "outdoor maths/English/science" etc. rather than generic outdoor learning. Set the learning objectives with your class so they are clear on the expectations.

MOVING BETWEEN INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPACES

- Make use of the transition time and focus the pupils by doing activities en route.

GATHERING AND MANAGING THE GROUP OUTSIDE

- You could use cones, chalk marks or the pupils' seating mats to identify individual workspaces.
- On sunny days, stand facing the sun to make it more comfortable for your class to look at you.
- Agree a gathering point and a clear call for returning before you send the group out. One way to gather in a reluctant group is to ask them to bring you something as a challenge. Be playful, especially with younger children and have a coming back game.
- Establish clear boundaries with your group. You may have identifiable features to stay within. You can make sure children know what these are by visiting them (e.g. "run to the fence and back, without touching it"). You could place colour-coded markers to create different zones. This will allow you to dictate the size of space you use in any one session, share it with other classes or spread out your class.
- Classes may be very excitable when they first go outside. It can be worthwhile doing a short physical activity or one that focusses them, e.g. a timed scavenger hunt. Tuning in with senses can be a powerful way to focus and calm your class. You may close your eyes and listen to sounds for 30 seconds, spot five different items on the theme etc.. The journey to the space can be used for this.
- Trails can be useful for spreading out pupils. Place trail sheets out of reach in upside-down zip-lock bags. Make a circular trail of learning challenges which can be started at any point so you can stagger the class around the trail. There are many premade trails online.

DURING THE SESSION

- Allow for some distractions, particularly at first. It is often worthwhile allowing pupils to watch the squirrel for a minute before return to topic, rather than trying to avert their intense interest. Pupils will soon regard such distractions as background and largely ignore them. However, permit yourself to be flexible during the session, if a learning opportunity presents itself. The outdoors is a dynamic learning space!
- Photograph learning activities and outcomes for records.
- Make as many links as possible between the outdoor and indoor learning, to integrate concepts.

AT THE END OF THE SESSION

- Allow plenty of time for feedback, especially as the environment lends itself to unplanned learning.
- Give children a few minutes to journal their outdoor learning, to embed it and provide you with something for review and evidence.

Have fun and enjoy the creative opportunities for engaged and interdisciplinary learning. You may be surprised how much you all gain from the experience.



Bringing nature nearer