

Helping pupils to grow with **outdoor education**



JO BARNETT, outdoor education group manager at Telford and Wrekin Council, shares two case studies of schools helping pupils learn with nature.

The pandemic has shown us all the true value and benefits of getting outside and embracing nature. Following multiple lockdowns, disruptions and covid-19 restrictions, more schools are now using their grounds and local green spaces, with the guidance of outdoor education providers, to re-engage their pupils, help them catch up on learning and support their well-being. Here, we look at two innovative examples of schools leading the way.

Hollinswood Primary, Telford

Hollinswood Primary is in the heart of Telford. The school is extremely proud of its learning environment, using outside spaces to maximise opportunities for teaching and learning. For a setting so close to the centre of Telford, it is one of the greenest schools in the borough, with extensive and beautiful grounds that include a wooded pit mound. Within 500m of the school is Telford town park, which offers canoeing, high ropes activities and the chance to explore 230 acres of local nature reserve created out of the historical industrial workings.

During the last school year and whenever covid-19 restrictions allowed, children showing signs of stress or anxiety would walk to the town park for weekly outdoor adventures. These were progressive and varied, with the focus on the children, not the activity. By having an experienced, well-qualified outdoor educator, there were opportunities to respond and adapt, challenge and stretch, or energise or relax as best for the children on that day.

Head teacher Glenn Atkinson explains: "Our children have been working on a tailor-made sequence of activities designed by Chris from Arthog Outreach and our school staff. The programme aims to develop resilience, communication, stamina, problem-solving and self-belief as part of the school's 'catch-up' work. The programme has already positively impacted on all the students (and staff) who took part."



Whitehaven Academy, Cumbria

Situated on the west Cumbrian coast, on the edge of the Lake District national park, Whitehaven Academy is in an ideal position to provide students with a rich outdoor learning programme that embraces the local environment. As part of the creative curriculum offer for years eight and nine, students participate in a 12-week Whitehaven Outdoor Learning Award. Based on the existing National Outdoor Learning Award but with a local focus and a strong emphasis on the importance of oracy, students explore a range of activities and develop skills leading to an expedition.

"We believe passionately in connecting our students with the remarkable environment around them," says head teacher Nigel Youngman. "The impact on confidence and self-esteem is palpable. The past year has made people think differently and for us, it has given rise to our creative curriculum. In addition to outdoor learning, students can study science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), arts award, politics and philosophy, food and nutrition, and creative media and design."

Over a year, 160 students will complete the outdoor learning aspect of the programme, working with a wide range of local providers and drawing on the considerable expertise of the staff. Course leader David McCabe sums it up: "We're absolutely loving exploring our extensive grounds, stunning setting and the various habitats on-site that we often have underused and undervalued. New connections with local partners support our students to pursue new interests in nature, conservation and activities in their immediate communities. Most of all, we're having memorable learning experiences outside of the classroom and delivering a refreshing antidote to lockdown learning."

i The Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC) is affiliated with NAHT. We encourage you to include AHOEC membership in your application with us. Learn more about outdoor learning by visiting AHOEC's website www.ahoe.org.

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