

Teaching Outside: How and Why



David Attenborough on outdoor areas



“Natural spaces are essential to human development and wellbeing, and none more so than those that we set aside for use by our children. A school playground is a vital space.”

Connecting pupils with nature



Having daily contact with a natural space is vital for children. For many, the only occasion they might have to do this is while on their school grounds.

Taking learning outdoors can provide a new perspective not only on a curriculum topic, but in developing an understanding of why nature is so important.

If we want our pupils to grow up with the desire to protect nature, then they need to experience it, appreciate it and understand it.



The benefits of teaching outside



Although perhaps not practical for every lesson, taking learning outside can have huge advantages: it provides opportunities for students to make real world connections and develop their problem-solving skills; it encourages teamwork and a sharing of knowledge and understanding between peers, rather than having to rely only on teacher feedback.

Making use of the natural resources outside your classroom allows learning to become more interactive and can provide an alternative look at abstract concepts.



You may be further inspired by Andrea Stevenson's reflections on going from never having taught outdoors to teaching 100 maths lessons outside in the space of 3 months:

[100 Maths Sessions Outside](#)

Research* has shown that outdoor learning has a significant impact on pupils' attitudes and attainment:

- Children who experience school grounds with diverse natural settings are more physically active; more aware of nutrition; more civil to one another; and more creative.
- Exposure to natural settings increases children's ability to focus and enhances cognitive abilities.



[*Getting Out of the Classroom and Into Nature: frontiers in Public Health](#)

[*The Scottish School Grounds Survey Report 2025: Prof John H. McKendrick](#)

Top tips for teaching outside



Behaviour is often cited as one of the main reasons why teachers are reluctant to take learning outside. When learning outside is a novelty for pupils, they are less likely to see the outdoor space as an extension of their classroom and instead associate it with where they spend their free time during break and lunch. You could allow pupils to run to the other end of the playground and make a loud noise before the learning starts as one way to get this out of their system!

However, the more often lessons are taken outside, the more regular it becomes for pupils to see it as another space where they learn. Create places to gather that serve your teaching needs, such as log seats or an outdoor chalkboard attached to a fence.





The best way to ensure teaching outside becomes embedded part of the curriculum rather than used as an ad-hoc activity is through adopting a whole school approach. Encourage your colleagues and school leaders to be involved in the delivery and development of your outdoor learning space.

When you take your class outside, **start small:** ten to fifteen-minute activities that can be moved throughout the day or week are best to start with, rather than aiming to spend the full hour outside.

Our hope is that the curriculum-linked resources we have provided on our website can be adapted to fill however long you wish to spend outdoors.

‘Go bags’



Another barrier to outdoor learning is planning and resourcing; schools that have embedded outdoor learning recommend each class having an outdoor learning pack or bag that can be grabbed as needed. This also allows for flexibility in inclement weather.

Useful items to include:

- tarpaulin (to create an outdoor ‘carpet space’)
- pencils
- chalk
- pegs
- clipboards (these could be made out of cardboard using pegs to attach paper)
- a selection of natural resources (e.g. stones, twigs, conkers, etc.)
- ropes (could be used to create an outdoor washing line to hang up pictures or texts)

