



Teaching Outside:

Why you should do it

and

How to go about it

David Attenborough on making use of 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.”

Why should we teach outside?



Although perhaps not practical for every lesson, taking learning outside on a regular basis 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, and it removes the need to solely rely on teacher feedback.

These slides will detail the findings of research projects that have looked at institutions where learning outside is an embedded part of the culture and include suggestions for how to achieve the same in your own setting.

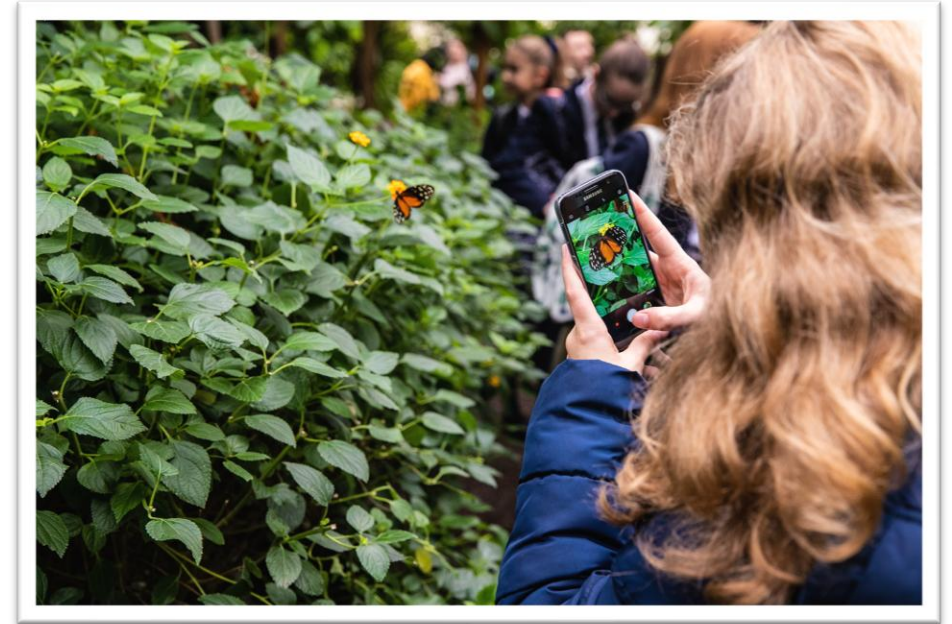


Taking learning outside



Taking learning outside the classroom does not have to be a huge undertaking, nor set in stone. As the class teacher, you are best positioned to assess how your class will respond on a given day. You may need to consider events happening across or throughout the rest of school. You might have to take a literal raincheck!

What is important to remember is that all forms of learning outdoors are valid, even if it is simply taking your class outside for a change of scene for your plenary.



Making use of the natural resources outside your classroom allows learning to become more interactive and can be used to provide an alternative look at abstract concepts. Interacting with your outdoor area encourages creativity and engages those who may struggle in the classroom.



Read 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](#)

The benefits of learning outside



Research* has shown that learning outdoors 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.



*Ofsted: Learning Outside the Classroom (2008)

*Getting Out of the Classroom and Into Nature: frontiers in Public Health

*The Scottish School Grounds Survey Report 2025: Prof John H. McKendrick

Learning outdoors...



Makes lessons more enjoyable (95%)



Has a positive impact on behaviour (85%)



Engages pupils with learning (92%)



Improves social skills (93%)



Improves pupils' health and wellbeing (92%)



Leads to a greater understanding of nature (94%)

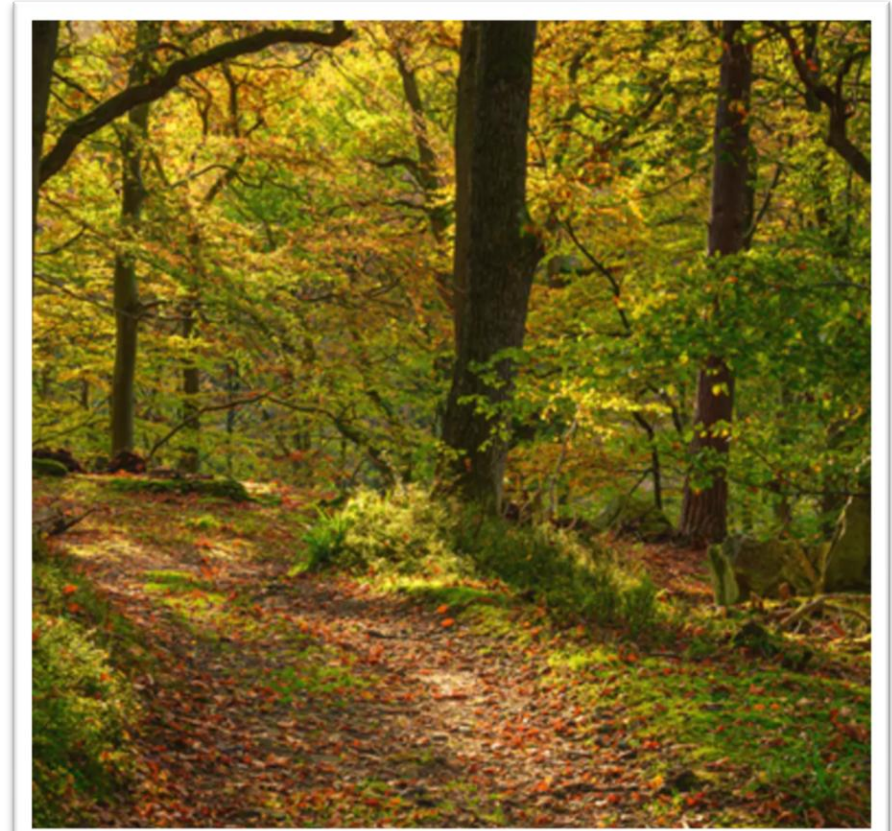
Connecting pupils with nature



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

Taking learning outdoors can provide a new perspective not only on a curriculum topic, but also 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.



How to introduce teaching and learning outside



Behaviour is often cited as the main reason 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.

In the UK, the weather can also make moving your classroom outside seem an unappealing prospect.

The following slides offer advice and suggestions from institutions where teaching and learning outside has been successfully embedded across all year groups.



Important elements for successful teaching and learning outdoors:

In a report by HM Inspectors, it was found that when the following six components of practice are put in place, it creates conditions for high-quality outdoor learning:

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|---|---|
| 1) Effective leadership of outdoor learning | 4) Staff using the outdoors to support the wellbeing of students |
| 2) Using outdoor environments to support the delivery of the curriculum | 5) Creating partnerships to support the planning, delivery and evaluation of outdoor learning |
| 3) Making learning in and about the outdoors a regular feature of young people's learning experiences | 6) Staff CPD centred around building confidence in delivery outdoors |

Consider creating an outdoor learning policy



Creating an outdoor learning policy will help to embed teaching outside into the ethos of your school.

It can be included in staff and parent handbooks, published on school websites and advertised on noticeboards. Outdoor learning could become a real selling point for your school.



Planning and embedding outdoor learning:

- Who will lead on your school's outdoor culture?
- Who will be in charge of the budget? (e.g. buying in resources like chalk, clipboards, etc.)
- Who will organise ongoing training and support for staff?





★ Adopt a whole school approach:

This is best way to ensure teaching outside becomes an embedded part of the curriculum rather than just used for ad-hoc activities.

Encourage your colleagues and school leaders to be involved in the delivery and development of your outdoor learning space.

★ Start small:

When you first start teaching outside, plan ten to fifteen-minute activities that are not necessarily set in stone and that can be moved throughout the day or week. This removes the pressure if something else comes up during the day or the forecast changes. You do not need to spend a whole hour outside on your first try – or even your hundredth try!

★ Share early successes and problem-solve issues together:

Meet as a school or department to collaboratively plan projects and make relevant curriculum links. Also consider other outdoor spaces in your local area to make use of, such as parks and allotments, plus cultural opportunities provided by museums, libraries, theatres and other local businesses.

★ Behaviour:



The more often lessons are taken outside, the more regular it becomes for pupils to see it as another space where they learn. Think about the boundaries you set and the way you regain pupils' attention during a PE lesson: the same methods can apply when leading other activities outdoors. You may initially need to allow pupils to run from one end of the playground to the other or to make a loud noise to get it out of their system before you get started. Eventually, an outdoor area can become an extension of your classroom.

★ Set up a learning space:

Create places to gather that serve your teaching needs, with features such as log seats, an outdoor chalkboard attached to a fence, or rope strung up between trees to act as a washing line; things that do not require you to make extensive preparations and help to smooth the transition.



★ Outdoor clothing:

Getting parents/the wider school community on board with your outdoor learning aims can help to support with provision for all-weather readiness. If your pupils in EYFS already bring in Forest School clothing, could the rest of the school also do the same? Perhaps some people have old wellies or cagoules they can donate to start building up an outdoor learning clothing collection?

Class 'go bags'



Schools that have embedded outdoor learning recommend having an outdoor learning pack or bag in each class 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 from cardboard using pegs or bulldog clips 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)





The information and guidance provided by ZSL are intended for educational purposes only.

Responsibility for the safety and supervision of pupils remains with the school and its staff at all times. Teachers should only undertake activities that are appropriate to their setting and must ensure that all activities are planned, risk assessed, and carried out in accordance with their school's policies, procedures, and safeguarding requirements.