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Why True Outdoor Education should be on the National Curriculum

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Outdoor Education

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Why do we want outdoor education to be on the national curriculum?

If Outdoor education became a compulsory part of the National Curriculum there would be a step change in the quality and impact of English schooling.

Outdoor education is most powerful when “interwoven within the formal school curriculum” ⁽¹⁾ and only by making it compulsory will it be possible to effectively influence school priorities and teacher behaviour.

There are a variety of interpretations of learning outside the classroom, but it is fundamentally composed of discovery-based experiential learning, delivered by expert professionals. It complements and enriches the learning experience and impact of a more indoor traditional school environment. Provided in the right way it can significantly transform a child’s ability to learn, to increase their life chances and to enrich society.

We would like to see 4 weeks of education in the true outdoors offered to every child before they are 16 . We recognise the cost and resources required for this and would prioritise those children who are less likely to be given enriching experiences by their families. Without intervention these children will not spend time in nature and will not benefit from the skills and personal development it can offer.

The range of demonstrable benefits for children and for society should not be exclusive to the enlightened or to the wealthy. Outdoor education has a crucial part to play in fostering social inclusion, skill development, improvement to wellbeing alongside academic excellence. ⁽²⁾

1 - Institute for Outdoor Learning “Teaching outdoors: helping teachers deliver outdoor learning in the curriculum”

2 – Lawlor, S ed 2017 “The state, national identity and schools” Politeia

What is outdoor education and where do we want to focus?

Learning in the true outdoors

Outdoor learning is not a subject but a way of teaching, and a way of learning. (3)

Outdoor education is not simply learning taking place outside within the school grounds, in a park or in a school garden. Learning outside has an important role in child development and should be encouraged but this is not the true outdoors.

Children should experience nature which is wild and natural. Many outdoor education centres offer large natural spaces in which to discover a living world of biological diversity which is as uncontrolled by humans as possible.

True outdoor landscapes immerse children in an intriguing and challenging topography filled with mystery and the unknown, with hidden areas to discover, explore, understand and enjoy. This includes being outside in the rain, snow, heat and the cold. It involves experimenting and & risk-taking which for disadvantaged children is a very unfamiliar environment.

True outdoor education implies a wider definition of both teaching and learning to remedy a wider definition of poverty. If true outdoor education is not on the national curriculum, many children in England will grow up without ever seeing, smelling or touching wood, or a cow, or a field, or experience a non-urban landscape or the changing seasons. We see it truly as part of the “essential knowledge” of the new curriculum. (4)

3 – Burt, J 2016 “Busting the myths on outdoor learning in schools” Politeia

4 – Department of Education 2011 “New Curriculum for English Schools”

Benefits of outdoor education – developing key learning skills & abilities

It is already well known that teaching core curriculum subjects outside the classroom is an effective way to apply topics and improve understanding through the stimulating impact of a new environment. (5)

However, true outdoor education can also develop fundamental skills to facilitate effective learning, personal effectiveness and socially positive behaviour.

Key relevant skills that are developed include communication, problem solving, teamwork, leadership and creativity which are all essential for us to meet the new challenges we will face in the 21st century.

True outdoor education can develop work-ready skills such as self-awareness, being receptive, personal drive, self-assurance, resilience and being better informed.

Impact

In this way, true outdoor education helps schools to deliver full potential development for children, and there are measurable positive impacts on absenteeism, behaviour management and avoidance of exclusion. (6)

5 – Council for Learning Outside the Classroom 2019

6 – Institute for Outdoor Learning 2008 “Excluded and challenging but able to learn” Horizons 44

Benefits of outdoor education – creating a connectedness with nature

True outdoor education allows children to directly experience the outdoors and the natural world in a facilitated and structured way which overcomes their initial reluctance, caution and risk aversion, and allows them to understand and value the natural world and appreciate its beauty and diversity.

It expands the total knowledge base of children who often have very limited horizons. Fire lighting, cooking, camping, hiking and challenging outdoor activities hugely increase their mental and physical reference points and improves their ability to take on board new knowledge and ideas.

Impact

There are significant improvements in the openness and span of attention, and reduction in resistance to learning. For example, the ability to understand and achieve improvement and progression, so from short walks to long walks to hikes; simple concepts to complex concepts.

A better appreciation and enjoyment of the natural world leads to better stewardship of it. We will depend upon the young to value and protect our planet. We need to leave it in good hands.

Benefits of outdoor education – improving mental and physical health

Our children are suffering from an epidemic of stress, anxiety, obesity and a lack of exercise leading to multiple health problems.

Outdoor education centres represent a constructive and effective response to this and are dedicated to helping young people learn successful personal behaviours to better cope with their emotions and to understand and embed healthy behaviours.

Many GPs are already prescribing natural remedies and encouraging patients, including children, to spend time in nature to treat a range of conditions from heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol and diabetes, to chronic stress, depression and anxiety. From self-esteem in girls to self-management in boys. Techniques including meditation and relaxation are much more easily taught in the true outdoors.

Impact

Outdoor education challenges children to unlearn many negative and restricting embedded habits and attitudes. We have seen some children who perceive themselves as failures rediscover themselves as leaders. The outdoors is a great leveller. We know that skills acquired in outdoor contexts can lead to better achievement and less lifelong frustration. Expanding their horizons through true outdoor education equips children to cope with their lives, have the confidence to overcome challenges and to treat themselves and others with respect.

Outdoor education can create a new love of exercise and walking which builds a healthier lifestyle and is a strong counterbalance to so much of their normal, sedentary, indoor lives dominated by a plugged in culture on social media and online entertainment.

Ufton Adventure **Theory of Change**

At Ufton we demonstrate the ways in which the key ingredients of true outdoor education can be combined into well designed and structured programmes with demonstrable, measurable and repeatable benefits

- Beautiful and wild outdoor setting
- Expert teachers
- Methodologies rooted in research and best practice
- An immersive multiple-visit and residential approach (7)
- Close partnerships with schools including on-site outreach

The approach is scalable, measurable and predictable

Ufton

Overview of our work in the true outdoors

Our holistic approach

Our goal is to use the benefits and challenges of the outdoors to help children to develop skills and behaviours to become more successful citizens that enjoy time spent outdoors

Young people who make choices & are self-regulated, who “stop, think, decide” & have an enthusiasm for learning using “tried it, getting it, got it”.
Able to form & maintain good relationships.

Clear goals

Achievement Pathways

Nurturing, therapeutic and holistic approach to child development

Builds enthusiasm & motivation for learning.
We develop self-belief & determination to succeed.
We help children to better manage & improve their physical, mental & emotional wellbeing.

The Ufton Learning Model

The Ufton 5 Ladders of Success – Developing Skills

Our ladders break down difficult concepts into manageable steps, all our work in the true outdoors is explicitly brought back to these ladders and children explain and decide where they have reached. We ask children to identify whether they have ***tried it, are getting it or have got it.***

1. Self Esteem
2. Empathy
3. Friendship
4. Nature Connectedness
5. Wellbeing

The Ufton 4 Rs – Developing Successful Behaviours

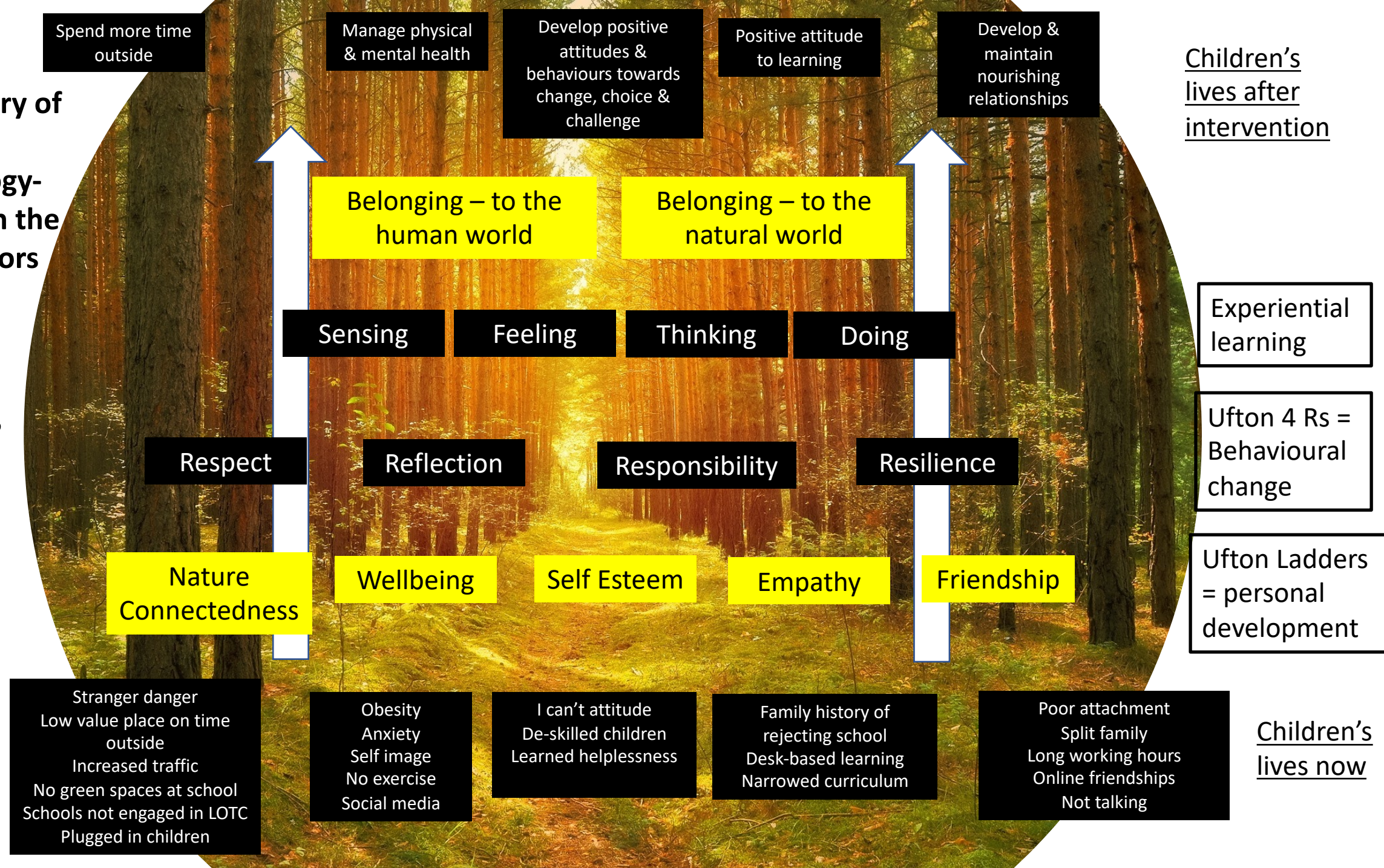
All of our work in the true outdoors is designed to develop successful behaviour. We ask children to identify ***what went well*** and ***what would be better if.*** We use this approach to show children how these behaviours are helpful and make their own lives easier.

1. Respect – Others, the environment, equipment and belongings
2. Responsibility – For my behaviour, protecting the natural world, equipment and belongings
3. Resilience – have a go and try new things, break down goals and bounce back from disappointment
4. Reflection – Did I do all I could? What impact did I have? What could I have done differently?

We record progress formally in Ufton passports which are given to children at the end of a programme

Ufton theory of change methodology-our work in the true outdoors

Change is possible



SELF ESTEEM



"Wanting to be someone else is a waste of the person you are."

I feel good about myself and deserve the respect of others; I am able to keep on working to succeed at achievable goals

I can match my own skills and qualities to my objectives; I can review my progress and understand what I might need to change to succeed

I know how I am progressing with my goals; I am building on my strengths and developing my weaknesses

I will focus on the positives about me; I have strategies to deal with negativity; I will set my own goals and attempt to achieve them

I will coach and encourage someone else to do their best and help them to overcome a challenge

I will help someone else overcome a challenge
I will set myself a challenge

I will try new activities and complete them (Outreach)

EMPATHY

"Seeing with the eyes of another, listening with the ears of another, and feeling with the heart of another."



I am aware of other people's feelings and I can adjust my behaviour accordingly

I can see how other people might take things personally when I am giving feedback

I can understand that to succeed we could share ideas and learn from mistakes and bounce back

I understand that people can see the world differently to me

I can listen to others and express how they are feeling

I can understand the feelings of someone else



FRIENDSHIP

"You can't stay in the corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes."



I am a reliable and positive friend to
be around

I will be there for my friends

I am positive around people even if things are
difficult

I can confidently communicate my ideas and values;
I can support the ideas and values of my friends

I listen to and consider what my friends have to say;
I can put trust in my friends and they can trust me

I can connect and make new friends

I can use kind words to encourage my friends (Outreach)



NATURE CONNECTEDNESS

*True joy results when we become aware of our
connectedness to everything (Paul Pearsall)*



I have a strong and positive relationship with the natural world; Nature is my story, nature is everybody's story

I think of the natural world as a community to which I belong; I understand the circle of life and the symbiotic nature of our relationship with the world

I feel a sense of awe and wonder at the natural world
I feel I must take action to protect the planet

I am developing a sense of awe and wonder at the natural world
I understand that we need to protect animals' and plants' habitats

I understand what plants and animals need to survive;
I understand that we are in a solar system and our place within it; I understand the importance of weather

I will spend time with animals; I understand being in nature can make me happy; I will respect nature by recycling, my waste, composting suitable food waste and taking away my litter

I will try and spend more time outdoors (Outreach)

WELL BEING



I am me!

Who and what I am is just fine

I am aware of my strengths and working on
understanding my weaknesses; I have strategies to
protect myself online

My Spiritual Connections

I am learning to create bonds with others that make
me happy

I am able to seek help from people I trust and resist
negative influences; I make time to connect to joyful things

My Physiological Needs

I try to get enough sleep

I try to take regular exercise

I am learning to eat well

I am learning to keep myself safe



WELL BEING



"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can."

Meaningful Life

I can maintain warm, satisfying and trusting relationships

I have goals in life and a sense of direction

Passion for life

I know what I enjoy but am open to new things and I make time to do what I enjoy

Taking Control

I can take charge of situations and make good choices

I will work hard to achieve my goals



Why focus on true outdoor learning now?

Traditional school always included the natural world and adventurous, physical and imaginative outdoor play, but the evidence is that children have become increasingly and significantly separated and disconnected from nature. Many schools have no access to playing fields or green spaces. Children do not meet up after school or play outside. Their free time is either inside or, at best, scheduled in a rule-based sporting activity.

Underprivileged children can be as much as 18 months behind their more fortunate peers. (8)

COVID has meant that children from all backgrounds have lost some of the critical and reinforcing habits of sustained and effective learning. Many less-privileged have fallen even further behind, and, without intervention, the pandemic is likely to have a lifelong negative impact that will deny a generation of children life choices and chances.

Society is also beginning to understand and value mental health and individual wellbeing for adults as well as for children, and to make the connection between personal and social resilience.

At the same time, consumerism, advertising and social media pressures are becoming even more pervasive, sophisticated and influential.

True outdoor education was important before, but it is even more important now.

What are the implications of adding this to the national curriculum?

If true outdoor education was added to the national curriculum, there are some clear requirements in order to make it scalable and effective.

Teacher training

- Train teachers to be better at delivering school-based work outside, and working in unfamiliar teaching situations. This is as critical for outdoor education as it is in core subjects (9)

Space provision

- There are many existing spaces and organisations but we will need more
- Parks are not the solution

Risks

- Quality will need to be defined and assured to maximise delivery and impact
- A common barrier is parental perception, which will required parent training and re-assurance

Cost

- Those families who need it most cannot afford it
- Although the average for English pupil premium children is 20% (pre-pandemic 16%), this is very unequally distributed. Underachieving schools can typically have 60%, with huge numbers of parents either working long hours for low-pay or not working at all with family culture of social failure

Summary

Being outdoors and active is a vital part of a happy and successful childhood.

Integrating the true outdoors into school education teaches basic but vital learning skills and increases self-esteem, mental health and social habits. It increases educational attainment, reduces absenteeism and exclusion, breaks a cycle of poverty and under-achievement, and fosters constructive, valuable citizens who can live happily and form enriching relationships.

Simply taking core learning outside the classroom at school can have a positive impact, but the benefits of learning in a truly outdoor context are even more important and impactful, and significantly improve both aspiration and attainment, especially for disadvantaged children.

Children challenged in the true outdoors become braver because their self belief increases. This courage helps them to deal more effectively with the challenges they face. We can't take away the challenges but we can develop skills to meet them.

The only reliable way to achieve this is to add it to the national curriculum, supported by the appropriate investment, training, measurement and partnership with qualified providers.

“I have never heard of anyone involved in the education system in the UK being asked the question ‘why do you want to teach indoors?’” (10)

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