



**FIFE COAST &  
COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**



# Explore Outdoors

## Development Phase Report

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## Purpose

The purpose of the Development Phase for Explore Outdoors was to investigate and understand the Barriers to Outdoor Learning and the presenting needs of schools and communities looking to improve their Outdoor Learning offering

This report gives a snapshot overview of the work that has been progressed on Explore Outdoors in the development phase of the Leven Programme's River Park project. This report identifies what we have learned so far and details the approach we have taken to both learning about community needs and simultaneously developing a fitting response to those needs. The report finishes by describing how the Explore Outdoors programme will be delivered.

## Context

The last ten years have seen the steady growth of Outdoor Learning in Scottish schools.<sup>1</sup> This has occurred contemporaneously with the embedding of Scotland's curriculum, the Curriculum for Excellence, which gives a strong pedagogical incentive to learning outdoors.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, the question that teachers are asking has shifted from "why should we teach outdoors?" to "how do we teach outdoors?".

Our conversations with teachers in the Leven area reflect this switch and we soon realised that the traditional model of delivering one-off, discipline-specific outdoor learning sessions for schools was not going to deliver the best value or have the widest reach and impact. After research and engagement, we have arrived at a consultation-biased delivery model. This delivery model will collaborate with schools to support the whole school approach to developing robust Outdoor Learning across the curriculum and providing access to regular and significant place-based education, which maximises reach and impact with available resource and capacity.

Place-based education is an active learning approach that promotes engagement with local cultures, heritage, and environment. This method emphasizes community and social action as a means of creating change at a local level. Additionally, a place-based approach teaches the importance of sustainability, cultural heritage, and conservation, underscoring the crucial role of our surroundings in shaping our future.

This year the Scottish Government introduced Learning for Sustainability: "Target 2030" A movement for people, planet and prosperity, Scotland's action plan 2023 – 2030.<sup>1</sup> This move has made Learning for Sustainability (LfS) a key driver in the future of Scottish education and builds a link between education and Scotland's just transition, climate ambitions, commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and health & wellbeing strategies. With place-based education as a pillar of LfS, Explore Outdoors is in a unique position to support Fife Council and Education Scotland with bringing this recent political driver to life in Leven.

In response to development phase findings, Explore Outdoors has set the following as its vision and objectives:

## Vision

A Levenmouth where the wide-ranging benefits of time spent learning outdoors are understood and valued, and where Outdoor Learning is a mainstream approach for all ages and stages.

Objectives:

- Support schools and teachers to improve frequency, range and quality of outdoor learning experiences offered.
- Promote place-based, experiential learning approaches.
- Learning for Sustainability is being promoted and progressed across Levenmouth cluster.

## Research

Scoping the needs of the Levenmouth cluster schools started with a broad reaching literature review that took account of Outdoor Learning needs across Scotland, before zoning in on school communities in the Leven area.

- Literature review approach to gathering data on barriers to Outdoor Learning in schools in Scotland.
- Review of needs within Fife and Leven.
- What is working well in Fife. School visits to Falkland Primary School for their Outdoor Learning pedagogy and to Capshard Primary School for their nurture environment.

## Engagements

The literature review was followed by a series of targeted engagements that allowed us to hear from a broad range of contributors. This allowed for two-way discussion on what schools need support with and the kind of service they would benefit from with Explore Outdoors.

This stage consisted of:

- Interviews with head teachers of four schools, covering policy, school approach, culture, barriers, and vision building.
- Outdoor Learning and School Grounds audit with two schools in the Levenmouth Academy cluster. This was done over six visits.
- Discussions with Fife Council Education Improvement & Education Management teams around supporting the development of their approach to TARGET 2030, the Scottish Government's Learning for Sustainability policy, and climate ready schools.
- Various conversations with Active Schools, outdoor learning delivery partners, Scottish Futures Trust, Learning through Landscapes and more.

## Training

When it became apparent that the schools would like a consultative development support service, we began conversations with Learning through Landscapes (LtL). This is a nationally recognised school consultation service, who have developed a change process to help schools to develop their schools' grounds and build activities to make use of the grounds. LtL have an accreditation scheme whereby skilled professionals can complete their training and become LtL accredited practitioners. This training programme was completed by Explore Outdoors delivery staff.

- Delivery staff completed Learning through Landscapes accreditation scheme.
- LtL is very well-known and respected in education circles.
- Training has helped to inform the delivery model and LtL partnership will ensure ongoing relevance of practice.

## What did we learn?

During the development phase repeating themes emerged. The first is around the climate challenge. Learning for Sustainability and climate readiness are motivating a desire to build on existing outdoor learning opportunities. The second is around equipping teachers with curriculum planning tools, CPD training and confidence-building activities. The third theme has found that there is a need for vision building and whole-school approach to developing practice. We have found that the Learning through Landscapes approach (Change Cycle) is an exceptionally good fit to presenting needs in this theme. Here are some highlights of our learning.

1. It was apparent that schools in the area are more than willing to engage with a process of developing their Outdoor Learning offering.
2. Explore Outdoors can be central to the implementation of Learning for Sustainability, and climate-ready schools approaches, that are of national political significance and are being scoped out in Fife just now.
3. Schools want support with developing their own practice and their ability to deliver regular and progressive outdoor learning.
4. Learning through Landscapes is a well-placed advisory and strategic partner.
5. There are some well-developed approaches to helping schools take forward their Outdoor Learning aspirations with a Whole School approach – see “What Will We Do” for details on our approach.
6. There is a wide array of willing delivery partners and support networks to link schools with the community.

## What did schools say they need support with?

Across all the engagements we had with schools, there was a very positive attitude towards support for the development of Outdoor Learning policy being welcomed. Teachers also expressed a willingness to upskill and take learning outdoors. E.g., Teachers asked for:

- Support with embedding Outdoor Learning into their curriculum planning and teaching.
- Facilitating or supporting SMT to deliver sessions and workshops that build a whole school vision and approach to Outdoor Learning.
- Understanding Health and Safety requirements and support with simple implementation.
- Help with engaging classes outdoors.
- Systems and processes to help with “preparedness”.
- CPD training to improve confidence with a range of Outdoor Learning scenarios, including taking ideas outside.
- School grounds development into meaningful learning environments to support curricular objectives.
- Activity bank building – to link activities to Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes and other school priorities.

## What will we do?

We will employ an Explore Outdoors Project Officer who will work with all the schools in the Levenmouth Cluster over the duration of the 4-year delivery phase. Instead of spreading the activity across the Leven catchment, centring the work around the Levenmouth cluster will allow us to build momentum in the schools that feed the Academy and therefore help to build a culture of valuing Outdoor Learning that will permeate into the lower years of the Academy, paving the way for future Outdoor Learning development there.

Each school will have a bespoke approach that fits the needs of the school community and locality. The following phased approach however will be used as a framework for our engagement with each school.

## Phase 1 Information Gathering

This will ascertain where we are now and begin by engaging with senior leadership teams, before involving teaching staff and an audit of the school grounds and surrounds.

We will cover the following.

- School Outdoor Learning delivery audit.
- School policies and processes.
- School Improvement Planning.
- HGIOS 4 and Outdoor Learning.
- CfE through Outdoor Learning.
- Risk Management unit.
- Report of findings.

## Phase 2 Building the Vision

This will start with a statement of intent that can build a picture of where we would like to be.

- Statement of intent.
- Set up working group.
- Curricular opportunities.
- Curricular planning tools.
- Skills and confidence review.
- What would we like to be able to do?
- How can we get there?
- Identify training needs.
- Developing design ideas.

## Phase 3 Making the Changes

- Implement updated policy and school systems.
- Set expectations.
- CPD Training.
- Implement grounds design project.
- Compile resources.
- Develop activity banks with curricular links.

A delivery schedule will be drawn up that creates a timeline of the work to happen with each school.

## Conclusion

At Fife Coast and Countryside Trust, we understand that Outdoor Learning is more than just being outside. It is about implementing innovative teaching methods, in the places and spaces that are best suited for learning, addressing local and global issues, and leading to individual and collective action. While education may serve various purposes, including the instrumental, practical, pragmatic, and philosophical, we contend that a fundamental objective should be to educate the whole child to become an agent of change. By exposing students to experiences beyond the four walls of a classroom, they can learn, act, and be inspired to build a world that is environmentally and socially equitable.

The response that we have had from stakeholders across the community, has been one of encouragement, interest, and opportunity. There is no doubt that this widespread support for the approach will play a role in ongoing successes. Work will continue to be done to convert generalised support into actionable partnerships that will contribute to the aims and objectives of the programme.

## References

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2. Learning and Teaching Scotland. (2010). curriculum for excellence through outdoor learning > 1 curriculum for excellence through outdoor learning. <https://education.gov.scot/media/isxg4lb0/cfe-through-outdoor-learning.pdf>
3. Scottish Government. (2023, June). "Target 2030" A movement for people, planet, and prosperity Scotland's Learning for Sustainability Action Plan 2023-2030 [Review of "Target 2030" A movement for people, planet, and prosperity Scotland's Learning for Sustainability Action Plan 2023-2030].



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