



Green-Schools

 An Taisce

OUTDOOR LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL SETTING



**LEARNING
ABOUT
FORESTS**

 An Taisce



WHAT IS IT?

Outdoor learning begins the moment you step out of the school. It can be formal or informal and links with all areas of the curriculum. The concept of “Outdoor Learning” is quite a self-explanatory term which is frequently used in today's vocabulary. Despite its common use, however, it is still lacking a widely known definition.



Outdoor learning is one of the pillars of Outdoor Education. The roots of Outdoor Education as we know it today have an old origin as they date back to the early days of school camping trips; but the term was first officially introduced in the 1940's and became more popular during the 1960's thanks to the emergence of Environmental Education programmes.

When talking about the practice of Outdoor Learning it is difficult to pin the term to an individual meaning. The broad nature of this concept, in fact, includes a wide range of actions such as: outside play-time in the early years, school grounds projects, environmental education, recreational and adventure activities, personal and social development programs, expeditions, team building, leadership training, management development, education for sustainability, adventure therapy and more.

The main unifying element of all these different forms of so-called outdoor learning is therefore their location, as they are not predominantly classroom-based but are performed outside, in nature.

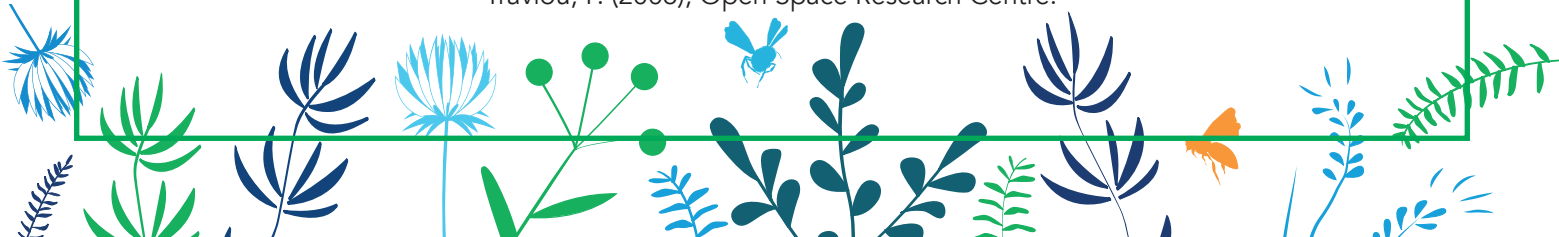
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

What better place for learning about the environment than in nature itself? No need to go very far: a schoolyard, a garden or the local park can be the perfect location to keep working on your theme in a fun and safe way. Outdoor education not only is COVID-friendly (respecting social distances), it is also proven to be of vital importance in the promotion of health and well-being – both mental and physical.

An open environment and fresh air have countless positive effects on a student's mind and often enhances their attention and concentration levels. The extensive studies carried out throughout the years identify several positive effects that derive from this educational practice, as highlighted by the statement below:

“ Experience of the outdoors and wilderness has the potential to confer a multitude of benefits on young people's physical development, emotional and mental health and wellbeing and societal development. Mental health and wellbeing benefits from play in natural settings appear to be long-term, realised in the form of emotional stability in young adulthood. ”

Travlou, P. (2006), Open Space Research Centre.





Learning Outdoors can provide a dramatic contrast to the more traditional learning experience of the indoor classroom. Not only does it happen in the natural environments where participants can see, hear, touch, and smell the real thing, it also happens in an arena where actions have real results and consequences.

This is particularly relevant when learning about the natural world, as witnessing changes in the eco-system while studying it often results in a very positive learning outcome.

The outside school environment has traditionally been used by P.E., Geography and Science teachers for learning such as field work and physical activities, however all subjects can benefit from going outside leading to a more holistic cross-curricular education.

“ Research shows that children find lessons outdoors are more relaxed, interesting and easier to understand and they perceive their teachers are friendlier outdoors”

(Chillman, 2003).

HOW TO FACILITATE?

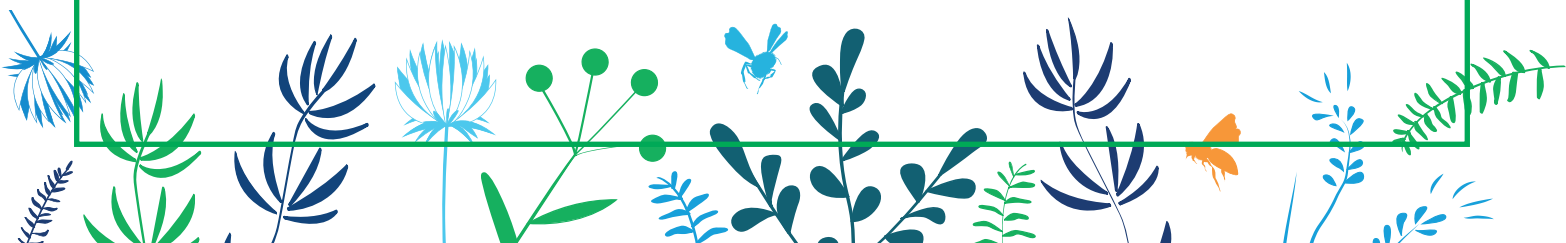
Go outside! Plan an activity or just spend time appreciating nature and the outdoors. Teachers do not need to be experts; Green-Schools officers will help and have plenty of resources available.

• PLAN AND PREPARE:

- Check the weather ahead of time or better yet have the children check the weather and watch for the best day. It is Ireland so it is important to watch predicted rainfall. As well as newspapers, radio, and TV there are accurate short-term forecast apps on most devices with internet connectivity.
- On school grounds have easy access to a first-aid kit and a phone in case of emergency.
- To facilitate longer stays outdoors or trips to local nature resources consider putting together an outdoor learning bag. Include: first-aid kit, mobile phone, camera, water, and any prescribed medicines required by any participant
- A.P.P.L.E
 - **Assess:** what you want to achieve with your Outdoor session.
 - **Plan:** the activities in advance where possible, linking them to your Outdoor Learning Goal
 - **Prepare:** Check weather and location in advance,

PRACTICAL TIP:

MAKE SURE THAT EVERYONE PAYS A VISIT TO THE BATHROOM BEFORE LEAVING!





- have an alternative plan in case things change.
- **Lead:** Given the change in environment from the classroom setting it is important to lead the learning outdoors with activities, tasks and learning goals.
- **Evaluate:** once you have tried Learning Outdoors learn from it, what worked, what did not and let this dictate your next lesson outdoors.



• RISK ASSESS:

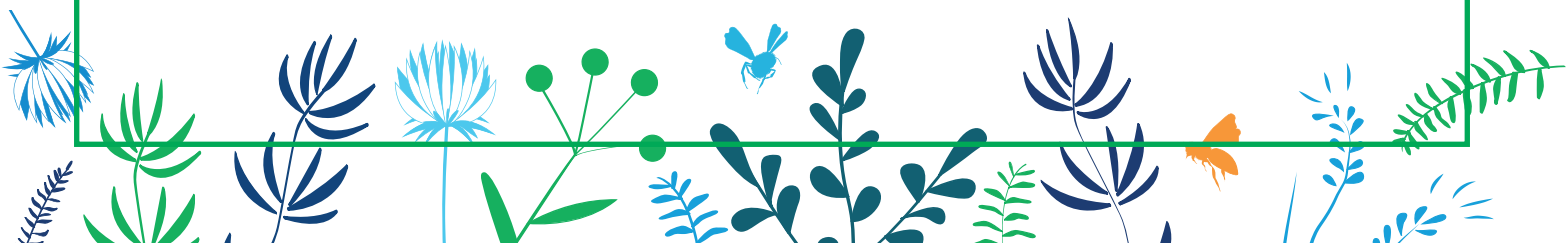
- Consider all aspects of the activity, who it is aimed at and possible dangers.
- Do not be afraid to change your plans based on external factors like weather.
- In line with school policy fill out any risk assessment or other required paperwork.
- Consider consent issues with parents, in particular if moving out of the school grounds.

• EQUIPMENT:

- There will be materials specific to your activity BUT the following are also very handy for an outdoor kit:
 - Clipboards / pencils / ropes / string / plastic bags / pegs / knife / tarpaulins / buckets / magnifying glasses / bug boxes / tape measures / waterproof clothing / hats / guidebooks / leaflets.
- Key to Outdoor Learning in Ireland is the correct clothing:
 - It is important to have at least a good waterproof jacket and not just a rain resistant one.
 - Make sure to wear warm clothing, especially in the coldest months.
 - Dress in layers, always bring a fleece or a jumper to add on if it gets colder and that you can remove if it gets warmer.
 - Wear wellies or good waterproof shoes.
 - Bring sunscreen and hats for sunny days
 - For winter, hats, scarfs, and gloves are good ideas.

CREATING YOUR SPACE

Identify an area within the school grounds that can be designated for outdoor learning. Consider whether it is a seating area, outdoor room, garden, or another space suitable for your school. A sheltered dedicated space while ideal may not be available to your school. In the absence of this type of space, planning ahead for external factors will help as highlighted above. For example, keeping an eye on





the weather and planning activities in advance. If the school decides to incorporate outdoor learning on a regular basis, you could consider a learning area outside of the school building or outdoor classroom. These can be created as permanent or temporary structures. It may be an addition to normal classrooms, an outdoor/nature area or a quiet spot for students and teachers. The possibilities are endless, and it is YOUR choice how you would like the area to be. For more information please take a look at our 'Creating an Outdoor Classroom' guide on www.greenschoolsireland.org.

BEYOND THE SCHOOL GATES

Each school will have its own policy around leaving the school grounds, and it is important to stick to this policy. Outdoor learning ideally would take place in school



gardens / schoolyards. If you don't have a school garden, a local park, beach, woods, or nearby nature, could represent a plausible option. When using outdoor spaces on school grounds and/or in nearby parks to create places for classes consider asking yourself the following questions: How close is the area to the school? How do we get there

safely? How long will we be? Should we bring food and water? Are both teachers and students wearing appropriate clothing? Do you need any permissions or require paperwork from school? What access to first-aid and medicines do we have/need? Is there seating? Is there shelter? What teaching supplies are needed and how do I transport them? What is the ratio of students to teachers?

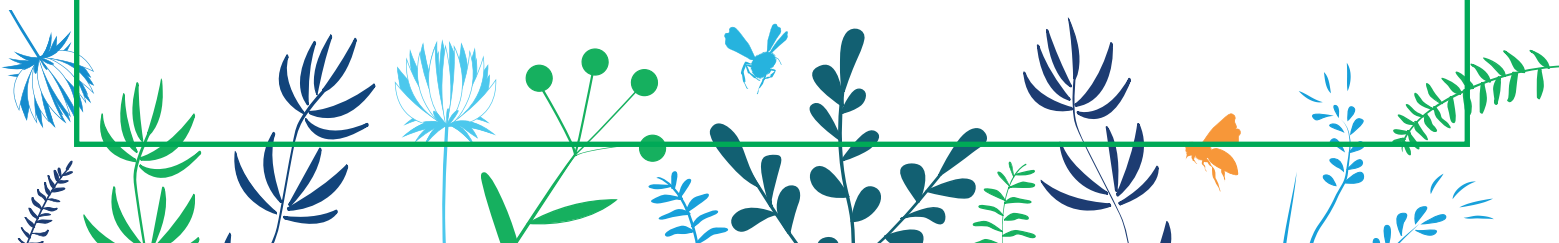
LEAVE NO TRACE

Foster a whole school attitude of outdoor ethics. Create an awareness of the natural world and how to interact with it. Take Only Pictures, Leave Only Footprints.

<https://www.leaveonotraceireland.org/education/education-introduction/>

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES AND CURRICULUM LINKS

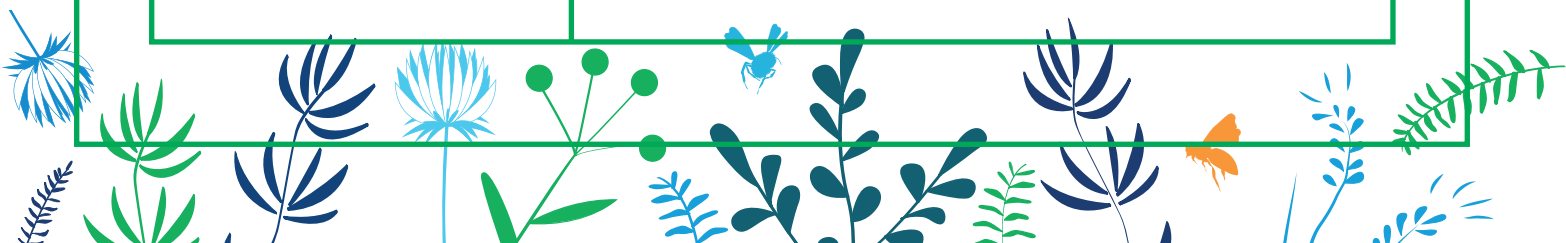
Outdoor Learning benefits most of the subjects in the school curriculum and lessons can include art, mapping, orienteering, treasure hunts, yoga, mindfulness, outdoor games, outdoor ethics, maths, science investigations, gardening, storytelling, nature detectives, bush craft, creating nature guides, looking at the clouds, making bird feeders, bug hotels, knots, drama, invite local experts to give talks, the environment, history, litter pick ups, beach cleans, bike/scooting activities and many more! We have examples in our Guide for Outdoor Learning activities for each theme online www.greenschoolsireland.org.





POSSIBLE OBSTACLES OR SETBACKS TO LEARNING OUTDOORS AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM:

CONCERNS AND OBSTACLES	SOLUTIONS, ALTERNATIVES AND ACTIONS
LOCATION	Finding an appropriate area can prove challenging but do not panic, even if your school does not have a courtyard, there are plenty of places that can be used as outdoor learning spaces. Examples include: • Local parks • Local beaches • Woods or forests nearby • Nearby nature Ideally look for something with a shelter and some seating options. Alternatively, be sure to plan around the weather and pick a forecasted dry / or mild day for your outdoors activities.
TIME MANAGEMENT	Time is one of the most frequently mentioned barriers; the common perception is it would take a long time to move a classroom outdoors and involve more effort than running a class indoors. With preparation and planning we can reduce the time it takes: • Pick the most convenient location as mentioned above. • Plan how the student will move from the classroom to the outdoors, how long does it take at both ends of the lesson and consider changes in clothing. For example, putting on jackets, boots hats and gloves. • Go prepared with your activities and inform the students beforehand, run them through how the class is going to take place so that they will be ready to start as soon as there. • If your activity takes 40 minutes, give yourself an hour so you will have plenty of extra time if you need it.





CONCERNS AND OBSTACLES	SOLUTIONS, ALTERNATIVES AND ACTIONS
CLASS / STUDENT MANAGEMENT	The key to getting students outdoors successfully is preparation. One way to prepare students is to explain to them exactly what is going to happen once they go outside. Express your rules and establish clear boundaries ahead. With younger kids it can be beneficial to arrange for different “roles” such as: • Someone to control that everyone is there when departing from school and before coming back to school • Someone to keep an eye on the time • Someone to check that social distancing and guidelines are respected This could be perceived as a “game” but can result in a good learning experience and may even help the teachers.
WEATHER	The unpredictability of the weather is a great barrier to learning outdoors, for this reason the main thing that we suggest to do is to frequently check the weather forecast (<i>Ireland's 3 day forecasts are quite accurate, allowing time to plan outdoor learning, and learning about weather forecasts can be a part of the students Geography curriculum</i>) and to bring the appropriate clothing. Keep an eye for weather warnings. Be prepared to change your plans last minute, if the weather is different to what it was predicted, and you do not feel comfortable being outdoors just keep your outdoor learning class for another day. That said, try not let the weather stop you unless is for good reasons. What's appropriate clothing? • No matter the time of the year, in Ireland you should always bring with you a good waterproof jacket • Wellies or good outdoor shoes • Sunscreen and hats for sunny days • For winter, hats, scarves and gloves are good ideas



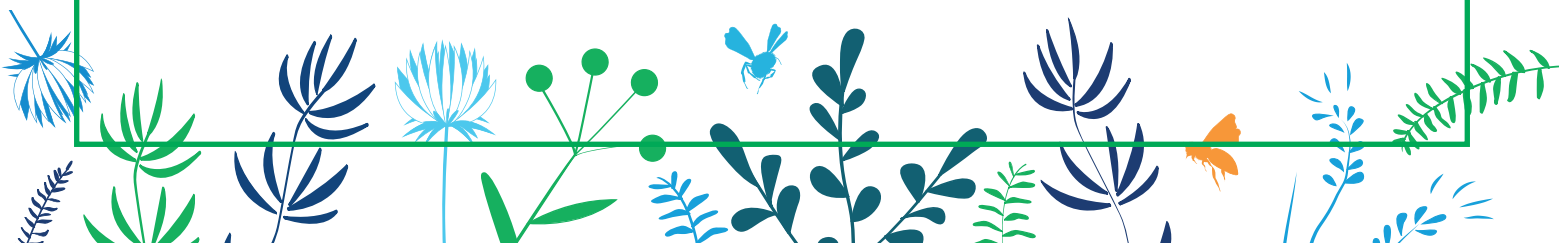


CONCERNS AND OBSTACLES	SOLUTIONS, ALTERNATIVES AND ACTIONS
CURRICULUM INTEGRATION	If the outdoors is not perceived as really related to the curriculum, it becomes an “extra” that soaks up valuable time. However, countless researchers have asserted that incorporating outdoors activities has numerous beneficial effects for the students and their learning experience. Moreover, as mentioned before, curriculum links are endless, all subjects can benefit from some outdoors time. To find the appropriate curriculum links you can have a look on line at www.greenschoolsireland.org or www.leafireland.org.
LACK OF CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE OUTDOORS	There is no need to be an expert in outdoor education to run classes outside and you don’t have to know everything about nature or your surrounding landscapes. If you prepare your lesson in advance you will be ready for any questions and if you are asked something you are unsure about don’t worry, tell your students you can check that once back in class and maybe even ask them to do a small project about it (depending on the type of question). The outdoors is a learning experience for students and for teachers and you should embrace this. In any case, if you have any doubts feel free to get in contact with a Green-Schools Officer for further information.





CONCERNS AND OBSTACLES	SOLUTIONS, ALTERNATIVES AND ACTIONS
SAFETY AND PERCEPTION OF RISKS	Bringing a class outside can be stressful as less familiarity with an area could represent more risks. To minimize hazards before bringing your class outside you should: • Consider all aspects of the activity, who it is aimed at and possible dangers. • Bring a first-aid kit and a phone to use in case of emergency • Fill out any risk assessment or similar protocol if required by your school • Consider supervision ratios in outdoor setting • Consider consent issues with parents, particularly if moving out of the school grounds Outdoor learning should be enjoyable, not stressful. If you do not feel comfortable with bringing your class outside and think that the risks are higher than the benefits, then don't. Alternatively, you can always ask a second teacher to co-run the outdoor class with you or ask an external facilitator.
LACK OF A FORMAL STATUS OF OUTDOOR LEARNING IN TEACHERS' EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE	Teachers can often find it difficult to embrace the practice of outdoor learning as it might not be formalised in the current curriculum of their schools' organisation. However, the Department of Education recommends getting outside as much as possible: <i>"The outdoor environment provides particular potential for learning as the new school year begins. Planning for more frequent use of this outdoor space across the curriculum will help children to adhere to social distancing, engage in physical activity and build their sense of wellness and contentment."</i> <i>Department of Education, 2020</i> You can find out more at www.greenschoolsireland.org





We understand that because of the unpredictability of the Irish weather it will not always be possible to deliver classes outdoors, this document is just an invitation to consider it for whenever possible. Outdoor learning in Ireland aims to take advantage of the opportunities to bring your class outside and experience learning in a different stimulating way.

We hope that this document has given you some useful guidance and practical information. Most of all we hope it inspires you to go outside and enjoy the wonders on our doorsteps with your students. There's lots of extra information on www.greenschoolsireland.org and www.leafireland.org and please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions. We'd love to hear about your outdoor adventures too so feel free to send us your stories or tag us [@Greenschoolsire](https://www.instagram.com/Greenschoolsire)



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION UNIT

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