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Outdoor Education Policy

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**Outdoor learning supports teaching across the curriculum**

Outdoor learning is a broad term that includes: outdoor play in the Early Years, school grounds projects, environmental education, adventurous activities, personal and social education, team building, education for sustainability and much more. Outdoor learning does not have a clearly defined boundary but it does have a common core, using the outdoor environment to enrich the teaching and learning of others.

At Weald, we are predominantly interested in the actions of a Forest School education and how we can integrate this with the everyday curriculum. For example, outdoor learning can spark greater creativity for pupils in English. Students’ imaginations can be fired and first-hand experiences can be provided as a basis for writing. Stories based in the woodland, using artefacts and natural objects are all hooks to engage children and get them enthused about their learning experiences.

Equally, in Maths, being outdoors is useful for making abstract concepts real. The experiential and hands-on nature of outdoor learning experiences makes the curriculum come alive for pupils.

**Outdoor learning supports health and wellbeing**

Health and wellbeing are important pupil outcomes of outdoor learning. Offering children the space to reflect and allowing them to escape the pressures of the classroom are vitally important. This provides children with the opportunity and time to be physically active, an ever-important factor in today’s society.

**Outdoor learning supports Character Education**

Impacts on learning outcomes such as social skills, engagement, confidence and self-esteem is linked with outdoor education. Outdoor learning is reported as supporting features of Character Education. The value of confidence in successful learning has been highlighted for years. Being outside leads children to have greater confidence in their own abilities, sometimes through taking more risks, so they are willing to try different challenges within and outside the classroom.

Outdoor learning has also been seen to encourage and develop social skills, communication, teamwork, new friendships, kindness and leadership. It consistently enthuses and motivates children, resulting in greater engagement with learning. If engagement is achieved, attainment will be increased as children will be interested and focussed on what is presented to them.

The opportunity to develop key character skills as well as taking ownership in their learning in contexts outside the classroom also contributes to improved behaviour. Studies have shown enjoyment of fresh air, new experiences and a practical context are all important to children and their conduct around school.

## Getting the whole school on board

It is no good children in Early Years having fantastic outdoor experiences and then moving through the school to be taught ‘in a box’ again. Themed initiatives such as ‘empty classroom day’ or ‘no electricity day’ are ways of encouraging all staff to get outside and see the impact outdoor learning can have.

Staff training (for example whole school INSETS) can be used to develop skills and build confidence in taking children outside for periods of learning.

**Benefits to teaching practice**

The attitude and behaviour of adults has a profound impact on what happens outside the classroom. It is, therefore, vital that children have the support of attentive, engaged adults who are enthusiastic about the outdoors and understand the importance of outdoor learning. Adults must be clear and comfortable about their role outdoors. **There is still a feeling that outdoor play is about children letting off a bit of steam as a reward, with adults walking around supervising**.

Outdoor education enables teachers to use different skills in a different environment to the classroom. It helps gain confidence in a range of teaching methods and styles where delivery in the classroom can be very methodical. Outside, pupils can be given the resources and the methods to use and explore. It’s more than just us delivering to them all the time.

**Recording successes outside the classroom**

Demonstrating progress when working outside is important. It presents its own set of challenges for schools as pupils may not record work in books in the same way as in the classroom. Evidencing progress for those who have not witnessed pupil’s work first-hand can be tricky. Evidence of learning needs to be produced. One way of doing this can be in the form of a scrapbook. Every class across the school can have an ‘outdoor learning’ scrapbook containing photos, comments, annotations and pieces of work. Classes update these regularly (once a short term) and are shared amongst staff to enable moderation and examples of best practice.

## Community help

The engagement of the school community is important in school life. Communities have a reservoir of skills that need to be tapped. This includes outdoor education. The knowledge and expertise of individuals within our community will provide strength and depth to our children through giving a different interpretation of what is on offer.

Outdoor learning offers more exciting resources and ideas. It motivates learners which is what we all aspire to achieve. Benefits for pupils include greater engagement with learning, enjoyment of lesson material and improved health and wellbeing to name just a few. Teachers and staff also benefit through a positive impact on teaching practice, professional development and skills enhanced.

**Don’t think ‘Why outdoors?’ think ‘Why inside?’**

**Reviewed: December 2019**

**To be reviewed: December 2020**