



Leadership and Management: Outdoor Learning

Audit which identifies the aspects of classroom practice which leaders should focus upon

Some of the areas I wanted to develop when I took over the Headship in 2013 were:

- ❖ Increase the amount of time the children spent outdoors.
- ❖ Maximise and make better use of the school grounds for learning.
- ❖ Make better use of the surrounding areas and community for learning.
- ❖ Develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world in which they live.
- ❖ Engage children in 'real' experiences that would ultimately develop their vocabulary and give them something to write about.
- ❖ Engage boys further in their learning.

These areas were identified through my knowledge of the school but also my experience and knowledge as an Early Years practitioner. Having seen the benefits lower down the school I wanted to look at developing this pedagogy across the whole school. All these development areas were linked in what I identified as '**Outdoor Learning**' or '**Learning Outside the Classroom**'.

As an Academy we are lucky enough to have extensive grounds which include two playgrounds, large fields, a wooded area and an allotment. However, the allotment at the time was hard to manage and the wooded area was not used at all due to the 'wildness' of it. This also raised issues around our grounds maintenance as currently the SLA was not meeting the needs of the school and the curriculum.

As a result this area became an area of development within the 2013-14 SIP and again in 2014-15. During this period of time it also linked well with the introduction of the new National Curriculum.

Leadership activity which focus upon making a difference in classrooms

As an introduction to the work on 'Outdoor Learning' I firstly arranged a PD day for the whole school looking at the importance and benefits of outdoor learning as well as identifying opportunities to engage children in learning outdoors through our current curriculum. From the start I wanted staff to understand that this was not a 'separate' subject or area that they needed to teach, but instead a 'tool' or 'strategy' for their teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum. For example outdoor learning could be used:

- ❖ To engage pupils in the learning.
- ❖ To provide opportunities to have a 'real' or 'memorable' experience.
- ❖ To act as a stimuli for writing.
- ❖ To provide opportunities for children to practise skills in a 'real' context that makes sense to them.
- ❖ To help them make links with their learning and the natural environment.

To support me deliver the PD day I recruited the skills and knowledge of an outdoor practitioner from Middlesbrough Environmental City, Phil Tate. By the end of the day all 'teams' across school had identified opportunities within each subject area where they could take the learning outside for the 2013-14 curriculum.

2013 - 2014

In order to ensure then that this took place and to support the teaching staff in the delivery of taking their learning outdoors, the SLT planned and took the following action:

- ❖ Mapped out CPD for staff linked to outdoor professionals working alongside them for a period of time. A rather similar approach to how we were using the Sports Funding to improve PE



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teaching, which had had very positive outcomes. This included the use of Middlesbrough Environmental City and their Free Range Kids Programme.

- ❖ Agreed a whole school objective linked to outdoor learning for the Performance Management cycle. (2013 – 14)
- ❖ Arranged a PD day with the Institute of Outdoor Learning focusing on providing staff with real examples of how they use the outdoors across a range of subjects.
- ❖ Identified key people within school that would promote outdoor learning within each Key Stage.
- ❖ Evaluated our grounds maintenance and as a result decided to take on the responsibility ourselves as an Academy, working closely with the School Business Manager and Site Manager.
- ❖ Developed plans to improve the outdoor provision within the grounds – clear some of the wooded area to situate a circle and fire pit; define learning spaces such as the allotment and orchard including installing a Polytunnel for all the year round; establishing a pond on site; creating a staged area with seating.
- ❖ Subject leaders, as part of their monitoring role, looked at planning and books to ensure that the outdoor environment was being used effectively in relation to their subject area.

Over the second year we continued to develop and build on what we had already started:

2014 – 2015

- ❖ Employed an 'Outdoor Learning Assistant' to work in the afternoons with pupils across school to take care of the allotment areas as well as participating in and supporting other outdoor activities.
- ❖ A new school website was written which allowed us to promote our outdoor curriculum.
- ❖ Mapped out outdoor learning opportunities linked to the new National Curriculum and our 'Cornerstones' curriculum themes/topics. Cornerstones were chosen as a school because of its pedagogy that linked very closely with that of Easterside's. This included forest and beach schools as well as the Reggio Emilia philosophy. It also promoted the use of 'real' and 'memorable' experiences to act a 'hook' and linked to other strategies we've used such as 'Mantle of the Expert.'
- ❖ Continued to develop the outdoor areas extending the KS1 playground; introducing musical instruments to the staged area.
- ❖ Introduced chickens to the outdoor environment which included a large run and Eglu.
- ❖ Introduced risk benefit assessment.
- ❖ Started to develop an outdoor progression document for KS1 and KS2 to be used to record progress of the class and individuals against.
- ❖ Finalised our '101 Things to do Before you Leave Easterside Academy' – this again included outdoor opportunities that were then embedded and planned across the school curriculum.
- ❖ Continued to arrange continued professional development to support teachers, enabling outdoor professionals to work alongside the teaching staff over a period of weeks. This was carried out by Middlesbrough Environmental City as well as Groundwork North East. Individual sessions were also provided by Tees Valley Wildlife.
- ❖ A Fire Pit Policy was written and fire pit training provided by 'Wild Country Walkabouts.'
- ❖ Subject leaders have continued to monitor outdoor learning as part of their annual monitoring.
- ❖ An Outdoor Learning leaflet for parents was written to be promoted in our entrance and on the website.
- ❖ Systems and procedures put in place to support NQT's and new members of staff.
- ❖ A new Easterside Academy Visits Book was put together to enable us to map out our visits across school linked to the new curriculum.
- ❖ Governor's monitored outdoor learning across the school following the big spend on the development of the outdoor areas.



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At the start of the 2014 academic year Easterside Academy was awarded the 'LOtC Bronze Award'.

Interventions designed for adults to learn how to do things differently

As an SLT we were able to put in place a range of interventions and strategies that enabled us to monitor the new curriculum and outdoor learning as well as begin to measure its impact.

- ❖ **Pupil Visit Questionnaires/Evaluations** – Teachers were asked to ensure that as well as themselves, the pupils were asked to evaluate at least one of their 'big' visits further afield within the year. This was to ensure that the visit was value for money and enabled pupils to meet the intended learning of the visit.
- ❖ **CPD Evaluations and Actions** – From 2013 onwards, all staff were asked to complete a quick CPD evaluation following any professional development they received. This again ensured value for money/time and helped us to identify and plan how training would be disseminated and put into practice across school. Also identified good training for other members of staff to attend or participate in.
- ❖ **Monitoring – planning / book scrutinies / lesson observations** – Outdoor learning was fully embedded within our monitoring cycle and still is. Subject leaders were all able to identify within their own subject, how it had been used across the school. Pupil book scrutinies also were a wealth of information as 'snap shot' observations were captured across the school through the use of annotated photographs. This has since been improved further through the use of '2 Create a Profile' which enables the teacher to link photographs, the curriculum and next steps in a much more time effective way. Teachers explicitly identified 'outdoor learning' within their planning to make it clearer for subject leaders and lesson observations both formal and informal showed that outdoor learning was being used across the school for a range of subjects.
- ❖ **Performance Management Cycle / Reviews** – All teaching staff had an objective linked to the development of outdoor learning within their classroom/year group. This enabled the appraisers to regularly review how staff were developing it within their own area of school. Again this helped to identify CPD needs and opportunities for pupils and staff.
- ❖ **New Curriculum Review/Evaluation** – A review of the new Cornerstones curriculum was carried out at the end of 2014-15 after the completion of Cycle 1. This has supported our planning and development of Cycle 2.
- ❖ **Governor Pupil Monitoring** – Governors carried out their own monitoring of the impact of the outdoor learning by speaking to a range of pupils from across the school.
- ❖ **Sought advice** – As an SLT we have sought advice when we felt we've needed it. This included speaking to various people in order to introduce 'Risk Benefit Assessment' within school. We also sought advice in relation to our 'fire pit' which included a Middlesbrough Health and Safety officer looking at the site and policy as well as Andrew Middleton from 'Carlton Outdoor Education Centre' and 'Wild Country Walkabouts' delivering training in conjunction with our new fire policy.
- ❖ **SEF for LOtC Bronze Award** – As a school we used the LOtC SEF for the Bronze Award to self-evaluate and enable us to see what we were doing well and areas we needed to develop. This process then continued after we achieved the Bronze as we used the Silver SEF form to continue our outdoor development.

New practice and provision in classrooms

Observations and monitoring of practice and provision in outdoor learning across the school identified a number of key things emerging:

- ❖ The use of the outdoor environment / school grounds is a regular feature of our school curriculum.



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- ❖ There are established 'outdoor learning' areas around school that can be used for a variety of different learning opportunities, across all subjects. This includes a woodland; a fire pit; a pond; an allotment/polytunnel/orchard; a staged area with seating and musical instruments; learning circles; seating and shelter areas. The Academy now manages and plans its own grounds maintenance and this has helped us to ensure it links closely with our curriculum.
- ❖ Outdoor learning is mapped out across the school, for each year group and in every subject.
- ❖ There has been a huge increase in the use of our local area and surrounding area e.g. Stewarts Park, Fairy Dell, West Beck. All within walking distance.
- ❖ Staff have been more adventurous in their choice of visits linked to their topics/themes with pupil and staff feedback being very positive and supportive of the intended learning. 'Memorable experiences' away from school have been provided. This has directly impacted on engagement and teaching and learning within the classroom.
- ❖ Risk benefit assessment now takes place with staff and pupils prior to visits and identified activities. Risk benefit assessments are also already in place for our outdoor learning environment; fire and chicken keeping.
- ❖ Children from nursery to Year 6 get regular opportunities to work outside in the allotment with the Outdoor Learning Assistant. This has enabled them to feel a part of what is produced and learn about planting and growing, as well as keeping chickens.
- ❖ Staff are able to record progress across outdoor learning – this is an area we will continue to develop.
- ❖ Parents have engaged in outdoor learning through our use of 'Open Mornings' across the school and 'Stay and Play' in Early Years.

Improved outcomes for children

Through the work we have undertaken over the last two years, we believe that outdoor learning and learning outside the classroom have become an embedded and established part of the curriculum and the way in which we teach at Easterside Academy. As an SLT and with feedback from staff, pupils and parents have identified the following improved outcomes for the children:

- ❖ Outstanding progress was observed by the Head Teacher and Local Authority where the outdoor environment had been used. In some lessons this was used to develop and introduce new vocabulary, as well as a strategy to motivate writing. An example of this would be when the Year 3/4 SEN class were taken into the woodland area to discover a land of sweets and chocolate! Through the environment that had been created, new vocabulary and language was discovered and modelled, that children then put into poems the following day. Without this 'real' experience that captured the children's imagination, it is unlikely that the children would have been so successful in the language they used within their poems. Similar experiences and opportunities have been seen across the school.
- ❖ Teachers report that children's motivation to write has increased, due to the 'real' and 'memorable' experiences they were providing linked to new, very engaging topics/themes. Working also in a much more cross-curricular and creative way also enabled staff to get children to write in a context they enjoyed and for a 'real' purpose. These 'memorable' experiences are often outdoors on the school grounds, within the local locality or further afield.
- ❖ Pupils, parents and staff speak very positively about their outdoor learning experiences. In our annual pupil questionnaire when talking about what they enjoyed best the three top answers were: learning outdoors, allotment and chickens! Outdoor learning has helped us to create an exciting curriculum that engages and motivates children. Hopefully for some children that has also impacted on our improving attendance data – children wanting to come to school because they enjoy it and love learning.
- ❖ CPD provided has had impact. Staff are confident in taking their learning outside and projects that have last over a number of weeks (e.g. Groundwork 11 weeks) have improved ideas and



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confidence in a number of areas. These outcomes have then enabled staff to plan and carry out their own learning outdoors.

- ❖ This has been also visible to parents where children have engaged in the 'Free Range Kids' project. Parents feedback there included comments such as:

"Before _____ started forest schools he was an xbox kid. Now he's an outdoor kid."

"_____ likes to build dens with his friends since taking part in forest schools. He also is a lot more confident in himself whilst playing with his friends."

"_____ has learnt about more plants and how to interact with other children a bit more."

- ❖ Staff have seen improvement in other areas of development such as resilience, social skills, problem solving and ability to work collaboratively.
- ❖ Children have demonstrated through their learning in lessons that they are developing a greater knowledge, understanding, appreciation and respect for the natural environment.
- ❖ Writing has improved in all areas of the school at the end of 2015. Although we have had other initiatives to support and develop writing across school, the use of 'memorable' and 'real' outdoor learning experiences has most definitely played a part. This has been seen also on a number of occasions through lesson observations.

Writing Outcomes

End of Reception

	2015
Speaking	77%
Writing	72%

End of KS1

Writing	2015
2C+	76 (88)
2B+	62 (72)
2A+	24 (28)
3	0.0
APS	14.78

End of KS2

Writing	2015
L3 +	100
L4 +	97
L5 +	39
L6	0.0
APS	-

100% of pupils made expected progress in writing at the end of KS2, and 46% made better than expected progress. This was also an increase from the previous year which had been 37%.

At the end of KS2 both reading and writing matched at 100% making expected progress and 46% making better. Again at Level 4 both subjects matched at 97% and at Level 5 36%. This is an improvement on previous years where reading attainment was much higher than writing.

The gap at KS1 for 2B+ writing narrowed by 7% and put writing at NA for the first time (without IAC). In all year groups across the school progress in writing matched that of reading.



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Enquiry into and reflection upon what difference it makes and where to focus next

On reflection the introduction of 'outdoor learning' and 'learning outside the classroom' couldn't have come at a better time, with the introduction of the new National Curriculum and Cornerstones in the second year of our development. Having 'Outdoor Learning' as a key area of our school improvement plan in the first year helped to ensure that the whole school were moving forward in the same direction and ensured that everyone understood the benefits and possibilities with working in this way. Processes like Performance Management and subject leader monitoring also supported this whole school drive. Carefully planned professional development also supported the development and gave teaching staff the skills, tools and confidence in which to take the learning outside. This has not only been for 'forest schools' type activities but also for learning across the curriculum. The Groundwork North East project was an excellent example of this and has enabled KS1 teachers to work in a similar way this year without the need for the outdoor practitioners.

If I go back to the key areas I wanted to develop at the start of my Headship there is evidence to demonstrate progress in all these areas.

❖ Increase the amount of time the children spent outdoors.	√
❖ Maximise and make better use of the school grounds for learning.	√
❖ Make better use of the surrounding areas and community for learning.	√
❖ Develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world in which they live.	√
❖ Engage children in 'real' experiences that would ultimately develop their vocabulary and give them something to write about.	√
❖ Engage boys further in their learning.	√

As we move forward into the third year of the development, the key areas we will be focusing on are:

- ❖ The development of the use of 'tools' across the school and progression.
- ❖ Ensuring good inductions and support for newer teaching staff and continuing support for those left confident. The fact that we plan and work so closely in teams supports those teachers who are less confident.
- ❖ Continue to develop the long term outdoor plan in conjunction with tool training for staff.
- ❖ Continue to develop how we record progress linked to outdoor learning skills.
- ❖ Providing a 'camping on school grounds' experience as part of our '101 Things to do before you leave Easterside Academy.' This has been booked with 'Compass Adventure'.
- ❖ Completing the SEF LOtC Silver Award document and applying for the award. This process may also identify areas that need further development on.