Learning in local Greenspace
– connecting young people with nature and their environment
What is this project about?

The project aims to help 100 schools across Scotland to get their pupils learning outdoors on a regular and frequent basis. This will be achieved by improving the access to and quality of a local greenspace and building confidence in teachers to take learning outdoors.

The schools that we will work with are those serving some of the most disadvantaged areas of Scotland.

The project will involve addressing barriers that currently prevent frequent outdoor learning across the curriculum.

Key to the success of the project will be partnership working between schools, local authorities (including education and other key departments such as greenspace, parks management and ranger teams) and a range of local and national environmental organisations. It is supported by Education Scotland and the Scottish Government.
Where has this project come from?

The main driver behind this project is the 2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity - A Strategy for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland. A route map for delivering this strategy was published June 2015 and it proposes six big steps for nature. This project is part of Big Step 3 “Quality greenspace for health and education benefits”.

Research and practical experience shows that when children and young people spend time learning outdoors they benefit in many ways. Their attainment increases; their physical health improves through greater time spent moving about in the environment; their ability to interact socially with their peers benefits; they develop their risk taking skills and their emotional wellbeing also improves. When young, spending time in and around the sights and sounds of nature also increases an understanding of its relevance and can help embed a lifelong commitment to its care.

To help maximise these benefits for children and young people, the Curriculum for Excellence states that every child has a right to outdoor learning. The General Teaching Council for Scotland Standards requires every school and teacher to enable Learning for Sustainability which includes outdoor learning. This project seeks targeted action to deliver this agenda, helping to improve educational attainment and local environmental quality for schools from more disadvantaged areas of Scotland.
What will the project achieve?

This project will facilitate, support and encourage schools to break down the barriers to regular and sustained outdoor learning. This work will happen within the context of what schools and other partners are already doing, including John Muir Awards and Eco-schools. It will build on existing good practice and add value to the Scottish Government’s Attainment Challenge.

The outcomes of the project sought are:

- Pupils’ entitlement to regular, frequent outdoor learning experiences at all stages of learning is realised
- Pupils are more connected to their natural environment
- Pupils health and well-being are improved
- School attainment is raised
- Local greenspaces are improved for local communities and biodiversity is enhanced
- Local networks of organisations supporting outdoor learning and greenspace improvements work together more effectively as a team

The outputs/deliverables of the project will vary from school to school depending on their requirements but will include:

- Greenspaces are more accessible from school grounds
- Greenspace quality is improved for outdoor learning, play and use by the community
- Teachers of target schools have the increased confidence to take learning outdoors
- Teaching resources and equipment have been sourced
- A range of project resources and reports made available on the internet to enable others to use in future
How will the work be led and managed?

The project is being led by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in partnership with a wide range of environmental organisations that are experienced in helping schools to take learning outdoors. These partners include Forestry Commission Scotland, John Muir Trust, The Conservation Volunteers, Keep Scotland Beautiful, National Trust for Scotland, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Grounds for Learning and Education Scotland.

A national project steering group has been set up to oversee the project. SNH will Chair this group and colleagues from our partnership organisations will join as members.

Local partnership groups will be established in each local authority area. These groups will be led by the local authority where possible and they will oversee the detailed roll out of the project with a number of schools in each area. A local or national environmental organisation will provide dedicated support to the local authority.

The main resources required are staff time and commitment across the range of partner organisations. This is largely being resourced through existing funding arrangements. SNH is providing a small amount of additional project funding for this and for other aspects of the work. It is envisaged that support for greenspace improvements will be drawn from other existing sources of external funding.
What is the timescale?

SNH aims to work with a broad range of partners to achieve this target by 2020. It is the intention that the project will inspire many more schools to get involved in outdoor learning in a local greenspace in the future.

Progress to date and what happens next:

- Detailed project planning has been scoped and developed through two national workshops and one-to-one discussions involving a range of national partners, organisations and professional networks.

- Over 700 schools that serve the 20% most disadvantaged areas in Scotland have been identified. This list was drawn up using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2012.

- A web mapping tool has been developed to help national partners identify the local greenspace resources within 500 metres of the school.

- The piloting of the project is underway in West Dunbartonshire involving the local authority, the local environmental trust and SNH. Other local partnership groups are currently proposed for Aberdeen, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Edinburgh, Glasgow and South Lanarkshire with national partners being identified to support each of these groups. Other groups may be established later in the project where the partnership can support them.

- Once established each of these local partnership groups will begin working with selected schools to identify what barriers exist in providing outdoor learning and what nearby greenspace/s could be used for learning/play. A tailored action plan will be drawn up to overcome these barriers. If greenspaces need work to be made accessible, safe, or are not of good quality, partners will make or enable improvements. If teachers need help to plan how to deliver lessons outdoors or to deal with health and safety concerns, the partners will also aim to help with this through CLPL programmes such as Teaching in Nature.

- The project will be evaluated by SNH and its partners with the aim of assessing how successful this work has been. This information will then be used to inform future initiatives.
If you would like more information about this work, please contact the project team at Scottish Natural Heritage:

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