



SUPPORTING SCHOOLS TO TAKE LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM





Managing outdoor learning, adventurous activities and social distancing on school grounds in England

Background

The Coronavirus outbreak has posed challenges for all of us working in educational settings. The gradual return to schooling will be equally challenging in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of staff, pupils and their families. Returning to the business of education will be gradual and involve careful planning and the introduction of very different routines and day-to-day management of the school community.

In order to manage the continued opening of schools for the children of key workers during lockdown the DfE have issued a range of guidance

which has now been extended to cover the gradual re-opening of schools and academies.

This guidance is regularly updated and there is no intention for this document to be constantly reviewed but it should provide a framework of considerations to inform the planning of outdoor activities in schools. Each educational setting will be different, however, the aim will be to try and balance the need for careful infection management with the need to reintroduce young people to learning while supporting their health and wellbeing.



Why outdoors?

The value and benefit of exercising and being outdoors has been one of the characteristics of the Lockdown period. There have been numerous references not only to the benefits of physical health but mental health and wellbeing as well. Of course, this was well known and understood before the outbreak, however, during Lockdown the benefits of such activity have not necessarily been shared equally across all in society. For some, often in urban areas, access to gardens and green spaces has been restricted due to the nature and location of their accommodation. A return to school enables us to redress some of these imbalances and allow all children and staff to access the outdoors.

There has also been increased support in the last few weeks of the benefits of being outdoors in terms of managing infection control.

Jonathan Van-Tam, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, said that 'it is absolutely clear that outdoor spaces with higher degrees of ventilation are less problematic environments for transmission than indoor spaces'. Dr Chris Smith, clinical lecturer at the University of Cambridge has stated that the chances of coronavirus transmission outside were 'vanishingly small' because ['the amount of dilution from fresh air is so high'](#).

Other academics and researchers have also highlighted that any viral particles are easily dispersed by the wind and recognise that being outside also makes it easier for people stay over 2m away from one another. It is, therefore, important that we use the benefits of being outdoors to help with infection control and as a location to encourage physical activity, support the development of health and well-being and bring learning alive.

Outdoors

Within the DfE guidance there have been numerous references for the need to use outdoor spaces, they suggest the use of 'outside space:

- for exercise and breaks
- for outdoor education, where possible, as this can limit transmission and more easily allow for distance between children and staff'

in relation to refreshing the timetable consider:

- 'which lessons can take place outdoors' and 'use the timetable and selection of classroom or other learning environment to reduce movement around school or building'
- 'working out arrangements for breaks or play times so that ideally only one group of maximum 15 children is in the same play area at any one time' and that 'children will remain in fixed groups throughout the school day, whether in class or outdoors, and with the same teaching staff'.

Physical Education

In terms of 'planning what to teach and how:

- Each school context will vary and needs are likely to be greatest

where children have not been able to access remote education consistently. Children who have had limited opportunities for exercise should be encouraged to exert themselves physically, making use of supervised non-touch running games within their group. [Youth Sport Trust](#) are also offering some support to schools.

- Physical education lessons may continue to take place providing they are strictly non-contact and do not involve more than any one temporary group.'

Risk Management

Every setting must carry out a risk assessment before opening, which will be guided by the employer, their policies and guidance. The assessment must address risks associated with coronavirus (COVID-19), so that measures can be put in place to control those risks for children and staff. Reference to the employer risk assessment and guidance will be essential when developing procedures for operating and running activities outside.

Additional support can be found within the [Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel National Guidance](#).

The latest [AfPE Guidance](#) may also be useful.



Creating a more coherent offer to support schools take learning outside

Schools are working with children and young people around their re-introduction to school and the ‘new norm’. Activities that focus on (for example) establishing new routines, physical & mental health, connectedness to nature, resilience and transitions will all be important in the early stages.

When schools are ready, they may need help to take their learning outside the classroom – whether into school grounds, local spaces or home environments.

The Outdoor Education Advisers’ Panel (OEAP) is working in partnership with The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC), with support of the Institute of Outdoor Learning, to facilitate a [unified, coherent response from across the many providers of learning outside the classroom services](#).

Our collective aim is to make it easier for schools to find high-quality services that will meet their immediate needs now, and to build foundations for more regular progressive learning outside the classroom going forward. CLOtC and OEAP are uniquely placed to act as independent brokers to the full range of quality assured services available.



Key consideration for schools, when undertaking outdoor learning and adventurous activities

Spending more time out of doors could reduce but not eliminate the chances of spreading the risk of infection and also contribute significantly towards improved health and physical wellbeing.

Outlined below are some considerations that could be borne in mind when planning for outdoor learning, adventurous activities in the outdoors.

Location

The best place for learning outdoors will be the school grounds. Spaces, distances and tasks can all be more easily managed. For many activities, spaces around the site need to be considered, how big are they? what is the task? and how do I use it? bearing in mind group size and social distancing guidance.

Using the outdoors may release other spaces around the site for other groups.

Beware of effects on other groups still inside select locations to avoid distractions if possible.

Teaching outside

When teaching outside some additional techniques to consider:

- Distractions: try to orientate the group so they are not facing any distractions such as other group or building works etc that can distract from your instructions & demonstrations.
- Consider sun & wind, better that you are faced sideways on to the sun than have the sun in either the eyes of the pupils or your eyes.
- Will the wind affect how well your voice will carry? Normally better that wind is onto the back of the pupils and not in their faces, but not if that means they cannot hear you!

Off-site

Travel in vehicles will be determined by the essential travel guidance in place at the time and even if undertaken may be highly restrictive if social distancing is to be maintained.

Challenges over supervision and social distancing if walking beyond the school site will make off-site activities difficult, even more so as it will increase the risk of mixing with other people.

It may be possible to use open spaces very local to the school site such as school fields or negotiate exclusive use of other open areas. Check with your employer's guidance.

On-site

Health and Well-being:

Having spent a significant time in isolation with only 'family' members a return to a location where there is greater contact with others has to be managed sympathetically, as will undertaking activities in outdoor settings or off-site locations.

It must also be recognised that some pupils have had no regular access to a garden or green space during Lockdown and will really value opportunities to access such spaces.

The confidence of staff will also vary according to their experiences over the last few weeks and how comfortable they feel about undertaking and managing outdoor activities.

Staff and children may also value areas for reflection and 'peace and quiet'.

Social distancing

The request from government is that social distancing guidance should be followed, though it is recognised that this can be a challenge for young people.

In relation to using outdoor space 2m distancing should be maintained as much as possible. Careful selection of activities and location will help in achieving this.

The examples highlighted in this document have been selected to assist staff in developing activities that offer good opportunities for physical activity and learning outside the classroom, whilst maintaining social distancing.

In terms of managing the spread of COVID-19, briefings for young people will replicate those given for indoor work including hand washing, touching of face, coughing and sneezing etc.

Moving outside and returning:

Identify 'collection areas' outside, to avoid pinch points at doors (could doors be fixed open, if not fire doors, to avoid contact with handles? Ideally this should be in place but some external doors do not have a hold open function). Where does the group head for as a rendezvous point? Is this with distanced spaces or marked areas to meet up in whilst still spread out? Chalk, tape, cones, hoops or rope could be used to identify 'waiting areas'.

Is there direct access to the outside?

Are coats picked up on route or already in class to aid moving outside?

How would coat pick-up be managed safely?

Are there sinks in classrooms to manage handwashing prior to going out? If not, can this be arranged beforehand or could you plan routes, if working with any one-way system, to include a stop at sinks/toilets etc?

Can each class 'bubble' have access to its own designated outdoor area?

Participants

As with indoor work, reacting to signs of young people or staff displaying symptoms of coronavirus have to be managed according to your current employer guidance.

Vulnerable pupils – needs to be accounted for as part of any risk management process

The ability of pupils to comply with social distancing and instructions will need consideration.

Sticking to working in existing class 'bubbles' outside will be advantageous, do not mix groups just because you are outdoors.

Activities

Reduce the number of activities that take place where there is a higher likelihood of even minor injury to reduce the need for first-aid, close contact with pupils, or visits to hospital.

Considerations may include equipment used, surfaces activities are taking place on, ability of young people etc.

Adapt activities to suit this new working environment.

Equipment

Try to minimise the use of equipment. All equipment with a hard wipeable surfaces to be cleaned/sanitised after use – any soft equipment to be removed.

Do not use outdoor equipment unless it can be cleaned appropriately between use and by different groups.

For some equipment used as part of an activity there may be a value in wiping down surfaces during an activity. Take a bag to contain any tissues, wipes used during an activity and dispose of according to current guidance.

If possible, issue pupils with their own equipment for any activity and collect back in for appropriate cleaning at the end of the lesson, or use items that are disposable e.g. orienteering maps, if maps are laminated they can be cleaned with appropriate cleaner.

If equipment cannot be cleaned easily then leave outside and in 'quarantine', for as long as possible, guidance on this will become clearer over time.

Clothing

Changing may be an issue, for older age groups. Could pupils arrive in PE kit on the days this is planned? Non-uniform? Could they bring a change of clothing in case of bad weather.

First-Aid

First-aid kits to be carried and contain both gloves and face masks and if possible disposable apron and eye protection. For more information, see your employer guidance. The government provides further [guidance for first responders](#).

Consider pupil/staff medication needs, carrying inhalers/Epi-pens etc as appropriate and as highlighted in the risk assessment.

Weather

- Sun screen & sun protection: ask pupils to bring in sun hats and to wear sun screen as required. Identify access to shady areas – can temporary shelter/canopy's be erected? Ensure pupils and staff stay hydrated.
- Cold and rain: ensure pupils are effectively clothed with coats/suitable foot wear/hats etc. Is spare clothing available? Can outdoor shelters be used? These may be outdoor classrooms or temporary shelters. Could a local Scout group/army provide large tents or marquees?

Hygiene

Hand washing regimes, as recommended for indoors, both before and after outdoor activities, especially if equipment is shared or jointly used. Use hand sanitizer for intermediate hand cleansing while on activities.

Be prepared to wipe hard surfaces down during within an activity.

Below is an image of a possible suggestion for making handwashing available outdoors (@creativestar tweet, Juliet Robertson).

See also the [Pictorial Guide on Social Distancing and the School Grounds](#) (produced by Atkins for Learning through Landscapes).

To aid this, handwashing sites as outlined in the photo below may be useful (this allows pupils to spread out when hand washing reducing congestion in school bathroom areas).

It is also worth considering the use of antiseptic hand gel, antiseptic wipes, tissues, bags for waste in outdoor classrooms.



When using outdoor handwashing outside:

- ensure the water in containers is emptied daily and flushed through to manage the Legionella risk.
- Consider multiple stations for different bubbles and outdoor areas in school grounds.
- Space out stations on the handwashing rope to allow for social distancing.
- Wire coat-hangers can be reposed to provide inexpensive bin openers/bag holders but tape up the sharp edges.

How should schools manage educational visits?

The government advises against any overseas or domestic visits for children under 18 organised by educational settings and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advises against all non-essential travel; the Department for Transport's advice to avoid public transport and unnecessary journeys, and Public Health England (PHE) social distancing measures remain in place.

Schools affected by these restrictions should work with their tour operator and/or insurance company. DfE will continue to review this position based on FCO and PHE advice.

For more information, read [coronavirus travel advice for educational settings](#).



Development of activities and Outdoor Education Adviser support for schools

This situation creates both a challenge and opportunity for taking your learning outdoors as in the past this particular approach to learning encouraged team working and a range of associated skills. With the introduction of social distancing in the short to medium term this presents a challenge.

On the flip side, working and being outdoors and close to nature has a very positive impact on mental health and well-being. The ideas outlined below would be subject to your local risk management considerations based on equipment, hygiene, space, pupils etc.

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What Outdoor Education Advisers can do now:

There are five immediate ways that you can support schools:

Help school sdevelop ideas for delivering activities outdoors

Build on your existing relationship with the school and look to extend this too. For example, the CLOtC website signposts to a range of [free quality assured resources for schools](#) from its Quality Badge holders and its partners. Some ideas have been developed, below.

Promote use of high-quality providers

DfE directs schools to use providers with a [CLOtC Quality Badge for learning outside the classroom](#); their services range from supporting schools with anything from curriculum planning and school grounds design to specific learning activity delivery, residential planning and delivery, adventure and expeditions. Get familiar with your local QB holders and encourage other good providers you know to apply for this accreditation too. Signpost to other providers or organisations with their own accreditation systems in place, such as Learning through Landscapes or IOL.

Help schools plan strategies for the new academic year and beyond

Identify how the school's grounds and local outdoor spaces can be integrated into curricular learning. Schools will need to use of all their spaces – and every space can be a learning space. Providing this support now will lay the foundations for a progression of learning outside the classroom activities and trips as restrictions are lifted and support the provider sector.

Many Outdoor Education Advisers already use the [LOtC Mark](#) framework as a tool to help their schools with this. It supports an integrated, strategic and progressive approach to curriculum delivery, recognises every space as a learning space, and puts pupils, teachers and school context at the core of curriculum development and delivery.

It is likely that learning outside the classroom will necessarily become a more prominent and regular feature of the implementation of curriculum for the foreseeable future. This presents an opportunity for schools to refine their curriculum intent and implementation, and to evidence impact in new ways.

The Mark is available through [CLOtC school membership](#), which costs just £95 and gives whole-school access to activity ideas and lesson plans for all core subjects, Early Years to Key Stage 4, written by practicing teachers and a whole range of planning and CPD modules.

Build links

Build links with schools who are already confident in taking their learning outside the classroom – this includes schools who have been awarded the [LOtC Schools Mark](#) accreditation.

Point schools to the latest guidance

A consortium of associations and bodies are working together to provide [guidance on dealing with specific issues to do with school trips](#) and travel.



Appendix 1 - Adapting activities

What follows are example activities that can be managed in groups of 3-15 1 teacher or TA working under a teacher. You can share these with your schools or direct teachers to the resources on CLOtC's website.

It may be useful to undertake some briefing on how the activities will be managed before going outside.

PE and Wellbeing

Don't forget that Outdoor and Adventurous Activities are part of the KS2 PE curriculum, so there could be no better time than now to be outside and developing some OAA, for ideas see the Outdoor Learning section, below.

[YST Activity Cards](#) and [YST Home Learning](#) These contain a number of activity cards for the 60 second challenge that could be turned into a circuit of activity.

Cards pitted off and left at activity stations around the circuit. Look at personal challenges, record keeping and data management.

'Bean game' is also good – Pupils to stand 2m apart, in their 'zone', and have to run on the spot. The name of a 'bean' is called out and they have to act out the name of the bean: French bean, broad bean, runner bean, baked bean, jelly bean and one for me; 'has been'.

Balloon – 'keepie uppies': A balloon is kept in the air by using breath. Then the 'leader' call out a body part which is then used to keep the balloon in the air, then someone else can call out another body part etc.

The social distancing hike! With 2m! lengths of rope or string do a 'Follow the leader' activity – take it in turns to lead. Could work in small groups up to six – also encourages team work! Stop every now and then and do 10 star jumps on the spot, run on the spot, press ups etc. Go around, under obstacles see Electric Fence challenge, below.

Athletics: There are many throwing, jumping and running activities that could be undertaken. Most require management of pupils around any 'waiting' areas.

Lots of relay games – waiting and finishing/exchange areas would need to be clearly marked, no contact or exchanging items.

Use of hard surface/plastic balls for throwing for distance or at a target, for example. Ask pupils to recover any items after throwing before the next pupil or group of pupils throw.

Break the group down into smaller units of 2/3 pupils. They can perform various jumps (Start with standing long jumps) hops, steps, bounds for distance and return back to their group. Again, keeping 2m apart while waiting will be important.

Dance: Lots of opportunities for dance, while keeping 2m apart.

Wellbeing: There may be opportunities to explore Yoga and stretching and link to mindfulness. Tae-chi would be a good activity.

Football: Opportunities for non-contact skill development, passing, shooting, dribbling and relays if organised around social distancing.

Net games: Badminton and short tennis are possible, but cleaning of equipment in between different users will be a consideration. Foot volleyball?

Field games: Quick Cricket? and Rounders/Softball may be possible. However, the cleaning of the bat in between participants would need to be considered, so more than one bat being available would be important. Runs would have to be adapted around the pitches, with a 2m distance between runners and those opposition players at bases (Use a cone level but 2m from the base for runners to reach). Would any ball need cleaning/wiping in between being used? See [Rounders England](#) for ideas and advice.

Orienteering: Considerations – within the overall course, set individual courses say of 3-6 check points that only one pupil will use. For a group of 12 this would mean at least 36 checkpoints.

Once completed they come back to a checkpoint and check results/answers, then move to another location to collect another map. This process will need supervising, may be useful to mark out waiting zones and would probably need to look at supervision levels according to ability, numbers etc.

Organise to reduce pupils going to the same checkpoint, have a 2m zone or waiting area (hula hoop?) at each point, and waiting around one teacher before moving on to the next mini course of checkpoints. (OL Cards – OEAP Outdoor Learning cards see below).

Outdoor Learning Cards: A selection of some of the activity cards can be found in the file sent with this document.

There are four groups of activities:

Orienteering: Cards O 1-17

Team building Cards T 1-17



Map Symbol Running game (Card O4 OL) could be organised if run in small teams of 3/4. Mark waiting lines while one person collects a symbol and comes back. This activity is great to adapt and support the wider curriculum by asking pupils to match up 'pairs' e.g. capital cities and countries, maths questions and answers, English grammar and explanations etc.

Memory Map (Card O14 OL) could be run in a similar fashion to May Symbol Running game. Any image could be cut up and reconnected such as famous paintings, maps of various scales, landmarks or even a story reconstructed!

Netball Numbers Could be arranged on a larger scale such as on a football pitch or fewer pupils take part. Issue laminated maps, these can be cleaned after use, or one use paper maps, one set per pupil. Send pupils out to one checkpoint at a time to start with, build up to multiple points. Consider a waiting area. Pupils start and finish in their own 'zones', where they can also wait. There could also be hula hoop, or similar, waiting zones near check points. Resources attached for football field activity as well as netball court.

Cardinal Points It may be useful to review the cardinal compass points first (4/8/16) Space the pupils out and identify the location of North, mark this on the playground or with a symbol. In the day time, how could you find the position of north without a compass?

Clue it is easier when it is not cloudy! Ask all pupils to face north to begin with, then ask them to point to a particular compass direction. After a few goes repeat but ask them to close their eyes and point. Can be replicated for degrees and angles.

Using [British Orienteering Federation School Games Resources](#) as well. They cover some of these activities for both Primary and Secondary pupils along with resources to undertake the activities.

Teamworking

Amazing Maze TB9. As pupils cross the maze one at a time the activity will just need physically managing at the start and finish to the Maze. Working with 3 mazes per temporary group would help. Directions could be given by co-ordinates or in a foreign language!

More Maze activities can be found via: [National Centre of Excellence Teaching of Maths](#) – Outdoor Learning Resources and CPD links.

Environmental Education

Lots of ideas to be found in the [OEAP Environmental Learning Cards](#).

A selection of some of the activity cards were sent with this document. There are four groups of activities:

Awareness and Experience: Cards AE 1-6

Explore and Understand: Cards EU 7-12

Sustain and Conserve: Cards SC 13-18

Create and Share: Cards CS 19-25

Scavenger Hunts - Pupils could work on their own looking for items and be aware of their need to abide by social distancing as they move around. All sorts of list could be compiled.

Plant discovery activity (Card AE3) See attached Card

Mini beast hunt (Card EU8) See attached Card

Mini-beast models (Card CS19) See attached Card

All of these activities can be undertaken individually.

There are also some additional resource ideas from Learning through Landscapes and Wildlife Watch attached.

The following organisations also have activity ideas:

[Learning Through Landscapes](#)

[LtL CPD webinars](#)

[Wildlife Trusts](#) Go Wild for 30 days A great campaign and free resources for the month of June

[Wildlife WATCH](#) (This is a branch of the Wildlife Trust). Some great free resources and ideas

As have the [Bumblebee Conservation Trust](#).

Getting back to school

Somerset Outdoor Curriculum have pulled together [5 days of outdoor based learning](#) for Year 1 and 2 pupils.

Somerset Outdoors have also produced a short video for staff who want [guidance on undertaking learning outdoors](#).

Literacy & Phonics

Creative STAR: Provide some really good [ideas to support literacy](#).

Kung Fu Punctuation: An excellent [physical activity to support punctuation development](#).

Problem solving & Maths

Individual activities: Shape hunts, patterns observed around the school site. Use sticks to make a range of shapes, measure the height of a tree (EU7 Environmental Learning Cards) or building on site, design playground mazes for other pupils try.

Fizz – Buzz: Maths and team game played in a circle. One pupil starts, by saying 'one' and deciding which way round the circle the counting goes. The next says 'two' and on it goes, however, you could ask that any number with 3 in it or divisible by three they shout out 'fizz'. Once they get the hang of this add another challenge by asking them to 'buzz' for any number that includes 5 or is divisible by 5. Of course, a number that is divisible by 3 and 5 is fizz-buzz!

Cambridgeshire Outdoor Maths Cards:

[Alfresco Maths](#). An excellent set of resources developed by the Cambridgeshire Maths Team and the Outdoor Education Adviser Service.

Creative STAR: has a wide range of further ideas for [outdoor maths](#).

Creative

Natural art installations: Andy Goldsworthy, Nils-Udo, Richard Shilling and Agnes Denes could be used as inspiration, there are a number of art themed activities in the Learning through Landscapes free resources.

Make a musical instrument using natural resources and create a natural orchestra.

Musical statues: One group to make 'music' and the rest are spread out and do various activities on the spot – dictated by a 'leader' and they have to stop when the music stops!

Reflection & PHSE

Circle time: Spaced out!

Raccoon Circle work: 2 to a 4m circle and join the circles up.

Supporting School Transitions: Some excellent resources produced by [Somerset County Council Health and Well Being team](#)

