# School Leader and Teacher Insights into Learning Outside the Classroom in Natural Environments

NATURAL ENGLAND

# Foreword

## Background

A recent synthesis of the evidence highlights the wide ranging benefits to children of learning experiences in natural environments (Dillon and Dickie, 2012). However there is also evidence to show the extent to which children are becoming increasingly disconnected from the natural environment (England Marketing 2009).

Both the UK Government and Natural England are committed to addressing this challenge by enabling better and fairer access to natural environments and thereby reduce the levels of children's disconnection with the natural environment.

The Natural Environment White Paper '*The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*' (**Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2011**) sets out the need to strengthen the connection between people and nature, and gives an explicit call for every child in England to be given the opportunity to experience and learn about the natural environment. To help achieve this ambition, Government sets out several key reforms and a specific commitment to support a new initiative called Natural Connections.

Natural England, working with The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, led a wide coalition of partners in shaping an evidence-led proposal for Natural Connections, which aims 'to reconnect children with their local natural environments by stimulating both the demand for and the supply of services to support learning outside the classroom in natural environments' (Natural England, 2012). Natural Connections will oversee the delivery of a three year Demonstration Project during 2012-2015 to test the effectiveness of a new delivery model in achieving the above aim, with particular focus on supporting schools in areas of multiple deprivation that are currently providing little or no learning outside the classroom in natural environments.

Natural Connections objectives are to:

- **Stimulate the demand from schools and teachers for learning outside the classroom in natural environments.**
  By engaging schools (head teachers, staff, governors and families, etc.) with a more compelling case for the benefits of learning outside the classroom in natural environments and giving them the confidence that they can overcome perceived challenges.

- **Support schools and teachers to build learning outside the classroom in natural environments into their planning and practices.**
  By providing better local face to face support to help teachers identify and access the local support and resources that are most likely to meet their needs.

- **Stimulate the supply of high quality learning outside the classroom in natural environments services for schools and teachers.**
  By providing service providers with insight about what schools need to support learning outside the classroom in local natural environments, including information on the key outputs and outcomes for schools, teachers, children, and local communities.

Natural England is also working with The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, the London Legacy Development Corporation and other partners to facilitate the development of a project aimed at improving support for East London schools and their local communities to enable more children to benefit from high quality play and learning experiences in their local green spaces including the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Like Natural Connections, the East London Outdoor Learning Project would also focus on supporting schools in areas of multiple deprivation that are currently providing little or no learning outside the classroom in natural environments. As such, we believe this could deliver positive impacts and help address some of the long-standing social and economic challenges faced by a number of the East London boroughs.

Work by King's College London (Dillon and Dickie, 2012) suggested that the natural environment sector has insufficient knowledge of schools that are not heavily engaged with learning outside the classroom. So to support the planning of both the Natural Connections and East London Outdoor Learning Projects Natural England commissioned the two studies in this Report to look into the needs of schools with varying levels of learning outside the classroom in natural environments, particularly those with little or no current provision. The aim was to find out more about different teachers' needs and concerns in relation to outdoor learning and how a new support/brokerage service might be able to help them.

East London compared with most other areas of England is considered to be atypical due to the extremely high levels of deprivation, very high population density, and population profile that is relatively young and transient even compared to other parts of London. These characteristics of the population are likely to be reflected in relatively high rates of school student and teacher turnover. There is a relative lack of green space in the East London Boroughs, where 33% of the areas do not have access to a local park close (within 400m) to home or

school. However East London is in a period of rapid development and change, with the opening up of 102ha of new green space at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and The Olympic Host Boroughs' Strategic Regeneration Framework aiming to ensure that discrepancy in life chances between East London Boroughs and West London Boroughs is addressed as a significant legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

So, the East London Teacher Insight study was commissioned to complement the wider national study used to inform the Natural Connections Project by exploring similar issues with schools in the four East London boroughs immediately surrounding the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

The two studies were undertaken by a team of three independent consultants working for King's College London between November 2011 and May 2012.

This report should be cited as:

# School Leader and Teacher Insights into Learning Outside the Classroom in Natural Environments - A Study to Inform the Natural Connections Demonstration Project

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# Acknowledgements

Newquay Tretherras, Cornwall

Phoenix High School, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Sidney Stringer Academy, Coventry

Southend High School for Boys, Southend

Teignmouth Community College, Devon

Walsall Academy, Walsall


## Special Schools

Baginton Fields School, Coventry

Corley Centre, Coventry

Lisburne School, Stockport

RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning, Coventry

The Moat School, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Whitestone Head School, Cornwall


*Please note that the selection of schools was driven by a desire to achieve a national sample of c 40 teachers in different types of schools (Primary/Secondary/Special) and within different types of local authorities (Metropolitan, Unitary, Shire, and London Borough, with contrasting levels of economic deprivation). The characteristics of the achieved sample of 38 teachers (see section 1.3) shows that, within the limits of what is possible for a relatively small sample, there is a good degree of variety in terms of school types, school settings and local authority areas.

# Executive Summary

This document reports on a study of 38 teachers and school leaders in primary, secondary and special schools with widely varying levels of outdoor learning. It focuses on their views of outdoor learning and their ideas about the Natural Connections Demonstration Project.

## Main Findings

### Views on Outdoor Learning

- **The way teachers and school leaders understand and approach 'outdoor learning' is individual and appeared to be influenced by very local factors -** including their own educational experiences and values, the needs of their students and their school context.
- **There were five main ways in which outdoor learning was described:** as nature study and fieldwork, as sport and outdoor adventurous activities, as learning anything outdoors, as getting out into the world and as outdoor vocational courses.
- **Interviewees articulated a range of rationales for outdoor learning.** Some talked about outdoor learning in terms of 'making learning real' and 'setting it in context'. Others talked of the potential for outdoor learning to: help children develop a world view; to allow teachers to be creative across the curriculum; to raise children's aspirations; to get out of the city; and to build career and life-choice aspirations.
- **All interviewees recognised and could describe a range of benefits for outdoor learning, with a positive impact on 'improving motivation, behaviour and self-confidence' being reported as the key driver.** This was seen as particularly important in special schools, and for groups of children with additional learning needs or some level of disaffection within mainstream schools.

### Current Outdoor Learning Activity

- **Direct communication with individual schools** (rather than the study of school websites, prospectuses, Ofsted reports etc.) **was found to be the only reliable way to assess current levels of outdoor learning activity.**
- **There were clear differences in the extent to which different outdoor learning contexts were being used.** Outdoor learning **within school grounds** was found to be either well-developed or developing in most schools. Day trips and residential trips to **distant outdoor sites,** such as outdoor activity centres (especially primary schools) and field centres (especially secondary schools), was also common in most schools. In sharp contrast, use of **local green spaces** just beyond the school boundaries for outdoor learning activities was very limited, although teachers felt there were opportunities to use these spaces where appropriate.
- **There were marked differences in the nature of activities at primary, secondary and special schools.** Most primary schools were actively using their school grounds in specific ways to support the curriculum, through use of gardens, food growing spaces, fitness and nature trails, and outdoor classrooms etc. By contrast, the use of grounds by secondary schools for outdoor learning was more limited to PE and occasionally for gardening, science and vocational purposes. Special schools had the most extensive and wide ranging use of school grounds for regular learning, recreational and pastoral activities.

- **It should be noted that differences between schools in the types of outdoor learning activities seemed to reflect very local factors.** Differences were not related to whether schools were in an urban or rural setting, to the amount of outdoor space available on site or locally, to the socio-demographic nature of their catchment, to Ofsted grading, or to membership or participation in outdoor learning related national schemes. Instead, variation seemed to be related to very local factors such as school context and individual teacher confidence and competence which is consistent with the findings reported by Dillon & Dickie (2012).
- **All schools in this study reported that they wanted to do more outdoor learning if this was facilitated in an appropriate way,** and were able to describe some very local barriers and how these might be overcome.

### Views on enabling Outdoor Learning

- **Specific support:** interviewees wanted:
    - skilled face-to-face support in schools - to help them find expertise, inspiration, ideas, to provide INSET training, and to assist local networking etc.
    - a simple online database/resource bank - to help them find information on local spaces and resources etc.
    - ways to facilitate more collaborative projects between schools - to share resources and to develop research and practice.
    - additional resources - both human and financial - to enable local action, for example by bringing in volunteers skilled in supporting across a range of school-based roles. (There was little or no indication that schools were aware of or using any of the support or resources already available from outdoor learning providers).

- **Targeting:** interviewees advised that any action should focus on:
    - all schools, adopting a tailored approach with each school;
    - enthusiasts and senior staff; and
    - skilled, independent facilitators and volunteers.

- **Overcoming challenges:** interviewees emphasised the need to:
    - promote the benefits of outdoor learning;
    - allow for building participation over time;
    - overcome local limitations such as availability of local green space, and cost/time issues; and
    - manage its development through effective coordination and legacy/sustainability.

## Implications for the Natural Connections Demonstration Project

Those involved in the management and delivery of the Natural Connections Demonstration Project should:

- **Be encouraged that this study found a universal enthusiasm for developing more outdoor learning across the different types of schools** (primary/secondary/SEN) regardless of location (urban or rural), catchment, current level of outdoor learning provision, or availability of green space on site.
- **Be reassured that many of the Demonstration Project's key features were echoed as enabling factors** by the participants in this study, including the provision of independent local brokerage, a participative web service, a volunteer development programme, external help with articulating value, and being focused on building capacity (legacy and ongoing sustainability at local level).
- **Pay close attention to the calls from teachers in this study for the Project to be:** open to all schools; tailored to individual contexts; target enthusiasts and senior staff; provide face to face support via truly independent and skilled facilitators; provide simple online support for finding resources; enable collaborative projects between schools; and to be evaluative.
- **Devise strategies for dealing with:** there being no easy way to identify schools that are providing little or no outdoor learning; that the needs of schools and teachers are very local and individual; and that outdoor learning is very broad and hence difficult to define.
- **Be aware that this study found a tendency for teachers to default into thinking about outdoor learning in terms of trip-based, out-of-classroom activities** such as visits to museums, galleries and residential centres. Participation was then associated with challenges related to trip-based activities such as cost and transport. As Natural Connections will focus on enabling better use of very local spaces, including school grounds, terminology and scope will need to be very clearly set out from the start.
- **Make the link to initiatives for increasing community green space** where availability of suitable spaces within school grounds or just beyond school boundaries is a real constraint for schools.

## Specific Recommendations for the Natural Connections Demonstration Project

- **Facilitate collaboration and learning between schools by ensuring the selection of schools reflects a range of levels of outdoor learning activity and is focused in terms of geographical location/s.**
- **Focus on testing the opportunity to facilitate outdoor learning within school grounds and in other local green spaces (rather than in more distant green spaces).**
- **Adopt a truly unique, tailored approach with each school.**
- **Must do elements:**
    - **Provide skilled, independent face-to-face support in schools;**
    - **Provide a simple online database/resource bank;**
    - **Enable collaborative projects between schools; and**
    - **Develop resources - both human and financial - to enable local action.**

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1  Background

The 2011 Environment White Paper, *The Natural Choice: Securing the value of nature*, set out the need to address the disconnection of children from the natural environment (DEFRA, 2011). One of the specific commitments it made was support for a new initiative called Natural Connections.

Natural England, working with The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, led a wide coalition of partners in shaping an evidence-led proposal for Natural Connections, which aims 'to reconnect children with their local natural environments by stimulating both the demand for and the supply of services to support learning outside the classroom in natural environments' (Natural England, 2012, p. 3). Natural Connections will oversee the delivery of a three year Demonstration Project during 2012-2015 to test the effectiveness of a new delivery model in achieving the above aim, with particular focus on supporting schools in areas of multiple deprivation that are currently providing little or no learning outside the classroom in natural environments.

Work by King's College London (Dillon & Dickie, 2012) suggested that the natural environment sector has insufficient knowledge of schools that are not heavily engaged with learning outside the classroom. So to support the planning of the Demonstration Project, Natural England commissioned this current study to look into the needs of schools with varying levels of 'learning outside the classroom in natural environments' (see Box 1.1) particularly those with little or no current provision. The aim was to find out more about different teachers' needs and concerns in relation to outdoor learning and how a new support/brokerage service might be able to help them. This work was undertaken by a team of three independent consultants working under the aegis of King's College London between November 2011 and March 2012.

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**Box 1.1**  *'Learning outside the classroom in natural environments'*

Learning outside the classroom in natural environments encompasses a wide range of educational activities undertaken by school students in various types of outdoor settings, including:

- school grounds (fields, sports pitches, gardens, etc.);
- local green spaces (parks, city farms, woodland, country parks, etc.); and,
- more distant outdoor locations (national parks, outdoor centres, nature reserves, etc.)

The important characteristics of these activities are that they are: *outdoors* (as opposed to indoors) within **natural environments** (as opposed to built environments), and are about *learning* (in terms of relating to school and school-age young people).

For ease, the phrase **'outdoor learning'** is used throughout this report instead of 'learning outside the classroom in natural environments'.

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This study was commissioned against a backdrop of considerable previous research into school-based outdoor learning. There has been long-standing interest in establishing and strengthening the evidence base relating to various types of outdoor learning (for example, Dillon *et al.*, 2003; Rickinson *et al.*, 2004; Malone, 2008; Ofsted, 2008). More recently, work commissioned by Natural England and undertaken by King's College London has synthesised the research relating to the barriers and the benefits of outdoor learning in natural environments (Dillon & Dickie, 2012). Taken together, these studies have underlined the wide-ranging benefits of outdoor learning but have also highlighted the very local challenges that can limit its development within schools. While subsequent teacher focus groups have explored these challenges in more detail (Natural England, 2011), the work was undertaken with teachers in schools that were already involved in outdoor learning and its timing meant that it took place before the announcement of the Natural Connections Demonstration Project. This current study was therefore initiated to be able to involve schools with little or no outdoor learning and to ask teachers directly about aspects of the proposed Natural Connections delivery model.

## 1.2  Aims

This research sought to examine the needs of staff in schools with varying levels of outdoor learning particularly those with little or no current provision. More specifically, the study aimed to provide up-to-date research-based insights into:

1) *Views on outdoor learning –* teachers' perceptions of outdoor learning and its benefits, and their schools' current outdoor learning provision and the factors that affect it;

2) *Views on Natural Connections –* teachers' ideas about how Natural Connections might support schools, who should be the target group and what difficulties might it face; and

3) *Implications for the Demonstration Project –* the implications of all of the above for the future management and delivery of the Natural Connections Demonstration Project.

## 1.3  Methods

The findings presented in this report are based on qualitative data generated through two main data collection processes.

1) **Documentary analysis –** Analysis of: (i) relevant school documentation (for example, school websites, Ofsted reports, etc.) as part of sampling and interviewing; and (ii) relevant policy and research publications as part of background context. These data were important both to understand the characteristics of the schools that took part in the study and to become familiar with the policy and evidence debates which might impact on the Natural Connections initiative.

2) **Staff telephone interviews –** Individual semi-structured telephone interviews were undertaken with 38 teachers and school leaders in different types of schools with varying levels of outdoor learning. More details about the nature and selection of these schools and teachers are provided below. The purpose of the interviews was to enable school staff with varying levels of experience of outdoor learning to speak frankly about the issues listed above under 'Aims'.

The sample selection process was driven by a desire to achieve **a national sample of 40 teachers in different types of schools** (Primary/Secondary/Special) within **different types of local authorities** (Metropolitan, Unitary, Shire, and London Borough, with contrasting levels of economic deprivation[1]). The characteristics of the achieved sample of 38 teachers and school leaders (Figure 1.1) shows that, within the limits of what is possible for a relatively small sample, there is a good degree of variety in terms of school types, school settings and local authority areas.

The sampling process was also driven by a clear desire to interview teachers in schools with **varying levels of outdoor learning, particularly those with little or no current provision.** While this aim was also achieved, as shown in Figure 1.1, it is important to stress the process was not without difficulties. The most significant challenge was the fact that there is no easy way to pre-select schools on the basis of their levels of outdoor learning. This study found that publically available information sources (school websites, Ofsted reports, newsletters, etc.) were neither helpful nor reliable indications of what schools were doing in terms of outdoor learning. It was therefore not possible at the sampling stage to confidently identify schools that had little or no current provision (and the achieved sample consequently included schools with varying levels of outdoor learning). As well as a challenge for this study, the difficulty represents an important learning point for the recruitment of schools for the Demonstration Project.

## 1.4  Report structure

The rest of the report is in three sections. Section 2 considers interviewees' views on outdoor learning in terms of its nature, what their schools are doing, what enables and constrains it and what would encourage more. Section 3 then examines interviewees' ideas about Natural Connections, in particular what it should do, who it should involve, how it should overcome challenges and what other initiatives it might learn from. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for the Demonstration Project (Section 4).

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[1] Using the County Ranks of the English Indices of Deprivation 2010.

## School Type

| | |
|---|---|
| Special schools | 6 |
| Secondary schools | 15 |
| Primary schools | 17 |

## Interviewee Role

| | |
|---|---|
| Support staff | 1 |
| Teaching staff | 5 |
| Middle leader | 9 |
| Senior leader | 23 |

## School Setting

| | |
|---|---|
| Rural special | 2 |
| Urban special | 4 |
| Rural secondary | 9 |
| Urban secondary | 6 |
| Rural primary | 11 |
| Urban primary | 6 |

## Local Authorities

| | |
|---|---|
| H'smith & Fulham (London) | 4 |
| Cambridgeshire (Shire) | 1 |
| Gloucestershire (Shire) | 2 |
| Devon (Shire) | 4 |
| North Yorkshire (Shire) | 7 |
| Darlington (Unitary) | 3 |
| Cornwall (Unitary) | 8 |
| Walsall (Metropolitan) | 1 |
| Southend (Metropolitan) | 1 |
| Stockport (Metropolitan) | 2 |
| Coventry (Metropolitan) | 5 |

## Current Outdoor Learning Provision Across Three Contexts
### (school grounds, local green spaces and more distant green spaces)

| | |
|---|---|
| Very limited in all three contexts | 7 |
| Developing in one context | 12 |
| Well-developed in one context | 14 |
| Well-developed in two or more contexts | 5 |

Note: More details about the nature of the outdoor learning activities happening across the schools are given in section 2.2.
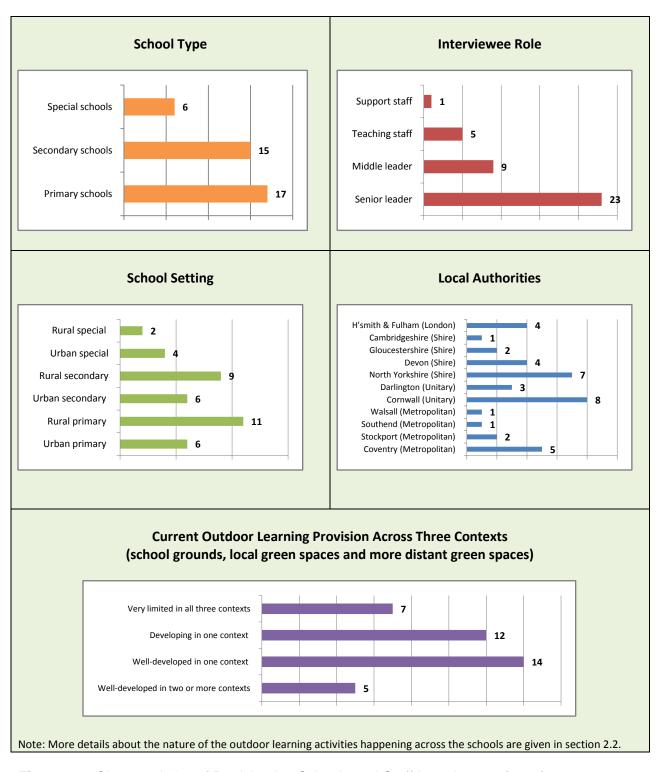
**Figure 1.1** Characteristics of Participating Schools and Staff Interviewees (n=38)

# 2. Views on Outdoor Learning

This section reviews what interviewees understood by the term 'outdoor learning in natural environments'. It also outlines the scope of outdoor learning activities happening at the schools, the factors that staff felt enabled and constrained these activities within their schools, and what they felt would encourage more activities.

## 2.1 Views on the nature and purpose of outdoor learning

Interviewees' responses to the question 'What is outdoor learning in natural environments?' revealed a range of views. Across the 38 staff interviews there were five main ways in which this term was described: as nature study and fieldwork, as sport and outdoor adventurous activities, as learning anything outdoors, as getting out into the world and as outdoor vocational courses (Figure 2.1).

Interviewees also articulated a number of different **rationales for outdoor learning.** Some talked about outdoor learning in terms of 'making learning real' and 'setting it in context'. Others talked of the potential for outdoor learning to: help children develop a world view; to allow teachers to be creative in how they taught the whole curriculum; to raise children's aspirations; to get out of the city; and to build career and life-choice aspirations. Outdoor learning was felt to be particularly beneficial in special schools and with groups of children with additional learning needs or some level of disaffection within mainstream schools, for its role in increasing children's engagement so that they are more able to learn. In addition, outdoor learning was seen to have wide-ranging appeal in terms of being cross-curricular, as relevant in urban as in rural settings, and not limited to physical spaces but also included reference to virtual/multimedia aspects.

In summary, the nature and purposes of outdoor learning in natural environments is understood differently by different interviewees and this variety seems to be due to a range of factors. There were indications of teachers' views being influenced by:

- their own educational experience – 'I can remember investigating a pond and river when I was at school....';
- their subject specialism – 'As a Media educator I have done research into digital literacies and I think there is a bit of cross-over with outdoor learning …';
- their own values – 'I think it's really important to get pupils outside';
- their own children's needs – 'Their closest outdoor space is the supermarket car park';
- their school's current practices – 'We're keen on providing opportunities for students to learn in other spaces not the classroom …';
- wider inspection requirements – 'How would Ofsted view this?'; and
- practices from elsewhere – 'One thing that we've been looking at is an initiative from Australia; the idea is that it's child-initiated learning, working in groups and deciding what they want to focus on'.

Given the individuality and therefore diversity of interviewees' understandings, Natural Connections needs to tailor its communications to take account of teachers' varied perspectives on outdoor learning. It is also important to note that interviewees' responses appeared to show

a lack of differentiation between learning outside the classroom and learning outdoors. This observation might have implications for Natural Connections as responses tended to default into thinking about learning outdoors in terms of broader out-of-classroom activities such as trips to museums and galleries, and this was associated by school staff with issues related to trip-based activities such as cost and transport. (The term 'outdoor learning' was used instead of 'learning outside the classroom in natural environments' in this research as the latter would have been too cumbersome. Terminology used should be considered in the Demonstration Project context.

Learning outdoors was also frequently described in terms of learning about the environment (such as food and nature) rather than the wider learning that can take place outdoors. Again this pattern may be of relevance to Natural Connections in terms of ensuring that communications allow the full potential of learning outdoors to be explored with teachers and school leaders.

| Views of 'outdoor learning in natural environments' | Typical quotes |
|---|---|
| *Nature study and fieldwork* <br> Outdoor learning seen as general nature study activities such as pond-dipping (primary school teachers) or more focused field work activities in geography and science (secondary school teachers) | *'Local parks – exploring for wildlife, seeing how kids identify species of trees, leaves.' (Primary school)* <br> *'Outside measurements and observations in a variety of environments for example, rivers, beaches, urban, rural, woodland.' (Secondary school)* |
| *Sport and outdoor adventurous activities* <br> Outdoor learning seen as outdoor PE lessons and school sports and/or outdoor adventurous activities (secondary school teachers and some special school teachers) | *'We use the outside a lot for sport – hockey, football, cross-country, netball, etc.'* <br> *'Watersports and camping – that sort of activity.' (Secondary school)* |
| *Learning anything outdoors* <br> Outdoor learning seen as creating as many opportunities as possible to take the children and the curriculum outside (primary school teachers) | *'Maths trails, pond dipping, science, drama, PE, design and technology, art, poetry, all sorts, just everything really.' (Primary school)* |
| *Getting out into the world* <br> Outdoor learning seen as taking students out into the world and the wider community (special school teachers) | *'Independent travel is a big thing for our students. Going outside opens up everything, presents physical challenges, and puts things into perspective. Outdoor learning widens their whole horizons.' (Special school)* |
| *Outdoor vocational courses* <br> Outdoor learning seen as students undertaking vocational courses with an outdoor dimension such as horticulture (secondary school teachers) | *'That's what our horticulture BTEC course is. It's outside and there are specific things they learn but it can be a vehicle for other things [like] team work and a sense of pride in their work, etc.' (Secondary)* |

**Figure 2.1** Interviewees' Views of 'Outdoor learning in natural environments'

## 2.2 Views on current provision of outdoor learning

Given the difficulties with gaining any real insight into current outdoor learning provision from school websites and documentation (see section 1.3), the staff interviews were an important opportunity to explore school practices in more detail. Interviewees were asked to describe what outdoor learning activities (if any) were happening across three contexts – within the schools

grounds, in local green spaces and in more distant green spaces. Staff were also asked whether their schools were involved with any national schemes relating to outdoor learning.

The main points that emerged from the 38 interviews are outlined in Figure 2.2. They seem to flag up three main findings.

**Firstly,** there were **clear differences in the extent to which different outdoor learning contexts were being used.** Day trips and residential trips to distant outdoor sites, such as outdoor activity centres (especially primary schools) and field centres (especially secondary schools), were common across the schools. In sharp contrast, use of local green spaces just beyond the school boundaries for outdoor learning activities was very limited. Outdoor learning within school grounds was found to be either well-developed or developing in most schools.

**Secondly,** there were **marked differences in the nature of activities at primary, secondary and special schools.** Most primary schools were actively using their school grounds in specific ways to support the curriculum, through use of gardens, food growing spaces, fitness and nature trails, and outdoor classrooms etc. By contrast, the use of use grounds by secondary schools for outdoor learning was more limited to PE and occasionally for gardening, science and vocational purposes. Special schools had the most extensive and wide ranging use of school grounds for regular learning, recreational and pastoral activities.

It should be noted that differences in the nature of activity between schools in this study were not related to whether schools were in an urban or rural setting, to the nature of the catchment, to the amount of outdoor space available on site or locally, to Ofsted grading, or to membership or participation in outdoor learning related national schemes. Instead, and echoing findings reported by Dillon & Dickie (2012), variation seems to arise from very local factors within the school such as local context and individual teacher confidence and competence.

Finally, there were a **number of specific observations** that are worth noting. Staff in several inner city schools (for example, in London, Coventry and North Yorkshire) reported an absence of any green space on site (due to housing developments or new classrooms) and a lack of any accessible local green spaces. A small number of schools stood out as potential showcases for future advocacy, including one secondary school that has a dedicated and now self-financing family and community engagement staff team. There were some head teachers who had led schools out of special measures, and their recommendation was not to automatically exclude schools in special measures from the Demonstration Project as outdoor learning may be seen as a valid way to help achieve targets. Primary school interviewees in one local authority (Cornwall) reported higher levels of activity compared to other areas which, as is discussed below (section 2.3), seems to reflect the influence of an active Forest School Programme.

These findings have a number of potential implications for the Natural Connections initiative. Although current provision can vary considerably between schools, there are clear opportunities to do more outdoor learning across all types of schools, i.e. primary, secondary and special, and rural and urban. Indeed, all interviewees reported a strong desire to facilitate more outdoor learning if it was enabled in the right way (see section 2.4). As variation in current outdoor learning provision appears to be influenced by a range of factors, often very local and specific to schools, Natural Connections would need to inform its selection of schools via personal communications with individual schools in the chosen locations. In particular, the Demonstration Project would need to tailor its approach when working with schools with little or no green space either within school grounds or within walking distance, perhaps by focusing more on facilitating creative use of school playground areas and/or green sites accessible via local public transport.

| *Within school grounds* | *In local green spaces* |
|---|---|
| **Activities in the grounds were well developed or developing in most schools.** | **In general schools were making very limited use of local green spaces.** |
| <ul><li>Primary school responses focused particularly on activities in key stage 1, including free-flow access to outdoor classroom areas.</li><li>Secondary school responses tended to focus on the use of grounds for sport and occasional geography and science field-work.</li><li>Special schools reported a more developed use of grounds, where available, reflecting their use in supporting a broader curriculum.</li><li>Most primary and some secondary schools reported a dedicated garden or food growing area that was typically used for lunchtime or after-school gardening clubs. A few schools reported a more developed approach with 'plot to plate' activities involving staff from across the school.</li><li>Responses appeared to bear no relation to the green space available on site, with some schools with very limited grounds managing impressive programmes through creative use of raised beds and planters, etc.</li><li>In general there was involvement of parents and community in establishing and supporting outdoor spaces.</li></ul> | <ul><li>In some cases it was because there was little or no local green space available within walking distance. Or if there was green space nearby, it was felt to be unsuitable or unsafe to walk to.</li><li>Some schools felt they had sufficient space on site so use of local spaces was unnecessary.</li><li>Primary school activities, where reported, included visits to local farms and estates, pond-dipping and canal walks, litter picks and beach cleans, sports events, use of local swimming pools, etc.</li><li>Primary schools linked to a Forest Schools programme tended to report the most developed use of local green spaces – often where they had access to woodland owned by a provider such as the National Trust, Woodland Trust or National Parks.</li><li>Secondary school activities tended to be limited to work experience and vocational training for re-engaging disaffected groups and occasional science or history topics.</li><li>Special schools reported more regular use of local spaces such as parks, local history walks, riding stables, etc.</li><li>Building community links and identity came through strongly in schools that were making use of their local spaces (both urban and rural).</li></ul> |
| *More distant spaces* | *National schemes* |
| **Almost all of the schools reported day-trips and residential trips to more distant spaces.** | **In general, there was very little mention of any national schemes relating to outdoor learning.** |
| <ul><li>Primary schools reported trips at upper key stage 2 for annual outward-bound activities and day-trips to green space venues such as woods, parks and environmental centres.</li><li>Secondary school trips focused on fieldwork for science, geography and history, for outward-bound enrichment and for vocational experience.</li><li>Special schools also ran regular annual trips to outward-bound centres and other specialist learning providers.</li></ul> | <ul><li>Across the sample there appeared to be no relation between membership of national schemes and organisations and level of outdoor learning activity.</li><li>There was no mention of any national natural environment sector organisations or their resources.</li><li>The one exception appeared to be involvement with Forest Schools in Cornwall, as schools involved with this programme did appear to have developed their capacity and approach to outdoor learning.</li></ul> |

**Figure 2.2** Current outdoor learning provision across different contexts

## 2.3 Views on factors that enable and constrain outdoor learning

This study was also interested in the factors that staff saw as enabling and constraining their current outdoor learning provision. Not surprisingly, interviewees cited a range of issues that were related to influences both within and beyond the school. These are not easy to divide into a clear set of enablers and a clear set of constraints since a similar influence could play out differently across different schools. It is more helpful therefore to flag up several themes that seem to play a key role (either positively or negatively) in the development of outdoor learning provision.

- **School leadership, culture and commitment**

On a positive note, some interviewees noted how senior staff and governors can help to create a culture that enables outdoor learning to develop, particularly in terms of giving staff 'permission' to be creative and take a common sense approach to risk. To quote the head teacher of a secondary school with very well-established outdoor learning: 'Our teachers have a free rein; they just need to do the most basic risk assessment to go outside'. A positive attitude towards outdoor learning was also evident amongst a number of new-in-post primary and special school head teachers who seemed keen to develop more outdoor learning. More generally, interviewees in all schools reported a desire to do more learning outdoors, regardless of their current level of activity.

- **Expertise and inspiration from others**

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the teacher interviews was the importance of ideas, inspiration and resources from others. In most cases such collaboration was talked about in terms of learning between schools (as discussed further in section 3.1), but there was no evidence that such sharing was happening in any structured way. A very small number of teachers noted the opportunity to learn from foundation and special school colleagues where outdoor learning appears to be more embedded. However, staff in several schools reported that they were constrained by not having access to information about venues or resources (discussed further in section 3.1). There was little or no indication that schools were aware of or using the resources available from outdoor learning providers unless the school was very close to one with an education team. There was no mention of any national natural environment sector organisations or use of their resources in any interview.

- **Access to local green spaces**

The availability of spaces within school grounds or just beyond was seen as an enabler, with many schools reporting how lucky they were to have suitable spaces. Examples included: 'We've got access to local spaces that are easy to get to, known, safe' (primary school) and 'We had space on our site to put in a greenhouse and a new shed for the start of the BTEC course' (secondary). Conversely, there were several examples where a lack of accessible outdoor spaces was a definite constraint. This lack could be both *within* the grounds ('At the moment the outdoor areas are used by the two Foundation and two Year 1 classes and space is tight' – primary school) and *beyond* the grounds ('We struggle for good outdoor places to take our students, for example, local parks are no good due to dog mess' – special school). It was also an issue for inner-city schools ('The new build has taken up all of the outdoor space apart from the astroturf' – secondary school) and those in rural areas ('We are in a rural location, but there

are not many appropriate places within safe walking distance' – primary school). This finding is of relevance in terms of Government's commitment to opening up more community green space.

- **Supporting resources**

Several interviewees emphasised the importance of having enough adults to help with a **range** of support roles for outdoor learning. Parents, and in some cases community partners, were being relied on to provide the hands-on resource to help fund, organise or undertake visits to outdoor spaces. In particular, schools seemed to need additional adults who 'have experience of working with young people and have been CRB checked'. In general, schools' requests for help were limited to making ad-hoc requests of parents. Some schools felt that they could not make any more requests of parents, especially those in small community schools and during an economic recession. Many schools reported that it was hard to recruit parent help from KS2 onwards as by then both parents tend to be working. No interviewees mentioned any proactive volunteer-recruitment campaigns to find the local help needed despite the advantages such a system might afford. A second issue was having enough financial support for capital works (such as drainage of boggy spaces or creation of raised beds) and for the purchase of equipment (such as sheds and tools.) In some cases, parents were providing help in fundraising for ad-hoc projects, but again very few schools reported a proactive approach to fundraising for outdoor learning. Transport costs were raised as an issue in relation to trip-based provision and where walking to local spaces was not a safe option.

- **Student need and student enjoyment**

In some schools the needs of students had been influential in the development of outdoor learning. In some cases outdoor learning represented a way forward to meeting the needs of particular groups of students. One secondary school interviewee, for example, described how: 'Our Horticulture course originally grew out of the needs of a particular Year 7 year group in 2005 which had 36% on the Special Educational Needs Register, i.e. three times the usual number. It very quickly became clear that the ordinary curriculum wouldn't work, so I had to put other things in place, one of which was outdoor learning'. In other cases, teachers described how children's positive responses to outdoor learning developments had been significant in maintaining a sense of momentum: 'Now you can see that our kids in Foundation Stage and Year 1 are coming on in leaps and bounds [after the introduction of free-flow outdoor learning practices]'. Some teachers also flagged up the way in which children's enjoyment of their outdoor learning experiences had resulted in strong support for further developments from school councils.

- **Staff confidence and enthusiasm**

Having someone passionate, well-organised and committed to outdoor learning on the staff was seen as another very important enabler, especially when combined with senior staff support. Time and again the need for enthusiastic coordinators was emphasised: 'You need someone who can drive and project manage it. They need to have dynamism and be enthusiastic as staff can be very challenged by the idea of teaching outdoors' (secondary school). Indeed, fears about possible accidents and discipline problems while teaching outdoors and concerns about bureaucracy and additional workload were noted as constraining factors in several schools. Beyond these, though, a small number of interviewees also felt that staff could be held back by deeper-seated reservations about outdoor learning. This reluctance suggested that staff were viewed as either not recognising the value of outdoor learning ('There is a strange mindset here

– it seems to me that the view is that if you're not in school then you're not actually learning') or not knowing how to assess its impacts ('Staff sometimes have concerns about not being able to record progress as hard evidence when they take kids outside'). This objection led to strong calls for external validation of the value of outdoor learning: 'We'd want to be reassured that what we do beyond the classroom is as valuable as what we do in the classroom'.

- **Time and priority**

Staff workload and competing priorities came up in some interviewees' comments about constraints. Typical quotes included: 'Staff feeling overloaded and pressured – with 'SATS', Ofsted and so on, we are doing a lot already' (primary school); 'Too many external projects have unrealistic timeframes – for influencing programmes in September you need to be talking to us before March (secondary school); and 'Calendaring will be important – with modular GCSEs and controlled assessments it's very hard to take children out, you'll find you get the dog-ends of the day' (special school).

## 2.4   Views on what would encourage more outdoor learning

All interviewees expressed the opinion that staff and students in their school would be keen to do more outdoor learning. This observation was true across schools with different levels of outdoor learning, geographical locations and student age ranges. Perhaps not surprisingly, interviewees' comments as to what would facilitate this involvement echoed the enabling and constraining factors summarised above. The strongest theme to emerge was the call for ideas through collaboration, especially with other schools (discussed further in section 3.1).

Interviewees were presented with a list of eight outdoor learning benefits (based on those identified by Dillon & Dickie, 2012) and asked to comment on which would be most important for their school. The responses that were received (a selection of which can be seen in Figure 2.3) highlighted the following trends:

- outcomes to do with **motivation, behaviour and self-confidence** were highly valued in almost all schools, reflecting increased awareness of the social and emotional dimensions of students' learning generally as well as the particular needs of children who do not flourish well in the classroom environment, who lack motivation or who have special educational needs;
- a clear focus on **curriculum-related benefits** in many schools, both in terms of the capacity for outdoor learning to enrich and extend core curriculum subjects and its capacity to support cross-curricular themes such as food, exercise and healthy eating;
- a clear interest in **vocational learning** benefits amongst secondary school staff involved in outdoor courses and alternative curricula and some primary schools teachers interested in broadening children's world-view and career aspirations;
- an emphasis on **teacher development** benefits by special school staff; and,
- **whole-school benefits and community links** rarely ranked as among the most important, but consistently commented on and they reflected schools' reliance on their local communities and towns.

Overall, teachers and school leaders felt that schools would be motivated by different kinds of potential benefits depending on their individual circumstances and priorities, so again reflecting a need for a tailored approach with individual schools. As one secondary school head teacher explained: 'It's very difficult to ID the most/least important as I think they are all hugely

beneficial. A holistic approach that allows not only academic but personal development is most important. Motivation, skills, confidence and subject knowledge are all high on the list'.

| Enhanced mental health and wellbeing | Improved motivation and behaviour |
|---|---|
| 'All of the benefits are important, but especially confidence, as this drives mental health and wellbeing, and this drives motivation.' (Primary school)<br><br>'This is priority number 1. I think we live in a very stressful society and so it's important that children get out and know how to enjoy the outdoors in every shape or form not just now but the lifelong opportunities they can gain.' (Secondary school)<br><br>'A lot of our students have mental health issues and these are the barriers to learning, i.e. the things that mean our kids don't come to the classroom. You don't learn if you're anxious.' (Special school) | 'Motivation and behaviour - we have lots of boys, it lets the boys be children, free to explore.' (Primary school)<br><br>'In horticulture, none of the disaffected students refuses to pick up a pen and write because they have got something to write about.' (Secondary school)<br><br>'Hugely important, especially for the kids of ours who don't want to come to school. Outdoor learning is a way to engage these kids and get them to learn in different ways.' (Special school) |
| **Curriculum knowledge and understanding** | **Increased self-confidence/self-worth** |
| 'First-hand learning inspires them and increases understanding. This is so important.' (Primary school)<br><br>'If a child can see what they're doing and what the impact is, then it is more relevant. Outdoor learning is better for that because there is something concrete to see'. (Secondary school)<br><br>'Many of our children have never seen a cow, never camped, it helps them get a sense of perspective, to discover things, it's such a transformation' (Special school) | 'Lack of confidence is a root cause of failing, putting them in different situations gives them a chance.' (Primary school)<br><br>'It helps develop children as people; they can see the consequences of their actions, better look after themselves.' (Secondary school)<br><br>'Parents always talk about wanting their children to develop in terms of becoming more independent, more interactive and more socially aware. All of these things are best taught off-site in real-life activities' (Special school) |
| **Vocational learning** | **Skill development –social and technical** |
| 'It broadens their horizons and shows them what could be possible to their work and leisure. (Primary school)<br><br>'They come out as nicer people, discover new things about themselves. At least one or two out of the 12 each year go on to get a job or do a college course in Horticulture.' (Secondary school) | 'They can be resistant to learning due to so much failure in the past but working outside helps them to develop team-work skills, pride in their work, etc.' (Secondary school)<br><br>'Personal development and personal skills – students being able to develop relationships with people they meet when working outdoors.' (Special school) |
| **Teacher development** | **Whole-school benefits and community links** |
| 'This is really important. The more creative our teachers can be the better. If staff are more creative out of school then they are likely to be more creative in school'. (Special school)<br><br>'This is key – schools have got to raise teachers' game, previously you could get 'outstanding' if teaching was 'good' but now all teaching has to be outstanding so teacher development is key.' (Special school) | 'It's very important in tiny schools which rely on local community a lot - we have a small staff so can't rely on them only.' (Primary school)<br><br>Community links is a really big thing. Our school has had a turbulent, difficult past, so raising public awareness of good things that are happening at our school is really important. If outdoor learning could contribute to this then that would be seen positively'. (Secondary school) |

**Figure 2.3** Interviewees' views on the different benefits of outdoor learning

## 2.5  Summary

**Views on the nature and purpose of outdoor learning**

Individual teachers and school leaders can understand and approach outdoor learning in quite different ways. Outdoor learning was characterised by interviewees in five main ways: as nature study and fieldwork, as sport and outdoor adventurous activities, as learning anything outdoors, as getting out into the world and as outdoor vocational courses. Teachers also expressed various rationales for outdoor learning, which highlighted its potential to: make learning real, help children develop world views and raise their aspirations, allow teachers to be creative and enable young people to get out of the city.

**Views on current provision of outdoor learning**

There were clear variations between different outdoor contexts (more frequent use of school grounds and distant outdoor spaces but limited use of local green spaces) and different school types (better developed in special and primary schools and more limited in secondary schools). These general trends, however, all had important exceptions which highlight the importance of variations due to very local school-level influences.

**Views on factors that enable and constrain outdoor learning**

On the question of enablers and constraints, interviewees cited a range of issues that were related to influences both within and beyond the school. These echoed previous research studies and flagged up the significance of: leadership, culture and commitment; availability of outdoor spaces; human resources and funding; expertise and inspiration from others; student need and student enjoyment; staff confidence and enthusiasm; and timing and competing pressures.

**Views on what would encourage more outdoor learning**

All interviewees expressed an opinion that staff and students in their school would be keen to do more outdoor learning. The motivations for making this happen, though, would be different for different schools. While 'improved motivation, behaviour and self-confidence' was attractive in most schools, 'vocational learning' was more appealing to secondary schools and 'teacher development' was particularly relevant to special schools. These findings underline the need for a tailored approach to outdoor learning with individual schools.

# 3. Views on Natural Connections

Having considered what interviewees had to say about outdoor learning, this section now examines their ideas for the Natural Connections Demonstration Project. It outlines teachers' views and suggestions as to what the main focus of the initiative should be, who it should seek to involve, how it should overcome challenges and what previous initiatives might inform its development.

## 3.1   Views on what should be the main focus of Natural Connections

When asked about what Natural Connections should do for schools, the staff highlighted four main priorities. It is important to stress that these priorities emerged as unprompted responses to an open question. So, notwithstanding differences between individuals in terms of detail and emphasis, there seemed to be considerable consensus in teachers' expectations about Natural Connections. As shown in Figure 3.1, interviewees wanted Natural Connections to provide:

- **face-to-face training and support;**
- **an online database and resource bank;**
- **collaborative projects between schools; and**
- **human and financial resources.**

| *Face to face training and support* | *Online database and resource bank* |
|---|---|
| 'Training on how to structure our lessons outside'<br><br>'Someone to talk to – what do you think of this?, how can we solve this problem?'<br><br>'Bringing people together – teachers, people who can help schools, parent helpers etc.' | 'Directory of local facilities – help schools to become more aware of what is out there'<br><br>'A handbook of activities, lesson ideas linked to the curriculum for schools to pick, take and add'<br><br>'An online forum for sharing, rating and reviewing providers' |
| *Collaborative projects between schools* | *Human and financial resources* |
| 'Helping schools talk to each other about who is doing what, what works, selling advice and support to each other'<br><br>'Opportunities for special schools and mainstream schools to work together on issues for example, ways of assessing outdoor learning' | 'Bring in more adults helpers - CRB checked and skilled in working with schools and taking trips'<br><br>'If subsidised transport to local areas could be provided then we'd take advantage of far more' |

**Figure 3.1**  Interviewees' views on what Natural Connections should focus on

## Face-to-face training and support

Interviewees were clear that any new programme aimed at supporting outdoor learning would need to provide face-to-face assistance in schools. More specifically, teachers wanted Natural Connections to offer three kinds of personalised support:

- **Staff in-service training (INSET) sessions.** The general rationale was that Natural Connections needs (in the words of one special school head teacher) 'to help teachers to be creative because most do what they're most comfortable with, i.e. work in the classroom'. So there were requests for:
    - 'modelling of good teaching outside the classroom' (primary school);
    - 'training on how to structure our lessons outside, differences in approach and objectives for why to go outside' (secondary school);
    - 'INSET where someone says: I'm going to take you and your kids out with the hope that you can do it yourself next time' (secondary school); and
    - 'someone to come and show us lesson ideas for different learning environments, how things link to the curriculum, and how you can assess outdoors' (special school).

- **Focused support and advice around specific issues.** The perceived need was for someone who could act as an advisor to staff involved in developing aspects of outdoor learning. Across the schools there were calls for help with:
    - planning outdoor developments, for example, 'help us set up an outside area that works';
    - developing outdoor teaching practice, for example, 'help and ideas and resources for key stage 2 teachers who are being asked to teach in a similar way to Foundation stage';
    - establishing vocational courses, for example, 'For our Horticulture BTEC, there was nowhere that I could go for advice, so it took me such a long time. You need someone to talk to';
    - planning outdoor teaching, for example, 'someone who could assist and support with doing risk assessments, etc. so that there are no issues there when we do it';
    - identifying local opportunities, for example, 'having someone who could come in and discuss possibilities on your site and other local green space areas'; and
    - managing outdoor learning, for example, 'tips and suggestions on taking groups out, for example, small groups better than whole class'.

The key idea here was the importance of having support that was both **focused** ('tackling those local and apparently trivial but tricky issues') and **interactive** ('need to be able to pick up the phone to someone when you have a problem/question').

- **Assistance with local networking.** The onus here was very much on Natural Connections representatives being able to help schools to forge links with:
    - nearby schools – 'If I knew a school that was really good at doing a certain type of outdoor learning then I'd love to be able to send some teachers, students and TAs to look at it and report back' (special school); and
    - local volunteers – 'support with tapping into the voluntary sector would be good' (secondary school); and, 'being able to link in with networks of allotment holders so

that they can work with you or helping schools to link with local Volunteers Bureau' (primary school).

In relation to linking with local volunteers, there were strong calls for voluntary help in a range of support roles, from planning and delivering activities to doing research about local spaces and fundraising.

## Online database and resource bank

A second clear message emerging from the participants in this study was the proposal that Natural Connections should develop some kind of online facility for schools. Suggestions related to this support centred on providing: a database of local venues, a bank of resources and discussion forums.

- **Database of outdoor learning venues -** staff in a range of schools expressed the desire for an easy to use database of outdoor learning venues. This suggestion came in response to existing difficulties with accessing information: 'So often you call up a place and they don't take school children in large numbers' (secondary school) and 'I'd like to know about facilities in the north of the city which is further away from us and we don't know about' (special school). A lack of local knowledge was a particular difficulty for teachers who commuted some way to their school or who were new to an area. In view of these issues, teachers wanted a database that was both *comprehensive* (full details of facilities, costs, contacts, testimonials, virtual tours, video clips, curriculum links, etc.) and *searchable* (by curriculum subject, activity type, location, venue type, etc.). This need was articulated in the following kinds of way:
    - 'A national database of outdoor learning for schools and youth clubs – what's out there, contact people, facilities (especially for special educational needs), costs; searchable by area and cross-check it for particular types of activities or curriculum subjects.' (Special school);
    - 'Information about some local centres to visit, for example, type in 'outdoor learning in Design and Technology' and find that you can do this at this place here that is open to schools working with them in these ways.' (Secondary school); and
    - 'Online portal of some kind so we could tap in either a subject area, for example, 'Maths key stage 3', a type of experience, for example, 'team building', or a type of venue and you can look at a glance at relevant possibilities with virtual tours, testimonials, video of things going on, links to NC and GCSEs and example lesson plans.' (Special school).

There was a strong emphasis on how such a database would help schools to make more of their local area: 'to know about accessing local spaces', 'to tap into local strengths, local positives and raise profile of what exists already' and 'to use local spaces that offer hope due to low or no costs'.

- **A bank of resources and equipment -** interviewees also felt that this kind of an online facility could serve another important function – providing schools with a bank of relevant resources and equipment linked to outdoor learning. This provision was envisaged as:
    - 'A handbook of activities, lesson ideas linked to the curriculum and learning objectives for schools to pick, take and add.' (Primary school);
    - 'A bank of resources and equipment like wet-weather gear and risk assessments.' (Primary school); and

- 'A pool of equipment, paper-based resources, links to useful websites and hire organisations, to make it easier for schools that don't have resources or equipment.' (Secondary school).
- **Discussion forums -** a few interviewees added the idea of including discussion forums and other interactive features. Suggestions here included: 'an online forum for sharing, rating and reviewing providers' (primary school), 'discussion boards/forums, FAQs, email questions, etc.' (secondary school) and 'opportunities to arrange shared trips [such as] pairing rural and urban schools' (primary school). These kinds of applications were seen by one respondent as 'helpful for teachers as their time is so squeezed'.

## Collaborative projects between schools

The potential for Natural Connections to foster partnership working between schools was a strong theme in the interviews with two main suggestions as to how this process might develop:

- **Sharing of expertise and resources between schools -** there were strong calls for Natural Connections to enable:
    - linking different types of schools – 'linking experienced schools with less experienced schools', 'twinning urban and rural schools';
    - sharing equipment – 'we're got quite a lot of equipment, for example, quadrats/nets etc. and we don't use them much so we'd be willing to loan them out to other schools';
    - sharing ideas and resources – 'sharing good practice and materials, i.e. what is happening in other schools/areas'; and
    - swapping advice and support – 'helping schools talk to each other about who is doing what, what works, selling advice/support to each other'.
- **Collaborative action research and development projects.** Drawing on previous positive experiences of such projects, there were requests for schools to be helped to work together on:
    - curriculum research – 'Give support/funding to enthusiastic teachers to be part of it and set it up as a trial research project, make it longitudinal enough so you can actually measure progress, and run it properly as a curriculum research project.' (Special school);
    - resource development – 'Connect say three schools that are near each other for ease of travel and with similar needs/issues would be helpful but not essential. If three schools each developed a piece of work as part of the collaboration then you've got three resources that you and others could use.' (Primary school); and
    - practice development – 'Funded release time and a steer to enable staff from special schools and mainstream schools to come up with ways of assessing outdoor learning. So some time to work on these kinds of issues as teachers with other teachers.' (Special school).

## Human and financial resources

Finally, there were pleas from some interviewees for Natural Connections not to overlook the resource implications of outdoor learning. In particular, interviewees flagged up the importance of **human resources** in terms of volunteer helpers in a diversity of support roles (gardeners, fundraisers, trip organisers and so on). The need for **financial resources** was also underlined in relation to capital projects and equipment ('we need funding for capital projects and maintenance') and for transport costs where relevant.

# 3.2 Views on who should be involved with Natural Connections

This study was keen to explore interviewees' views as to which types of schools and teachers should be the focus of the Natural Connections initiative. Once again, there seemed to be a strong degree of consensus across the 38 staff in this study as to who the initiative should seek to involve. The main messages, as summarised in Figure 3.2:

- Include all types of schools but tailor to each;
- Target enthusiasts and senior staff; and
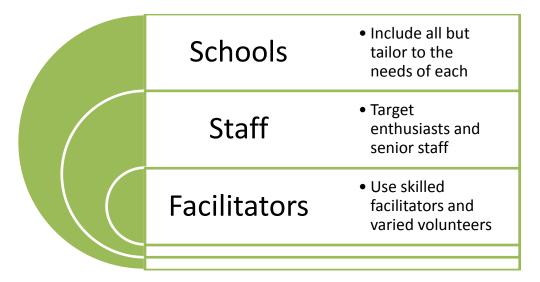- Use skilled facilitators and varied volunteers.



**Schools** • Include all but tailor to the needs of each

**Staff** • Target enthusiasts and senior staff

**Facilitators** • Use skilled facilitators and varied volunteers

**Figure 3.2** Interviewees' views on who should be involved with Natural Connections

## Involve all types of schools but tailor to the needs of each school

Interviewees could not have been clearer about **the need for Natural Connections to have an inclusive (as opposed to targeted) approach to schools.** Time and again, similar responses were heard: 'make it available to all schools', 'target everybody', 'it needs to be across the board', 'every school – all ages and beyond', 'all schools', 'everyone'. This pattern seemed to reflect a belief in the importance of 'starting early' and working right across the age range and/or a general opposition to the targeting or exclusion of particular types of schools for initiatives. Having said that, there were a couple of interviewees who suggested that a degree of targeting might be appropriate: 'try all schools but perhaps urban schools are most in need?', 'everyone – especially those in areas of disadvantage'.

It is important to note that several interviewees also emphasised how **including all schools did not mean doing the same thing with every school.** The need for Natural Connections to 'tailor its approach to schools' depending on their particular needs, interests and specialisms was another important message. This observation echoes many of the findings reported in Section 2 concerning the variability of teachers' understandings of the term 'outdoor learning in natural environments', the specificity of the factors that can enable and constrain outdoor learning across schools and the ways in which specific benefits of outdoor learning had more or less significance for different kinds of teachers and schools. It also links with the point made earlier about Natural Connections needing to provide support that is both focused and interactive and so capable of responding to local needs.

## Focus on enthusiasts and senior staff

Interviewees had a range of suggestions as to who might be targeted within schools and responses varied considerably between primary, secondary and special school settings. **The common message, however, was to focus on enthusiasts while not forgetting to use senior leaders both to identify these people and to get their backing.** More specifically:

- there will be different types of enthusiasts across different types of schools (Figure 3.3);
- in primary schools it is important to think in terms of community players (governors, parents, volunteers) as well as school staff;
- in secondary schools it is important to think in terms of vocational and academic, extra-curricular and curricular, and early career and middle leaders;
- in special schools it is important to think in terms of enhancing the creativity of all staff; and
- in all schools it is important to think about the possibility of working with trainee teachers.

| *Primary schools* | *Secondary schools* |
|---|---|
| √ PE coordinators<br>√ Science coordinators<br>√ Eco committee coordinators<br>√ Foundation stage teachers<br>√ Governors<br>√ Parents, grandparents | √ Early career and newly qualified teachers<br>√ Department heads, for example, Geography, History, Science, Catering<br>√ Vocational education coordinators<br>√ Inclusion managers<br>√ Extended Schools coordinators<br>√ Advance Skills Teachers, for example, Science, Geography<br>√ PE teachers and Duke of Edinburgh leaders |
| *Special schools* | *Other* |
| √ Important for all teaching staff | √ Trainee teachers |

**Figure 3.3** Possible enthusiasts in different types of schools

### Use skilled facilitators and varied volunteers

Four primary school interviewees offered views on who Natural Connections should involve in terms of external facilitators. Drawing on their own experiences of working with different kinds of external helpers in school, they all stressed **the importance of 'getting the right people'.** In two cases, this was characterised in terms of 'having a broad range of skills' or 'being very balanced people with practical skills in working with schools and local environmental knowledge and networks'. For another interviewee, the key was identifying:

- 'People who have real expertise and who listen, not do-gooders who want to do things. People who are happy to let the school work it out for themselves rather than trying to do it all in one go really quickly. A lot of people want to do it themselves and get the glory'.

A primary school head teacher made a similar point when he said: 'Make sure the brokers have high quality facilitation/coaching skills […] Not coming in with a set agenda but with high quality facilitation skills to see potential in schools' projects and make them special'.

Beyond the external facilitators, interviewees in several **schools emphasised the importance of also involving a wide range of volunteers.** As noted earlier, there were strong calls for voluntary help in a variety of support roles, from planning and delivering activities to doing research about local spaces and fundraising.

## 3.3 Views on how Natural Connections should address challenges

Interviewees were also asked to share their ideas about the kinds of challenges that Natural Connections might encounter and how these could be addressed (see Figure 3.4 for detail). The kinds of difficulties that were envisaged centred on:

- promoting the initiative – recruiting schools, getting senior staff support;
- building participation – accessing enthusiasts, getting other staff on board;
- overcoming limitations – time-scale issues, costs issues; and
- managing its development – effective coordination and making it sustainable.

| Recruiting schools | Getting senior staff support |
|---|---|
| √ Present the project to schools in person<br>√ Use networks, for example, primary heads associations<br>√ Recognise schools' unique context/ combination of grounds and spaces<br>√ Ensure clear focus on curriculum<br>√ Use schools to influence others, for example, clusters | √ Stress links to tangible student outcomes<br>√ Focus on enhancing learning capacity<br>√ Evaluate impacts and value for money<br>√ Highlight official endorsements<br>√ Make link to head teachers' priorities |
| Accessing enthusiasts | Getting other staff on board |
| √ Identify the right people via heads? (see Section 3.2)<br>√ Use social media networks for example, #ukedchat<br>√ Start small and then scale-up | √ Stress easing not adding to teaching burden<br>√ Challenge the idea that 'outside = not learning'<br>√ Target whole staff events<br>√ Stress links to tangible student outcomes |
| Time-scale issues | Cost issues |
| √ Have realistic expectations of pace of change<br>√ Have realistic time targets for outdoor learning<br>√ Have realistic lead-in periods for planning | √ Ensure minimal costs to schools<br>√ Enable funding for capital projects for example, through better access to funds available<br>√ Enable local access to local amenities |
| Effective coordination | Making it sustainable |
| √ Develop a well-coordinated regional/local approach<br>√ Make all support easy to access online<br>√ Involve school and outdoor professionals<br>√ Use skilled facilitators (see Section 3.2) | √ Provide training in evaluating outdoor learning<br>√ Have designated champions/coordinators<br>√ Plan over 7 years, i.e. cycle of a cohort<br>√ Think about embedding from the outset |

**Figure 3.4** Interviewees' views on solutions to possible challenges

## 3.4 Views on previous developments that could inform Natural Connections

During the interviews, a small number of the teachers/school leaders made references to existing schemes or developments that could inform Natural Connections. These included:

- national schemes such as *School Sports Partnerships* and *School Sports Co-ordinators* which 'were successful because they had allocated time to make sure things happened';
- curriculum/teacher development initiatives such as the *Children Challenging Industry Project* which reportedly 'employed passionate, well equipped and extremely knowledgeable trainers to come in and deliver something that we can now replicate';
- teacher research projects such as the *Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project* and the *Coventry Anti-Bullying Development and Research Project* because they encouraged teachers to evaluate their practice and to share ideas between schools;
- resource hubs such as **http://www.teachshare.org.uk/** which provides 'free online links to information about developing sustainability in schools and local authorities'; and

- outdoor learning initiatives such as Forest Schools/Forest Education Initiative which had been influential for several of the primary schools in this study.

All of these suggestions are based on the personal experiences of the individuals concerned but the reasons that teachers gave for flagging them up may well be instructive. That is, they provide further support for several ideas that have already been mentioned, such as the need for dedicated coordinators and skilled facilitators, the importance of helping teachers to evaluate and share their practice and the value of resources being easily accessible online.

## 3.5   Summary

### Views on what should be the main focus of Natural Connections

Without specific prompting, the interviewees in this study had clear and reasonably consistent ideas about the Natural Connection initiative. In summary, they wanted a service that would provide a mixture of:

- face-to-face training and support;
- an online database and resource bank;
- collaborative projects between schools; and
- additional human and financial resources.

### Views on who should be involved with Natural Connections

In terms of which schools and teachers Natural Connections should work with, there were clear calls for the Demonstration Project to:

- target all schools but tailor its approach to individual contexts;
- focus on enthusiastic staff but ensure senior buy-in; and
- engage skilled but sensitive facilitators and volunteers in a range of roles.

### Views on how Natural Connections should address challenges

The interviewees' in this study emphasised the need to plan carefully for possible challenges associated with:

- promoting the initiative – recruiting schools, getting senior staff support;
- building participation – accessing enthusiasts, getting other staff on board, networking;
- overcoming limitations – time-scale issues, costs issues; and
- managing its development – effective coordination and making it sustainable.

### Views on previous developments that could inform Natural Connections

Some interviewees felt that lessons might be learnt from previous national developments, curriculum development initiatives, teacher research projects, resource hubs and forest school programmes. Features that particularly appealed were the use of dedicated coordinators and skilled facilitators, the focus on helping teachers to evaluate and share their practice and the provision of easily accessible resources online.

# 4. Recommendations

This final section draws together the key findings into a series of recommendations for consideration during the planning of the Natural Connections Demonstration Project.

**Facilitate collaboration and learning between schools by ensuring the selection of schools reflects a range of levels of outdoor learning activity and is focused in terms of geographical location/s.**

There is an opportunity to work with all types of school in the Demonstration, regardless of location, catchment, current level of activity etc.

There is also a clear desire for schools to learn with and from other schools that are already providing outdoor learning, ideally those within the locality.

It is therefore recommended that any rationale for selecting portfolio/s of schools for the Demonstration Project should be focused in terms of geographical location/s and should aim to include schools with a range of different levels of outdoor learning, in order to optimise the potential for development across the group of schools,

This study found that communication with individual schools was the only reliable way to assess levels of outdoor learning. Publically available information sources – such as school websites, Ofsted reports, newsletters – were neither helpful nor reliable indications of what schools were doing in terms of outdoor learning. Hence sufficient time will need to be allocated to the planning and delivery of school recruitment and selection to ensure that this delivers an appropriate mix of schools.

**Focus on testing the opportunity to facilitate outdoor learning within school grounds and in other local green spaces (rather than in more distant green spaces).**

Distant sites such as outdoor activity centres were being used by most schools in this study to support outdoor learning. In sharp contrast, use of local green spaces just beyond the school boundaries for outdoor learning activities were very limited – often exacerbated by a lack of awareness about the spaces available and a need for ideas about how to use them. Likewise some provision within school grounds was present in most schools, but there was enthusiasm for developing this further in all schools.

Hence it is recommended that Natural Connections should focus on testing the opportunity to facilitate the use of very local green spaces either within school grounds or within easy local reach.

**Adopt a truly unique, tailored approach with each school**

The need for Natural Connections to 'tailor its approach to schools' depending on their particular needs, interests and specialisms was an important finding of this study. It was reflected in the fact that while teachers wanted the Demonstration Project to be inclusive of all types of schools, they also stressed that this did not mean doing the same thing with every school. Interviewees were clear that Natural Connections will need to provide support that is both focused and interactive and so capable of responding to local needs.

Furthermore, on the question of enablers and constraints to outdoor learning, school staff flagged up the significance of various local-level issues. These included: leadership, culture and commitment; availability of suitable outdoor spaces; human resources and funding; expertise and inspiration from others; student need and student enjoyment; staff confidence and enthusiasm; and timing and competing pressures.

All interviewees expressed an opinion that staff and students in their school would be keen to do more outdoor learning. The motivations for making this happen, though, were different for different schools. While 'improved motivation, behaviour and self-confidence' was attractive in most schools, 'vocational learning' was more appealing to secondary schools and 'teacher development' was particularly relevant to special schools. These findings further underline the need for a tailored approach with each individual school.

## Must do elements for the Natural Connections Demonstration Project

Without specific prompting, the interviewees in this study had clear and reasonably consistent ideas about what Natural Connection should do. In summary, they wanted a service that would provide a mixture of:

- **skilled face-to-face support in schools -** to help them find expertise, inspiration, ideas, to provide INSET training, and to assist local networking etc.
- **a simple online database/resource bank -** to help them find information on local spaces and resources etc.
- **ways to facilitate more collaborative projects between schools -** to share resources and to develop research and practice.
- **additional resources** - **both human and financial -** to enable local action, for example by bringing in volunteers skilled in supporting across a range of school-based roles including outdoor learning, fundraising, gardening and building works etc. (There was little or no indication that schools were aware of or using any of the support or resources already available from outdoor learning providers).

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# School Leader and Teacher Insight into Learning Outside the Classroom in Natural Environments – A Study to Inform an East London Outdoor Learning Project

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# Contents

# Acknowledgements

# Executive Summary

*This document reports on a study of 20 teachers and school leaders in the four East London boroughs adjacent to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. It focuses on their views about outdoor learning provision within their schools, and their ideas about a possible East London Outdoor Learning Project. It is a follow-up to a similar study of teachers nationally.*

## Main Findings

### Views on the Current Status of Outdoor Learning

- **Clear differences were evident between East London schools in terms of their current levels of outdoor learning.** Despite fairly similar catchment areas and age ranges, some schools had very little happening while others had well-established, varied activities.
- **Use of different types of outdoor settings was distinctive relative to national trends –** East London schools were less likely to be using their grounds (due to lack of space) but more likely to be using local green spaces (due to free public transport).
- **Enablers and constraints were similar to the national study, but several played out distinctively in the East London context.** For example, 'expertise and inspiration from others' was particularly important due to high staff turnover and 'student need and enjoyment' was about providing for children who have limited experience of any outdoor spaces.

### Views on the Future Development of Outdoor Learning

- **All interviewees felt that staff and students in their school would be keen to engage in more outdoor learning, and would be willing to use their pupil premium to support this.**
- **Interviewees felt that their schools would be motivated most strongly by benefits relating to curriculum development and personal, social and health education.** Compared with the wider national study, there was less interest in vocational learning and skill development reflecting the predominance of primary school interviewees.

### Views on an East London Outdoor Learning Project

Interviewees want an East London Outdoor Learning Project that will:

- **provide face-to-face support and advice to individual schools,** along with some web-based resources, collaborative projects and human/financial resources;
- **involve all schools, but focus particularly on enthusiastic staff** and use facilitators and volunteers with an understanding of the challenges in East London; and
- **use a range of different approaches to getting schools on board** and learn from previous initiatives.

# Recommendations for an East London Outdoor Learning Project

Those involved in making plans for the development of an East London Outdoor Learning Project should:

- **Be encouraged by the enthusiasm expressed by all of the teachers and school leaders in this study in relation to the idea of developing outdoor learning.** This interest came from schools which were doing very little outdoor learning as well as ones where provision was well-established. The one important qualifier is that this study consulted mainly primary schools and so cannot be seen as representative of secondary and special schools.
- **Take note of the fact that the status and extent of outdoor learning can vary markedly between individual schools within East London.** This variability within a sample of schools with fairly similar age ranges and catchment areas underlines the need for any future support to take a case-by-case approach. What is needed is a fine-grained, localised appreciation of what is and what is not going on in individual school contexts.
- **Recognise and build upon the pockets of interesting practice that currently exist within East London schools.** These pockets include schools with already well-established provision (which could be used as examples to inspire and support others) and schools that are making some use of local green spaces (which could be extended and strengthened).
- **Respond to the strong call from school leaders and teachers in this study for face-to-face advice and training focused on their specific school context.** Time and again the request was for someone with relevant expertise and an appreciation of local challenges to come and work with staff and advise on what could be achieved within and beyond their school.
- **Pay careful attention to the distinctive mix of challenges and opportunities facing schools, teachers and learners in East London.** There are, of course, significant challenges stemming from the realities of social deprivation, language difficulties, staff turnover, limited school grounds and so on. Alongside these, though, are some important opportunities such as subsidised public transport, access to varied community spaces and an enthusiasm in some schools for imaginative approaches to overcoming barriers to learning.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The 2011 Environment White Paper, *The Natural Choice: Securing the value of nature*, set out the need to address the disconnection of children from the natural environment (DEFRA, 2011). One of the key reforms it outlined was the need to remove barriers for teachers to learning outside the classroom, and one of the specific commitments it made was support for a new initiative called **Natural Connections.** Natural England, working with The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, led a wide coalition of partners in shaping an evidence-led proposal for Natural Connections, which aims 'to reconnect children with their local natural environments by stimulating both the demand for and the supply of services to support learning outside the classroom in natural environments' (Natural England, 2012, p. 3). A three year Demonstration Project (2012-2015) will test the effectiveness of a new delivery model in achieving the above aim, with particular focus on supporting schools in areas of multiple deprivation that are currently providing little or no learning outside the classroom in natural environments.

A synthesis of evidence (Dillon and Dickie, 2012) suggested that the natural environment sector has insufficient knowledge of schools that are not heavily engaged with learning outside the classroom. So to support the planning of the Natural Connections Demonstration Project, Natural England commissioned a study to look into the needs of schools nationally with varying levels of learning outside the classroom in natural environments particularly those with little or no current provision (Rickinson *et al.*, 2012.) The aim of this national **Natural Connections Teacher Insight** study was to find out more about different teachers' needs and concerns in relation to outdoor learning and how a new delivery model based on a local face-to-face brokerage service might be able to help them.

The Natural Connections Demonstration Project will need to draw conclusions about future replication and transferability, so geographical areas felt to be highly atypical are likely to be avoided in the Demonstration Project itself. **East London** is considered an atypical area for several reasons including its extremely high levels of deprivation, very high population density, and population profile that is relatively young and transient compared to other areas of London. This movement in the population is reflected in rates of school student and teacher turnover. East London also has a relative lack of green space compared to other areas of London and is also experiencing considerable change as a result of the London Strategic Regeneration Framework and the London 2012 Olympic games.

Hence the present **East London Teacher Insight** study was commissioned to complement the earlier national study by exploring similar issues with schools in the four East London boroughs immediately surrounding the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The purpose was to add insights to the wider Natural Connections initiative and to inform a future outdoor learning project in East London. This research was undertaken by a team of three independent consultants working under the aegis of King's College London between January and May 2012. In both the East London study and the national study, the term outdoor learning was used as a short-hand for learning outside the classroom in natural environments (see Box 1.1).

## 1.2  Aims

This research sought to examine the needs of staff in schools within the four East London boroughs adjacent to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Waltham Forest). It was expected that this study would involve schools with varying levels of outdoor learning including ones with little or no current provision. More specifically, the study aimed to provide up-to-date research-based insights into:

1) *Views on the current status of outdoor learning* – teachers' descriptions of their schools' current outdoor learning provision and the factors that enable and constrain it;
2) *Views on the future development of outdoor learning* – teachers' interest in the idea of developing more outdoor learning and what would encourage them to do that; and
3) *Views on an East London Outdoor Learning Project* – teachers' ideas about how such a project could support schools, who should be involved and what difficulties there might be.

## 1.3  Methods

The findings presented in this report are based on qualitative data generated through two main data collection processes.

1) **Documentary analysis –** Analysis of: (i) relevant school documentation (for example, school websites, Ofsted reports, etc.) as part of sampling and interviewing; and (ii) relevant policy and research publications as part of the background context. These data were important both to understand the characteristics of the schools that took part in the study and to become familiar with relevant policy and evidence debates.
2) **Staff telephone interviews –** Individual semi-structured telephone interviews were undertaken with 20 teachers and school leaders in different schools within the four

East London boroughs adjacent to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Waltham Forest). More details about the nature and selection of these schools and interviewees are provided below. The purpose of the interviews was to enable school staff to speak frankly about the issues listed above under 'Aims'.

The selection process was driven by a desire to achieve **a sample of 20 staff in different types of schools** (Primary/Secondary/Special) within the **four East London boroughs adjacent to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.** The characteristics of the achieved sample of 20 teachers and school leaders (Figure 1.1) shows that while the geographical coverage is good for all the boroughs apart from Hackney, the range of school types is predominantly from the primary sector. This observation is important to bear in mind when considering the findings of this study in later sections. The views expressed are generally those of primary school staff and should not be seen as representative of those working in secondary or special schools within the same boroughs.

The sampling process was also driven by a desire to consult with staff in **schools with varying levels of outdoor learning, including those with little or no current provision.** While this aim was achieved, as shown in Figure 1.1, it is important to acknowledge that half of the interviewees were in schools that already had fairly well-established outdoor learning. One reason for this outcome was that, as experienced in the wider national study, there is no easy way to pre-select schools on the basis of their levels of outdoor learning. Publically available information sources (school websites, Ofsted reports, newsletters, etc.) are neither helpful nor reliable indications of what schools were doing in terms of outdoor learning. It was therefore not possible at the sampling stage to confidently identify schools that had little or no current provision (and the achieved sample consequently included schools with varying levels of outdoor learning).

It should also be noted that the process of contacting schools to arrange interviews was neither easy nor straightforward. In many cases, repeated email and telephone communications failed to generate responses from schools and relevant local agencies within the boroughs were also difficult to access. Such difficulties with engaging schools (of all types but particularly secondary and special schools) may well be an important factor to bear in mind for any future outdoor learning project in East London.

## 1.4   Report structure

The rest of the report is in four sections. Section 2 considers interviewees' views on current outdoor learning in terms of what their schools are doing and what enables and constrains that provision. Section 3 looks at possibilities for future development in terms of interviewees' ideas about developing more outdoor learning and the kinds of benefits that would be most appealing to staff and students. Section 4 then examines the interviewees' ideas about an East London Outdoor Learning Project, in particular what it should do, who it should involve, and how it should overcome challenges. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for an East London Outdoor Learning Project (Section 5).

**School Type**

- All through schools — 1
- Special schools — 2
- Secondary schools — 2
- Primary schools — 15

**Interviewee Role**

- Teaching staff — 3
- Middle leader — 1
- Senior leader — 16

**School Location**

- Hackney — 2
- Newham — 5
- Tower Hamlets — 5
- Waltham Forest — 8

**Current Outdoor Learning Provision Across Three Contexts**
**(school grounds, local green spaces and more distant green spaces)**

- Very limited in all three contexts — 3
- Developing in one context — 5
- Well-developed in one context — 2
- Well-developed in two or more contexts — 10

N.B.: More details about the nature of the outdoor learning activities happening across the schools are given in Section 2.1.
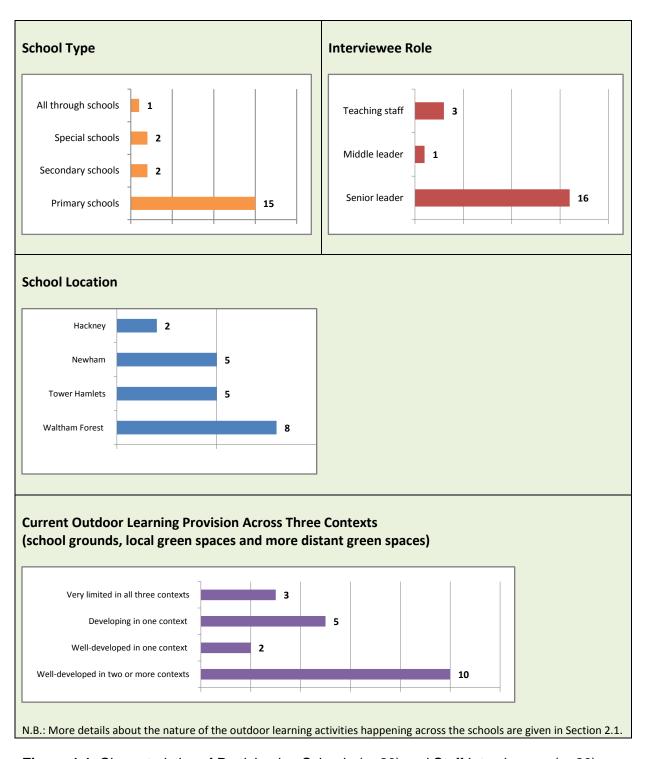
**Figure 1.1** Characteristics of Participating Schools (n=20) and Staff Interviewees (n=20)

# 2. Views on the Current Status of Outdoor Learning

This section examines what the interviewees had to say about their school's current outdoor learning provision. It outlines the nature and scope of outdoor learning activities happening across the schools, and the factors that interviewees felt enabled and constrained these activities within their specific settings.

## 2.1 Views on current outdoor learning activities

The teachers and school leaders who took part in this study were asked to describe the outdoor learning activities happening at their schools. Their responses help to highlight two important points about current outdoor learning in these East London schools.

**First, the provision of outdoor learning varies considerably between these East London schools.** Looking at the extent of activities in three different settings (school grounds, local green spaces and more distant settings), there were some schools that had very little happening in any of these contexts, others where activities were well established in two or more of the contexts and several schools that were somewhere in between these two extremes. More details are provided in Figure 2.1, but the underlying point is that within a sample of 20 East London schools with fairly similar age ranges (i.e. almost all primary) and catchment areas (i.e. all inner London boroughs), there was considerable variation in the status, scope and extent of outdoor learning. This finding underlines the unhelpfulness of broad generalisations about the likely extent of outdoor learning in particular geographical areas or school types. As other studies have shown (for example, Dillon and Dickie, 2012), what is needed is a much more fine-grained, localised appreciation of what is and what is not going on in individual school contexts. This observation is as important for an outdoor learning project in East London as it is for the Natural Connections Demonstration Project nationally.

**Secondly, there are distinctive differences in the extent to which different outdoor learning contexts are being used by East London schools.** The broad patterns can be summed up as very variable use of school grounds (i.e. either well-developed or completely undeveloped), and fairly widespread use of both local green spaces and more distant outdoor settings (see Figure 2.2). In comparison with trends seen in the previous study of schools nationally, the East London schools in this study appear to be less likely to be using their school grounds (due to some schools having little or no outdoor space) but more likely to be using their local green spaces (due to easier access with free public transport). This finding flags up once again the distinctiveness of the challenges and opportunities that any future East London Outdoor Learning Project would need to consider. It also emphasises the very local nature of the factors that can enable and constrain outdoor learning in schools – a point that will become clearer in the next section.

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Well-developed outdoor learning in two or more contexts*** <br> 10 schools (9 primary, 1 secondary) | • Almost all examples were primary schools that were making regular use of their own school site and local green spaces and/or (slightly less frequently) residential visits to more distant settings. <br> • There was one secondary school that had well-established outdoor provision for curricular and extra-curricular purposes. <br> • For some of the schools in this category, it was clear that teaching outdoors was central to their ethos and vision. |
| ***Well-developed outdoor learning in one context*** <br> 2 schools (1 primary, 1 special) | • Both examples came from schools that had well-established activities within their grounds. <br> • The focus was on either supporting learning in Foundation/key stage 1 (primary) or meeting the needs of children who struggle within the classroom (special). |
| ***Developing outdoor learning in one context*** <br> 5 schools (4 primary, 1 all through) | • The examples here were of two main types. One type was primary schools on a new or newly-developed site which were in the process of developing those grounds for learning and teaching. <br> • The other type was primary or all through schools that were introducing residential trips to more distant outdoor locations. |
| ***Very limited outdoor learning in all three contexts*** <br> 3 schools (1 primary, 1 secondary, 1 special) | • The examples included: a primary school that had no opportunities for outdoor learning on site and no impetus to initiate any activities off-site; a secondary school that had no outdoor learning provision beyond sport and physical education; and a special school that had no current provision due to recently moving to a new site. |

**Figure 2.1** The extent of outdoor learning across the schools

| *Within school grounds* | *In local green spaces* |
|---|---|
| **Activities in the grounds were well-developed in some schools, but undeveloped in others.** | **Use of local green spaces was fairly common in many of the schools.** |
| • Primary and special schools that were using their grounds cited outdoor growing activities, curriculum work, growing areas, sensory gardens, play facilities and free-flow arrangements. <br> • Across all schools including secondary that were not using their grounds, the main reported barrier seemed to be space: either a lack of green space within the grounds or a shortage of un-used outdoor space altogether. | • Primary, special and secondary school examples included: sports days and PE lessons in local parks, walks to local canals and woodland, visits to museums, trips to nearby outdoor activity centres. <br> • The main enabler seemed to be the availability of free public transport which made accessing local venues convenient and affordable. <br> • However, a definite barrier for some schools was a lack of suitable local spaces due to concern about dog mess, strangers or the fact that areas intensely managed for activities such as football offered restricted outdoor learning opportunities. |
| *More distant spaces* | *National schemes* |
| **Day-trips and residential trips to more distant spaces were fairly common across schools.** | **There was fairly limited involvement with national schemes relating to outdoor learning.** |
| • Primary, special and secondary school examples included: day trips to organised outdoor learning events, and annual residential trips to various Local Authority/outdoor education centres. | • Interviewees made very few references to national schemes/organisations relating to outdoor learning. <br> • The exceptions were: Open Futures and Forest Schools (staff training) and Countryside Live (off-site events). |

**Figure 2.2** The extent of outdoor learning across different contexts

## 2.2 Views on factors that enable and constrain outdoor learning

Running through the interviewees' comments about their school's current outdoor learning were a mix of positive enablers and a negative barriers. The specific combination of positive and negative influences differed between the schools but, as in the wider national study, there were a number of themes that cut across all of the settings. At a broad level these align well with the seven themes identified in the national study (see the sub-headings within this section), although the way in which some influences play out within the East London context is distinctive. For example:

- gaining 'expertise and inspiration from others' was particularly pertinent because of the high staff turnover and some city teachers' lack of familiarity with nature;
- having 'access to local green spaces' was even more important because of the lack of green space within the grounds of many East London schools;
- ensuring 'supporting resources' to cover transport costs was made easier by schools in London being able to access free public transport; and
- responding to 'student need and enjoyment' was not only about children who struggle in the classroom but also children who have limited experience of any outdoor spaces.

### School leadership, culture and commitment

Echoing teachers nationally, several interviewees in East London schools with well-developed outdoor learning provision cited senior staff support as a critical enabler. There were comments about how 'the head supports this even if it's not in the curriculum' or 'the governors are committed to improving the outside environment as part of the school improvement plan'. Such support had been influential in making improvements in the grounds, giving certain staff responsibilities relating to outdoor learning, and/or creating a general enthusiasm for teaching outdoors. Alongside leadership, some interviewees also flagged up the need for outdoor learning 'to become a habit that is embedded within the school'. For example, not just undertaking trips but 'timetabling them in and making them an expectation', and not just making changes in the grounds but 'having a grounds development group' to maintain and continue the process.

### Expertise and inspiration from others

As in the wider national survey, teachers and school leaders in this study emphasised how developing outdoor learning can often require input and ideas from people beyond the school. For one primary school, involvement with an external curriculum development initiative called Open Futures had 'been great to build confidence and develop efficient and dedicated staff'. Several head teacher interviewees placed a similar onus on having 'experts in to inspire staff with ideas of what to do' and 'help us develop the skills to do more of this ourselves'. For some, external support was particularly important in an area such as East London because of its urban setting ('We're urbanites, so we need ideas for structured approaches, both formally and for natural play') and its staffing challenges ('We've had 8 out of 23 teachers leave since the start of this school year').

## Access to local green spaces

As noted in section 2.1, use of local green spaces was not uncommon amongst the schools in this study. In contrast to trends seen in the previous national study, the East London schools were more likely to be using their local green spaces but less likely to be using their school grounds. The main reasons for this state of affairs were all connected with access to green spaces. On the one hand, several schools had little or no outdoor green space on their own site and so learning opportunities were severely restricted. On the other hand, many school had nearby open spaces and venues that were accessible using free public transport and so fairly easy to use. It is important to stress, however, that for some schools lack of access to *suitable* green spaces locally was a significant constraint. The key issues were: 'problems with dog mess and security and staffing', 'having to clear litter away before we can play', 'infant school children not [being] able to walk any great distance locally' and '[outdoor spaces being] just a large area of mown grass, there is no diversity of habitat so it's very limited what we can do'.

## Supporting resources

As in the wider study, many interviewees highlighted the role that additional human and financial resources can play in developing outdoor learning activities. The importance of having 'enough adults' was a common theme and this issue had been addressed by parents assisting in various roles ('running clubs, helping to create growing spaces, sharing expertise and raising funds') and/or support staff (such as teaching assistants, learning mentors and in one case Graduate Teacher Programme participants). Adequate financing was another important enabler that needed to be in place in terms of accessing off-site venues ('facilities in some boroughs charge for schools outside their area so you can get charged even though you're not that far away'), maintaining on-site facilities ('You need action plans to look at costings of, say, looking after the animals') and purchasing equipment ('Getting resources like wellies'). As mentioned above, the fact that schools can access free public transport within London has been an important enabler of off-site outdoor learning amongst the schools in this study.

## Student need and student enjoyment

As with teachers in the wider national study, one of the appealing features of outdoor learning for staff in East London was its ability to meet their students' needs. One head teacher talked about how 'our approach is driven by pedagogy and understanding – learning everywhere, rich experiences – it's experiential education and it's responding to the needs of our pupils, 80% of whom have English as an Additional Language'. Others stressed the importance of simply taking children out into community spaces: 'For our kids getting on an escalator is a new experience; the parents offer no support in getting their children out so this is really important'. Along similar lines, one head teacher explained that 'Lots of our children live in flats so even getting dirty is a huge thing'. Some staff also saw outdoor learning as helping children from diverse cultural backgrounds 'to understand issues of litter and pollution' and 'to get to know local plants and flowers'. One special school teacher, working with 'all sorts of kids who struggle in the classroom environment', emphasised how well such students respond to 'learning outside and using animals'.

## Staff confidence and enthusiasm

The need to increase staff confidence in relation to teaching outdoors was an important theme for many of the interviewees in this study and its national level predecessor. This need came in response to: fears about health and safety ('We've been brow-beaten by health and safety so

we need to debunk the myths about risk'), shortcomings in relevant knowledge ('The new generation of teachers do not know their trees and flowers – we need to open their eyes to what's there'), weaknesses in curriculum planning ('We need to develop staff confidence in how to develop programmes of work under the new creative curriculum') and difficulties with staff turnover ('health and safety becomes more of a challenge as teachers don't know the kids).

**Time and priority**

Once again several interviewees mentioned time pressures as a constraint upon outdoor learning. This observation reflected concerns about the time for planning ('It takes time organising outdoor learning, it's harder than teaching in a classroom'), the travel time ('It takes time to move pupils about, so whilst we have permission from parents for local journeys, it just takes time, especially if you're moving a whole year group') and the time within the school day ('We are already doing a lot in lunchtimes and after school, so it's hard to fit more in'). Closely connected with these issues of time, of course, were questions of competing priorities. As one secondary school teacher stated: 'The new emphasis on curriculum and the English Baccalaureate is narrowing opportunities. Ofsted is a big factor, too, as there is a focus on the classroom monitoring which is hard if it's not in a classroom'.

## 2.3   Summary

- Clear differences were evident between schools in terms of the current levels of outdoor learning activities. Despite fairly similar catchment areas and age ranges, some schools had very little happening while others had well-established, varied activities.
- Use of different types of outdoor settings was distinctive relative to national trends – East London schools were less likely to be using their grounds (due to lack of space) but more likely to be using local green spaces (due to free public transport).
- On the question of enablers and constraints, interviewees cited a similar range of influences as teachers in the national study. These include: leadership, culture and commitment; availability of suitable outdoor spaces; human resources and funding; expertise and inspiration from others; student need and student enjoyment; staff confidence and enthusiasm; and timing and competing pressures.

However, some of these influences played out differently in the East London context. For example, 'expertise and inspiration from others' was more important due to high staff turnover and 'student need and enjoyment' was not only about children who struggle in the classroom but also children who have limited experience of any outdoor spaces.

# 3. Views on the Future Development of Outdoor Learning

This section shifts the focus from current provision to future development. It considers how interested these East London schools were in the idea of developing more outdoor learning locally, and which of various potential benefits would appeal most to their staff and students.

## 3.1 Views on the idea of developing outdoor learning

When asked whether staff and students in their schools would like to develop more use of local green space for learning, interviewees' responses were universally positive. An unreserved 'Yes' or 'Yes definitely' was the usual answer in almost all schools. In two cases (both primary school interviewees), a small qualifier was added such as 'Yes, but it takes organising' and, 'Yes, but with reservations as we are already doing so much'. The overall expectation, though, was that staff and students in these East London schools would be keen to do more outdoor learning.

Further support came from responses to a question about whether schools would be willing to use their pupil premium to support the development of outdoor learning. Apart from in one special school where decisions over pupil premium were made at a higher level, there was widespread support for this idea. Interviewees cited the following kinds of reasons:

- 'It is in line what our children need – they live in flats and don't get that experience';
- 'We know it works and raises standards and excites the children';
- 'We plan to use the funding to get security gates so we can use our site more effectively';
- 'It would enable children to access clubs and help fund costly residentials'; and
- 'We already use the pupil premium to fund residential trips, so this would fit well'.

These comments about using the pupil premium give an indication of the kinds of benefits that might be important to schools in making decisions over investing in future outdoor learning. This issue is now explored in more detail below.

## 3.2 Views on the benefits of developing outdoor learning

Interviewees were presented with a list of five outdoor learning benefits (based on a similar but slightly longer list used in the wider national study) and asked to comment on which would be most important for their school. The responses that were received (a selection of which can be seen in Figure 3.1) highlighted the following trends:

- Outcomes to do with **'supporting the curriculum – knowledge and understanding'** were important in all schools, reflecting concerns about making learning real, raising standards through broadening the curriculum and improving children's knowledge of their environment;
- Benefits in the area of **'personal, social and health education'** were also highly valued across schools, reflecting interest in the way that outdoor learning can stimulate children with special educational needs, provide new experiences and raise aspirations for inner-city children, and facilitate secondary school transition for Year 6 students;

- Interest in **'whole school-community links'** was mixed, that is, it was very important for some schools which were looking to engage parents and community groups but far less of a priority for others; and
- **'Vocational learning'** and **'skill development'** were low on the agenda for most schools due, it would seem, to the age-range of their learners, i.e. predominantly primary phase.

Overall, then, teachers and school leaders in East London felt that their schools would be motivated most strongly by benefits relating to curriculum development and personal, social and health education. This finding concurs with broader patterns reported in the wider national study, although there was less interest in vocational learning and skill development amongst the East London interviewees due, it seems, to them being almost all primary school practitioners.

| Supporting the curriculum - knowledge and understanding | Personal, social and health development |
|---|---|
| 'Hands-on experiences are what makes learning real.' | 'Year 6 residential trips help with transition to secondary.' |
| 'I have previously worked in a school in special measures and what enabled us to reach our targets was broadening the curriculum.' | 'It gives children opportunities that they don't get otherwise, for example, the tube, green spaces, museums etc.' |
| 'We have leadership meetings to see how we can enrich the curriculum, lots of the solutions are outside the classroom.' | 'We want to move kids from "I want to work at Asda" to "I want to be an astronaut". Outside trips broaden horizons and raise aspirations.' |
| 'Many children haven't seen a cow – it expands their knowledge' | 'In special education, motivation is key. Outdoor learning brings awe and wonder to those who are often cynical.' |
| **Skill development** | **Vocational learning** |
| 'This is important but it's more limited now we are not a Business and Enterprise College'. | 'Yes, there are not enough vocational courses.' |
| | 'This is the only one that isn't key for us.' |
| **Wider school-community links** | |
| 'This is less important for us.' | |
| 'Personally this is the most important - working with parents, toddlers and babies too. Social schools are central to our ethos and functions.' | |

**Figure 2.3** Interviewees' views on the different benefits of outdoor learning

## 3.3 Summary

- As in the national study, all interviewees expressed an opinion that staff and students in their school would be keen to engage in more outdoor learning. There was also widespread agreement that schools would be willing to use their pupil premium to support this kind of development.
- In terms of making such improvements happen, interviewees felt that their schools would be motivated most strongly by benefits relating to curriculum development and personal, social and health education. Compared with the wider national study, there was less interest in vocational learning and skill development reflecting the predominance of primary school interviewees.

# 4. Views on an East London Outdoor Learning Project

Having considered what interviewees had to say about outdoor learning in the first tow sections, this section now examines their ideas about an East London Outdoor Learning Project. It outlines interviewees' views and suggestions as to what the main focus of such a project should be, who it should seek to involve, and how it should overcome challenges.

## 4.1 Views on what the main focus should be

Interviewees had a number of ideas about what an East London Outdoor Learning Project could do for schools in the area. Their suggestions connect fairly well with the four main priorities highlighted by teachers in the national study:

- face-to-face training and support
- an online database and resource bank;
- collaborative projects between schools; and
- human and financial resources.

However, there were some important differences in emphasis between the East London teachers in this study and teachers nationally. For example, the interviewees in this study placed a far greater emphasis on face-to-face support and were less concerned about an online database. They also wanted more in the way of support and advice about what to do locally or how to develop their grounds but less in terms of staff in-service training. In addition, there was less interest in collaborative projects between schools. There was also one interviewee in this study who questioned the idea of a new initiative focused on outdoor learning: 'Why do we need another service? We don't need something more, we just need time to access all of this'.

### Face-to-face training and support

As in the national study, there was a strong desire for support and advice that was face-to-face and hands-on. There were calls for three kinds of help:

- **Support and advice focused on individual school needs –** This was by far the most frequent suggestion and reflected a desire for tailored advice and guidance on how to develop outdoor learning in individual school contexts. One request was for 'a bespoke service that tells us: "Here's the curriculum topics, here's the places to explore and here's how to enhance your curriculum"'. Others wanted someone 'to come and have a look and then tell us what's available – people, funding and where the suitable outdoor spaces are'. Along similar lines was a request for someone 'to show us what can be done and give us an awareness of the spaces and places we don't know about'. For some, the interest was in advice about 'how to use own space more effectively'.
- **Staff in-service training (INSET) sessions –** In some schools there was also an interest in staff training in order to address problems with confidence, knowledge and skills. To quote one head teacher: 'We have the site, we just need training and confidence, so some initial input to get the staff on board'. For another head teacher, training was about enabling staff to

be able to run the kinds of learning activities that at present are only available externally at specialist centres: 'We use a forest education centre but it's really costly and it would be great to develop these skills in the teachers so we can develop our own activities'. Others talked about training sessions to 'improve subject knowledge, especially amongst new staff'.

- **Educators to undertake outdoor learning –** In one school, the request for support went beyond focused advice or in-service training and was about having 'a ranger to take children out'. Two other schools recognised the spectrum of possible outdoor learning opportunities, calling for both CPD to be able to do more of the basics themselves but also for signposting to the organisations with the expertise and venues needed for more specialised requirements.

## Online database and resource bank

There were far fewer calls for web-based support and resources from the interviewees in this study compared with those nationally. The onus was much more on face-to-face support ('not a website, but a hands-on approach modelling what could be done') and paper-based resources ('a leaflet on what's available locally').

However, there were still some interviewees who talked in terms of 'downloadable resources', 'sharing ideas on a website', 'a forum' and 'examples and types of providers in a menu or catalogue'. It was also clear that many of the information needs articulated by interviewees in this study could be met by some kind of online database facility. For example, information about 'where to go with no walking or tube to find suitable spaces' or 'a list of green spaces that are safe and that have shelter in case it rains, and ideas for what to do in these places'. One teacher talked about how 'resources need to be for activities not just places' which also would be possible via a web-based searchable resource bank.

## Collaborative projects between schools

Compared with the national study, teachers and school leaders in East London were much less likely to mention working with other schools to develop outdoor learning. However, there was some interest. One primary school head teacher saw potential for 'group work with other schools', another felt that 'collaboration is possible' and one special school interviewee was keen 'to link with other EBD [Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties] schools'. There was also a primary school head teacher who stressed that 'where schools are doing things, we should learn from them'. Beyond these cases, though, most other interviewees seemed to want a project that would provide support for individual schools as opposed to groups of schools in collaboration.

## Human and financial resources

Some interviewees touched on the provision of human and financial resources for outdoor learning. As in the national study, there were references to volunteers: 'In my last school we had a walking group of volunteers from the library come in to help us but we haven't got that here yet'; and 'It needs to be a sustainable model – volunteers need to become a weekly member of staff'. As in the national study an awareness of wider volunteering practice appeared to be lacking in most schools, instead schools expressed a reliance on help only from parents. There were also some calls for financial support such as 'funding for a member of staff to have time to work on this'.

## 4.2   Views on who should be involved

Interviewees were asked for their ideas about which types of schools and teachers should be the focus of an outdoor learning project in East London. Once again the views expressed had fairly strong echoes of the main messages in the national study but the suggestions were less specific and detailed. Three main points were communicated:

- **Involve all types of schools but tailor to each –** All interviewees agreed that a future outdoor learning project in East London should be open to all schools. As one teacher argued: 'It should include community schools and special schools and schools with no outdoor learning happening'. Another stressed the importance of 'enabling progression by starting at primary and developing pupil motivation for getting out and exploring/learning outdoors'. Echoing the wider national study, several headteachers interviewed had recently moved their current or previous schools out of Special Measures. In each case they felt that it was taking a broad and creative approach to the curriculum - one including the use of outdoor learning – that had underpinned their success in achieving performance targets. For this reason interviewees were consistent in recommending that schools in Special Measures were not excluded from projects. It was also clear, though, that interviewees wanted support that was bespoke, advice that was specific and resources that were localised. In other words, a project that was tailored to individual school contexts and local opportunities.
- **Target enthusiasts and senior staff –** Exactly as in the national study, interviewees recommended a combined focus on committed enthusiasts ('Go with the ones who are willing and those who have access to resources and grounds') and those in leadership positions ('primary head teachers and secondary heads of department'). Other suggestions included 'using educational visit coordinators' as a way into schools.
- **Use skilled facilitators and varied volunteers –** It was clear from many of the interviewees' comments that project facilitators and volunteers would not only need expertise in outdoor learning but also an appreciation of the challenges facing teachers and learners in East London. As one head teacher described, 'a day in the life of one of our children is wake up/school/Mosque/bed. They often haven't even been on the tube'. One special school interviewee also made the point that to work with their students 'volunteers would need experience of autism, needs, physical needs, etc.'.

## 4.3   Views on the challenges it will face

When asked about the possible difficulties that an East London Outdoor Learning Project might encounter, most interviewees talked about **the challenge of getting schools on board and building momentum.** With similarities to the national study, the suggested ways forward included:

- contacting schools by email as opposed to by telephone;
- writing to identified key members of staff and not just the head teacher;
- attending local network events, for example, head teacher forums and school network meetings;
- using local newsletters, for example, the Hackney Bulletin;
- approaching schools with 'a single A4 sheet detailing opportunities in your area';
- emphasising the wider benefits of outdoor learning;
- promoting links with core/mainstream curriculum subjects; and

- emphasising the word 'free'.

Interviewees also suggested a small number of **previous initiatives** that an East London Outdoor Learning Project might be able to learn from. These included:

- outdoor learning initiatives such as Open Futures and Forest Schools that had reportedly been helpful for increasing staff confidence with teaching outdoors;
- national educational initiatives such as the Targeted Mental Health in Schools Project which had involved specialists providing training for staff in schools;
- international curriculum development initiatives such as the New Zealand PE Curriculum which used a multi-pronged approach to encouraging physical activity in schools; and
- online educational resources such as the Get Set website which was found to have easy-to-use ideas, blogs, competitions and resources.

Finally, interviewees were asked a further question about whether developments associated with London 2012 presented any additional challenges and opportunities for their schools. The comments made in response revealed **decidedly mixed views about the impact of the Olympics on local schools.** On the one hand, there were some schools that were using the event as a stimulus for curriculum projects and/or visits to the site. For example: 'In the summer term we have a creative project on the Olympics, and a couple of the year groups will visit the site' (primary school) and 'Our school is doing lots – cycles to view the site, visits and girls are volunteers at the Olympics' (secondary school). Another primary head teacher felt that 'most schools welcome the Olympics, the Get Set network has ideas for schools and opportunities to work with athletes, etc.'.

On the other hand, however, there were others who saw no real educational benefits to offset other difficulties such as transport. There was also real frustration about schools being sent tickets for events at venues far outside of London. The following quotes are typical:

- We are cut off by the Olympic Route plus it's been really disappointing. We've tried hard but we feel let down. We were offered 6 mountain bike tickets for Essex, but we are next to the Olympic Village!
- We are unlikely to use the Queen Elizabeth Park as it is not easy to access as we are so far north. Meanwhile they have only offered school tours at weekends and for 20 children at a time (which is less than full class but more than half) and we have been offered some tickets, but only to a cycling event out of London!
- We're only three stops on the tube from the Olympic site but I have no idea what the plans are for that site and no idea of what's there already. […] We were sent tickets for a football match in Manchester!

## 4.4  Summary

Interviewees want an East London Outdoor Learning Project that will:

- provide face-to-face support and advice to individual schools, along with some web-based resources, collaborative projects and human/financial resources;
- involve all schools, focus particularly on enthusiastic staff and use facilitators and volunteers with an understanding of the challenges in East London; and

- use a range of different approaches to getting schools on board and learn from previous initiatives.

# 5. Recommendations

This final section draws together the key findings into a series of recommendations for a possible East London Outdoor Learning Project.

Those involved in making plans for the development of an East London Outdoor Learning Project should:

- **Be encouraged by the enthusiasm expressed by all of the teachers and school leaders in this study in relation to the idea of developing outdoor learning.** This interest came from schools which were doing very little outdoor learning as well as ones where provision was well-established. The one important qualifier is that this study consulted mainly primary schools and so cannot be seen as representative of secondary and special schools.
- **Take note of the fact that the status and extent of outdoor learning can vary markedly between individual schools within East London.** This variability within a sample of schools with fairly similar age ranges and catchment areas underlines the need for any future support to take a case-by-case approach. What is needed is a fine-grained, localised appreciation of what is and what is not going on in individual school contexts.
- **Recognise and build upon the pockets of interesting practice that currently exist within East London schools.** These pockets include schools with already well-established provision (which could be used as examples to inspire and support others) and schools that are making some use of local green spaces (which could be extended and strengthened).
- **Respond to the strong call from school leaders and teachers in this study for face-to-face advice and training focused on their specific school context.** Time and again the request was for someone with relevant expertise and an appreciation of local challenges to come and work with staff and advise on what could be achieved within and beyond their school.
- **Pay careful attention to the distinctive mix of challenges and opportunities facing schools, teachers and learners in East London.** There are, of course, significant challenges stemming from the realities of social deprivation, language difficulties, staff turnover, limited school grounds and so on. Alongside these, though, are some important opportunities such as subsidised public transport, access to varied community spaces and an enthusiasm in some schools for imaginative approaches to overcoming barriers to learning.

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