



Grounds for Change project

Embedding outdoor learning in teaching practice: A practical guide for headteachers and senior leaders working in urban settings



Learning
through
Landscapes



Children and young people learn in a variety of ways; some thrive in a classroom environment whilst others need to experience what they are learning to understand it. The enrichment that experiential learning gives to all children's education is essential and what better way to deliver this than within their very own school grounds – they are local, relevant and easy to access for school staff and children.

Access to outside space at schools comes in many forms ranging from extensive grounds with playing fields within the school gates, smaller traditional playgrounds or access to a local walk-to green space for play and recreation. Above all playgrounds are a universal offer that all children can experience regardless of their individual circumstances.

Within London especially, opportunities to access natural spaces and habitats have diminished. That is why it is essential that the Foundation endeavours to support organisations such as Learning through Landscapes (LTL) to ensure that schools are making the most of these precious outdoor spaces for children's learning and development.

Sir John Cass's Foundation has supported the Grounds for Change project from pilot stage to further development. The Foundation champions initiatives that aim to improve learning, behaviour and achievement and I am delighted to say that these goals for four primary schools in Southwark have been realised through this particular initiative

The Foundation has a long-standing partnership with Learning through Landscapes having worked with them since 1999 and with excellent results. In fact it is the results achieved from earlier grant funding that have helped to influence the Grounds for Change project.

It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the late Alderman Dr Ray Ellis who sadly passed away earlier this year. Ray was the Chairman of the Foundation's Grants Committee and very supportive of the Grounds for Change project.

I commend Grounds for Change and hope this publication will act as a guide to those endeavouring to establish similar projects in urban environments.

Deputy Kevin Everett
Treasurer and Chairman
Sir John Cass's Foundation



Grounds for Change

Creating an exciting, diverse and purposeful curriculum is always going to be high on the priority list for any senior leader. At Learning through Landscapes we strongly believe that the outdoors provides the perfect opportunity for teachers to ignite a passion for learning in children whom may otherwise disengage from education.

Within the urban environment one of the safest places for children to explore is their school grounds. Providing opportunities for children to use these spaces for learning, play and exploration is something that is often mistakenly dismissed as frivolous in the push to drive up grades. What is being missed is the incredible impact the outdoors can have on young people.

The Grounds for Change project was established to demonstrate, that with the right support and guidance, schools in even the most urban environments can develop their practice in the outdoors to enhance their curriculum. Learning through Landscapes has worked with four schools in the London Borough of Southwark to change the way they use and manage their outside spaces for learning and play. As a result of the changes implemented, we have seen evidence to suggest positive impacts on the behaviour, motivation and attainment of their pupils.

Interestingly there were a number of issues that were consistent in each of the schools we worked with, which allowed us to try out different approaches and assess what the most effective strategies were. The common issues were:

- lack of space
- no access to natural environment
- children's unsuitable clothing
- teachers' lack of experience
- children not used to conditions outdoors
- staff or parents not valuing the outdoors

This practical guide provides simple steps to address these common issues. We hope this guide will help other schools in urban areas to start laying the grounds for change.

"Their progress is amazing. We've got 100% progress in Maths and 97% in reading and writing [for their two or more targeted academic progress points]"

Sylvia, teacher,
St Peter's School



Step 1 Know your school

The foundation of any sound change management process is about understanding the current situation. As a confident and knowledgeable leader of learning outdoors, your improvements will be built on a thorough grasp of how outdoor learning works in your school: Who is enthusiastic? Who needs support? What resources do you have available and where there are gaps? What can the outdoor spaces at your school do for learning? How will the outdoors support the goals and ethos of your school?

The activity in this step can be quite lengthy and involved. Carry out the audit over a couple of weeks giving yourself time to adjust and modify and to review your responses. You may find you return to the audit as you work through the process of changing the school's practice in using their outdoor spaces. For example if you are thinking about planting an orchard, things to consider will include: How will pupils access the orchard at break times? Will they need an all weather path? What is the area currently used for? Would an orchard conflict with or complement this? Check your planned location with your Local Authority to make sure that it doesn't conflict with underground services or access needs.



1 – Sample audit questions

You can access a list of audit questions to help you create your own at www.ltl.org.uk/pdf/Appendix-1-audit-tool1450190581.pdf



Tip 1: Explore your grounds

During the delivery of the Grounds for Change project we found that schools that had a clear idea about how various individuals and groups used the outdoor space, were better equipped to plan for their needs. It also gave them the chance to spot opportunities they may have otherwise missed. For example, one school identified a completely unused outdoor space which they later developed into a dedicated area for quiet outdoor learning.

Step 2 Create a vision

Having undertaken a thorough audit of the way your grounds are used, designed and managed, it's time to use this information to develop your school's vision for outdoor learning and play. It is vital that the concept and purpose behind your vision are sound because it is these that others will use to understand why there is a need to change the way in which they currently work.

A vision statement will drive and inform improvements in the way your grounds are used, developed and managed. It should reflect the priorities of your school improvement plan, but should have a character and purpose of its own.

Depending on how much support and time you are able to expect from colleagues, run your visioning activity as either a whole group visioning session or through e-mail communication.

In addition to the school improvement plan it will also be worth revisiting your school's parent brochure to get a sense of what the school's overall objectives and ethos are, and how they can inform the development of your vision for outdoor learning and play. If you have a wellbeing of children policy, read and reflect on that too.

As an urban school, you might also want to include the below discussion points:

- How much access to quality outdoor spaces do the children in your school get in their lives?
 - Is it a responsibility of the school to support this?
- There is no right or wrong answer to the second question, but it is important for the school to decide.



2 – Visioning exercises

You can access a number of exercises to help you create your vision at www.ltl.org.uk/pdf/Appendix-2-Visioning1450190614.pdf



Step 3

Assign roles and responsibilities

Once you have shared your vision with the whole school community, it is a good time to provide people with an idea of their roles and responsibilities for the use, design and management of the outside spaces.

You can go about this in a number of ways but it is important that each person and group understands both their role and that of others. We would recommend that the following key roles are allocated at the earliest opportunity:

Coordination of spaces

This role is to make sure that each space is used, timetabled effectively and managed appropriately. It might be that someone already has a responsibility for coordinating the use of sports pitches, the hall and classrooms. It might just be that you include the various outdoor areas as well.

Maintenance

Although each person or group will hold responsibility for the care and maintenance, there should be one person who can coordinate the activity and monitor the use and/or misuse of a space.

Planning

To have effective teaching in the outdoors as a resource, there needs to be one person in the school who can support other staff members to write this into their planning. This person should be passionate about the use of the outdoors and will need to regularly remind staff of the vision and their commitment to teaching outdoors.

Extra-curricular

There are multiple external and internal extra-curricular groups that can, and do, make use of outside spaces. Someone needs to take the responsibility of working with these groups to

make sure the spaces are appropriate and working to meet the school's needs. Schools which are outward focused and collaborate with external groups will gain additional benefits.

Alongside the roles above you will also need to consider how each person's responsibilities for the outside are communicated. You will need to think about how they contribute to the use, design and maintenance of each space and how this will be reinforced over time. You might consider doing this through:

- regular e-mail communication
- staff training
- changes to job descriptions and therefore through appraisals
- updates in staff meetings
- celebrations of good practice

Tip 2: Appoint an outdoor learning leader

The school that had the greatest success was the one that appointed an outdoor lead person on the teaching staff. This person had the most experience of outdoor learning and was able to effectively assist other teachers in planning lessons outdoors. The project co-ordinator was able to work closely with this person to think strategically about teaching outdoors and organise lessons across year groups.



Step 4

Get the right tools and resources

One of the most important pieces of learning from this research is related to the tools, lesson plans and materials that teachers are given to deliver effective learning outdoors.

During the four years of the project, teachers consistently reported that detailed planning and flexible materials were of significant value. These types of resources have enabled barriers to be broken down and aid in the delivery of the curriculum. As space is an issue in most urban schools, simple storage solutions and smaller, flexible resources such as pieces of equipment that can be used for multiple purposes (e.g. tarpaulins, ropes, pieces of wood) are always going to be the most preferred options.

Many of the resources you may need to aid outdoor learning can be identified in Step 1. The people you consult with will often provide barriers as to why they are currently not using the outdoors for teaching and learning. Providing the right resources will systematically improve the conditions and remove anxieties staff may have. For example, if teachers cite a lack of accessible resources (such as dipping nets, arts and crafts materials or other outdoor use equipment) as a barrier, purchasing a storage solution to make these more accessible, might help to alleviate the issue.

In addition to accessing space outdoors, the concern of not knowing what to do when you get there is another common barrier. There are many products and resources that enable teaching and learning outdoors – a good starting point is supporting staff with what they feel they are able to do. With this information the person responsible for curriculum planning can review the resources that would offer the most amount of flexibility for all staff to use.

Tip 3: Make resources available to all

To overcome teachers' biggest fear of poor weather, full class sets of wet weather clothing were provided to two schools. School A gave the clothing to one NQT teacher to use over the year. In School B, the person managing outdoor learning was responsible for the clothing and made teachers aware that it was available for everyone to use. At the end of the year School A had only used their equipment once at the beginning of the year. School B on the other hand had regularly used the kit as the Outdoor Learning Leader had kept a close eye on planning and its required use. They had then encouraged teachers to avoid cancelling lessons in poor weather as the children had the appropriate clothing available.

Tip 4: Show teachers how to use resources

Each school in the project was provided with a set of hazel sticks that had been measured and cut to standard metric sizes. Training was then provided to show how these resources could be used as a flexible teaching tool. Many of the staff commented on how useful and simple these ideas were and subsequently used them for shape, number and problem solving activities.





Step 5 Support staff delivery

Teacher confidence is absolutely critical in delivering high quality lessons. Of course it is important to provide the right environment and tools to teach outdoors, but without the confidence and sufficient ideas, teachers will still be apprehensive as to what can be achieved in an outdoor space.

Over the duration of the Grounds for Change project, the LTL delivery staff supported teachers through demonstrations and guided activities. Many teachers reported it was this hands-on support that gave them the confidence to try activities and lessons on their own.

One of the most effective ways of teacher support is for one enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff member to run a training session (or maybe a series) analysing staff anxieties and sharing ways of jointly achieving their school's vision.

You may want to source professional guidance to support curriculum development or to provide practical ideas on delivering outdoor learning. Please visit LTL's website (www.ltl.org.uk) to view a directory of LTL accredited professionals who can help you.



Tip 5: Celebrate and share

To celebrate their progress, one of the Grounds for Change participating schools ran an outdoor learning week during National School Grounds Week. During this time, all teachers were asked to use the grounds as much as they could. With careful timetabling of spaces, every class managed to deliver at least one outdoor lesson each day. The initiative enabled teachers to share what they were doing, but also to learn from each other's ideas. The programme was led by the Outdoor Learning Co-ordinator and teachers were supported as and when needed. There are now plans to run the same event each year reminding staff how useful and engaging the outdoor environment can be.

Step 6 Measuring change to evidence impact

If you can demonstrate the positive impact that outdoor learning and play has made on your children's learning and wellbeing, this will show the school community and inspectors why it is crucial to continue embedding outdoor learning and play in the school's every day practice.

The first step is to decide which measures you would like to use to show the impact of the changes undertaken – for example the level of attainment. This will be your baseline that will then allow you to show how the change influenced the attainment. For most impact choose stats and targets that are relevant and link to current school priorities.

For example, if your school's priority is to improve problem solving in maths then your measure might be test based using a problem solving test at the beginning of the intervention followed by one at the end.

Always think about how you can isolate one intervention from another, so in this case look at the result against either a control group that is not receiving lessons outdoors, or against test results from a previous year group. This will give you a more accurate idea of the impact the outdoors is having on the children. Another measure might be children's feelings about a particular subject. In this situation, you could either ask another member of staff to observe levels of concentration and engagement during lessons, or, alternatively you could provide questionnaires before and after.

Other methods include qualitative measures and rely on feedback from staff or pupils. These forms of impact are still very valid and documenting them properly will further strengthen your argument. This can cover comments about levels of enjoyment or anecdotes about concentration or engagement in activities.



“They went round and they started spotting trees and they no longer looked at a tree as just a tree, a tree had a name, it had a way to be classified as well”

**Paul, Year 5 teacher,
St Peter's School**

Step 7 Review and celebrate

It is very easy to put systems in place and then hope they continue or develop as time goes on. However, without someone reviewing progress and celebrating the achievement, it is very easy for outdoor learning to be pushed aside for the next priority.

Therefore it is crucial to find ways of tracking when outdoor learning is taking place and sharing outcomes with your colleagues.

One way of doing this is to complete the audit in Step 1 annually. This will measure 'where you are now' and help you to identify what the next steps could potentially be. It will also enable you to show everyone how far they have come and what a great job has been done.



Sir John Cass's Foundation

Established in 1748 and now a major independent educational charity benefiting the whole of London, the Foundation takes its name from its founder, Sir John Cass. Born in 1661, Cass served as Alderman, Sheriff and MP for the City of London and was knighted in 1712.

Today the Foundation has links in nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of education, supporting its primary and secondary schools in London, as well as the Cass Faculty of Art, Architecture & Design, within London Metropolitan University, and the Cass Halls of Residence in Hackney, providing good quality, low-cost, student accommodation.

The Foundation prides itself on developing long-term partnerships with key educational establishments, awarding in 2001 a multi-million pound grant to City University's Business School, subsequently re-named the Cass Business School. A large grant was also given to establish the Cass School of Education and Communities at the University of East London in 2008. In addition, a wide range of individuals are supported each year through scholarships and grants.

Learning through Landscapes

Learning through Landscapes is the national charity working to ensure that every child benefits from outdoor learning and play. It advises government, engages the private sector and empowers school communities and early years settings to make the best of their outside spaces for children's education and well-being.

In a recent survey of schools that improved their grounds with LTL support, 88% said it had resulted in more creative learning and environmental awareness among pupils. Despite such benefits, 80% of teachers in a recent MORI poll said they believe that their school is failing to make the most of their outdoor spaces. LTL aims to change this – and is the only organisation focussing specifically on school environments in order to do so.

Over the past 25 years, LTL has worked directly with over 10,000 schools, raised over 24 million pounds for grounds improvements and trained thousands of teachers and practitioners to help them rethink the design and use of their outdoor environments.



The Grounds for Change guide

You can access an electronic version of this guide and supporting resources at www.ltl.org.uk/resources/results.php?id=876

The delivery of the Grounds for Change project was supported by a Steering Committee comprising the following individuals and organisations:

Richard Foley Chief Executive, Sir John Cass's Foundation

Madeleine Danaher Senior Education Adviser, Southwark Council

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Laura Dosanjh Director of Applied Innovation, The Young Foundation

Bethia McNeill Programme Leader for Youth Transitions, The Young Foundation

Louise Thomas Programme Lead: Education and Deputy Managing Partner, The Innovation Unit

The following schools took part:

Harris Primary Academy Peckham

Information from the OfSTED School Data Dashboard:

- In 2014 there were 395 pupils on roll
- 43.6% of pupils were entitled to free school meals

Grange Primary School

Information from the OfSTED School Data Dashboard:

- In 2014 there were 367 pupils on roll
- 66.7% of pupils were entitled to free school meals

Phoenix Primary School

Information from the OfSTED School Data Dashboard:

- In 2014 there were 433 pupils on roll
- 41.3% of pupils were entitled to free school meals

St Paul's Church of England Primary School

Information from the OfSTED School Data Dashboard:

- In 2014 there were 348 pupils on roll
- 49.8% of pupils were entitled to free school meals



Sir John Cass's Foundation



With special thanks to Sir John Cass's Foundation for its generous funding and support over the duration of this four year project. Founded in 1748 and one of London's oldest and largest education charities, Sir John Cass's Foundation supports education for young people in London through grants to individuals, schools and organisations.
sirjohncassfoundation.com

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