

Footprints

Step-by-step together

Your newsletter from the Diocesan Board of Education

January 2021

Outdoor Learning



Paul Dunning
Diocesan Director of Education

At the start of a New Year I hope and pray this edition of Footprints lifts your spirits. I'm going to hand over my usual introduction to words from Psalm 95:3-5 and Josie Barnett, the departing Centre Manager of our Horstead Activity and Residential Centre.

For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

When I was asked to submit a few words on Learning Outside the Classroom I was happy to oblige. This is my last season at Horstead and it is a great opportunity to endorse outdoor learning and introduce William Mills, who will take over from me as Centre Manager this month.

Horstead is a fantastic diocesan resource, as unique in its set up and history as it is in its delivery of outdoor learning. I came to run Horstead a decade ago and saw the opportunity to expand our offer to a wider audience and to make outdoor learning easier for teachers to manage and more accessible to children, particularly those from areas of deprivation, who seldom get the opportunities that many take for granted.

We have worked hard with our colleagues in education to dispel the myth that Learning Outside the Classroom is just kids playing in the woods and getting covered in mud. They do, and it is, but it is so much more. It is now universally accepted that children's access to green spaces isn't just nice to have but a vital link to good mental health and wellbeing, without which, any amount of learning is placed in jeopardy.

Connecting children to green spaces and helping them to regain a nurturing perspective of the world has become even more important through this pandemic. Outdoor learning will help to combat and repair some of the damage that has been suffered with the continuous trail of frightening and alarming headlines and restrictive practises. The far-reaching consequences

of lockdown on this generation of school children cannot be known, but all measures available need to be explored to reduce the extent of that damage. Outdoor learning isn't the stand alone cure, but it does offer a therapeutic route to wellbeing and good mental health by restoring and replenishing contact with parts of our world that seem untouched by COVID.

Understanding what lies outside the classroom and how it can support conventional learning is the key to many successful school strategies. Nature has it all and can broaden learning opportunities and help children to experience their learning in different contexts, creating deeper understanding of key subject areas.

It is no surprise that in the natural classroom children visibly thrive as they absorb and retain all the things they experience with greater clarity and depth, providing the foundations for becoming lifelong learners. Denying a child outdoor learning is like cutting off their supply of sunlight, making their world dull and cold. Let the light shine on all of our children so they can appreciate and learn to love the beauty of our world and protect it in all its fragility.

See back page for Awe and Wonder photos.

LISTEN

CELEBRATE

IMAGINE

EMPOWER

...MORE THAN WE CAN IMAGINE

Elizabeth Cooper

Senior Teacher

Tacolneston and Morley Federation

Outdoor Education takes place in a variety of different ways in the Tacolneston and Morley Federation. The schools are able to offer children large playing fields, nature gardens, beds for flowers and vegetables, a pond and woodlands. This is further enhanced by residential trips that include adventurous sports, nature trails, rope courses and initiative challenges. Outdoor Education is timetabled for every class from reception to year 6. This year the federation has also trained up a teacher to lead Forest Schools.

Outdoor Education is a learning experience with its own distinct identity, but when it comes to the National Curriculum, is there a better way to understand habitats in science, maps

and grid references in geography, creation in RE and exploration of art or music than by being outdoors? The Outdoor Education the children receive during their time in primary school gives them a lifelong love of nature and responsibility for the global environment. When children return to visit they speak positively of their experience and how it provided them with a sense of place and belonging to a community.

Providing this connection with the environment gives everyone, adults and children, the chance to think, reflect and learn about themselves. During the current global pandemic it is more important than ever that our children have an increased access to this provision and the children's smiles, engagement, as well as their personal and social development tell us how essential this is to us, as a school federation and community.



Remembrance: outdoor learning at Harleston Primary Academy

Hannah Houlgate

Headteacher

Harleston Primary Academy, St Benet's

Think back to a time where the autumn leaves had fallen and all you wanted to do was walk through them and hear the noises. Crunch! Crunch! Shuffle! Shuffle! This is a place to understand the curriculum.

At Harleston Primary Academy we have embraced the outdoors - our site includes an amphitheatre, peace garden and a forest. All of which are used on a daily basis.

We embrace forest schools and every day since starting at Harleston Primary Academy I have watched as wide eyed children march towards the woods, eager to learn today's lessons.

In November we made the decision to hold a Remembrance Service outside, socially distanced (of course). Our children wanted to use their environment to create monuments which, in time, would rot into the ground and create new life. Much like the symbol of Remembrance herself: the poppy.

Each class was tasked with using the resources which they had gathered from the forest and school grounds to create a monument to those fallen soldiers. The



classes knew that the monuments would not last forever - that was not the point of them. They were eco-friendly and had a meaning and power to them.

At first, from my window, I saw classes outside. They were wandering around the site with a purpose - seeing what they had to work with. The children were exploring the different media to use and their discussions (what I could hear of them) were fascinating. Have you thought about...? If we used X... we would need... They were becoming problem solvers - they were working as a team.

Having found their natural resources, they set their minds to planning how they would construct their work. Each group planned, tried and adapted their work. Knowing that even if they weren't there yet, they soon would be.

Some groups decided to create traditional wreaths and crosses, using oak leaves and twigs. They used their mathematical skills to enhance their work, paying close attention to ratios and shape.

Other groups wrote poems and

messages on natural resources.

They were mindful of the task at hand and took inspiration from their surroundings.

We had an array of natural and original pieces of Remembrance art. The next thing was how we shared it with the rest of the school community and with the wider community...

The children at Harleston Primary Academy had a fabulous idea - we adorned our woods with these acts of Remembrance. At each point there was a new symbol for us to reflect upon. As a school we held a Remembrance Service, outside. We remembered the fallen. We remembered the living. We thanked God for all that we are and all that we have.

Each class reflected on the work which every child had a hand in making. They were mindful of where the work had come from and how different each piece was, even though we all came from the same starting point.

As the weeks passed and the forest was used for bush craft, science, geography and English, so the structures broke and became one with the earth again. Several children have reflected to me that this was natural, and this was what the poppies did. Ready to grow again.

The children at Harleston Primary Academy flourished in their outdoor acts of Remembrance - they showed us that they were willing to work with a growth mindset to overcome the challenges faced.



Emily McMillen
Acting Headteacher
Heartwood CE VC Primary &
Nursery School

At Heartwood, outside learning is at the heart of our learning and is where the name of our school originates. Our curriculum creates many opportunities for children to take their learning outside and remove any ceilings on learning.

We are incredibly fortunate to have a large woodland on our site that our school community have transformed into a Forest School provision. All our children have weekly sessions, bringing the science, geography and other

areas of learning to life with hands-on experiences, providing our children with memorable learning and endless opportunities to enrich their vocabulary.

Our vision at Heartwood CE VC Primary and Nursery School is to enable every child to enjoy a life filled with meaning and purpose, underpinned by Christian values, a love of learning and an eagerness to make the world a better place. 'Live life in all its fullness.' John 10:10

Creating these outdoor learning opportunities, along with our 'Making a Difference' curriculum enables the vision to come alive. Our children are learning to respect, love and cherish God's creations and look after the wonderful world that he

created. Building bug hotels, bird houses, and learning about seasons and nature are examples. Incorporating our values, the children build their friendships and take responsibility for our environment.

Our school allotment is a place of tranquil and calm where children plan, grow and look after produce. The produce is used to serve the vulnerable in the community and for creating delicious creations in the school kitchen.

Incorporating the Danish hygge approach to school life, we also bring the outdoors indoors by using natural materials and resources for our learning. Please visit our website to find out more: www.heartwood.norfolk.sch.uk

DSSO Showcase: Outdoor Learning memories



Sue Lunnun
DSSO

Has there ever been a time when being in the outdoors has come into focus in the way it has in 2020?

Those of us with gardens have felt for others living without that luxury; we have benefitted from an all too rare opportunity to make the most of our locality. Every day I learned something new and frequently experienced good old fashioned awe and wonder.

The DSSO Showcase usually celebrates how brilliantly a school is delivering the focus of the theme; in popular speak, a massive shoutout! Despite the restrictions placed on education, it has continued to evolve and Outdoor Learning has loomed larger than ever. My thoughts have turned down memory lane to my own

teaching and experiences in the dim and distant past...

Training in the 1970s, my first teaching practice was in the idyllic location of St Ives, Cornwall. As an aside, I'll just mention the fact that the class teacher watched me the first morning, found me up to some sort of standard and left me on my own with the class for the rest of the placement – except when she came with us on the harbour/beach visit. As her house was right on the beach, you'd have thought she'd have known better than to let me and the pupils collect buckets full of seawater, crabs, tiny pool dwelling creatures and seaweed – when we arrived in the classroom the next day, it absolutely stank! On my third practice, we collected twigs to make our own charcoal to use in drawing; we set fire to them in the metal class bins, with a fire bucket on hand. Wonderful but taboo these days!

Later memories include: orienteering involving a simple map following post-it clues stuck to trees and buildings to find "treasure"; a local history topic investigating past local residents' lives and discovering the many ancestors'

graves of pupils' ancestors in a village churchyard; and sitting outside in coats as the sun went down drawing winter trees (with our own charcoal of course!).

Also the joys on residential: a group of lambs in Wales seemed to be practising for the 100m; they returned again and again to the top of the field and raced down – right opposite where we were supposed to be conducting a river study; and at Mont St Michel, simply climbing up and down the tiny alleyways. Most children enjoyed this more than their day in Disneyland Paris!

What might the future hold for our schools? Maximising the use of school grounds to keep children outdoors can only be a good thing. Out of school visits may be more of a challenge for the moment but it is wonderful to see schools continuing to give children meaningful and memorable outdoor learning opportunities.

From Psalm 115:16

*The heavens are the heavens of the Lord,
But the earth He has given to the sons
of men*

Wherever outdoor learning is going, let's make the most of it!

An example of how Governors can support Outdoor Learning



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Earlier this year, I visited Kessingland CE Primary Academy and was so impressed with the amazing outdoor area that they have developed. Headteacher, Adrian Crossland, explained that the school had been on residential visits to the Hands on Heritage site in Tunstall Forest which some governors also attended. Having seen the impact of the Outdoor Learning on the children, the governors were keen to develop the school grounds so that the children could benefit from this type of environment every day, not just once a year.

The Chair of Governors, Keith Jennings, explained that when he joined the Kessingland Local Governing Body (LGB)

in 2015 the school had just become an Academy following an Ofsted judgement of special measures. He was invited by the Senior Leadership Team to undertake a pupil perception survey. He discovered that one of the overwhelming desires of all the children was the reinstatement of an on-site adventure park, which had been closed due to dilapidation and health and safety grounds.

Therefore, governors backed the decision to develop the outdoor area and subsequent LGB meetings focused on:

- Discussing and supporting the funding of Forest School training for staff
- Reviewing and agreeing the plans for an on-site Forest School
- Reviewing and authorising the risk assessments associated with Forest School
- Sharing and discussing the implications of individual governor's monitoring reports.

Most of the money needed was collected through fundraising and an unused area is now a place in which children are desperate to learn. It even has a double decker bus as an outdoor classroom.

Both Adrian and Keith recognised that the key person driving the project



was Kelly Haward who is now the Forest School Lead. Her passion and commitment were amazing and included giving up hours of her own time to develop the environment and make links with outside agencies to provide the best opportunities for the pupils.

Governors and staff have noticed a transformation in behaviour since the new outdoor facilities have been in place. Those children who find a conventional classroom challenging are engaging with their learning more readily and those who are more academically focused are gaining confidence in creative activities. A great outcome!

Awe and wonder at Horstead!



Josie Barnett
Centre Manager
Horstead Activity and Residential Centre

Reassuring for any child to catch a glimpse of lightening blue as a kingfisher flits across their boat as they row up the gentle flowing river.



How comforting for a child to build a woodland den under a robust Horse Chestnut tree and find a shiny glistening conker under its branches.



How optimism will grow when a child finds and picks a juicy blackberry from a thorny bush to put in some bannock bread they've just baked over an open fire and how joyful it is for children to gather round the campfire with silly songs and jokes under a starry sky.

Training update

All training from December 2020 through until April 2021 will be via Zoom and places are to be booked via Eventbrite. The timing and cost has now been amended to reflect this change.