

Outdoor Learning at East Park

Creating rich learning experiences and promoting health and wellbeing



Introduction

Based in the heart of Maryhill in Glasgow, our school is surprisingly well served by local outdoor amenities, including parks, The Children's Wood, the Botanic Gardens and the Forth and Clyde Canal. Within the school grounds, we have a large and secure outdoor recreational area (The Garden), which includes space for loose parts play, outdoor gym equipment and picnic areas. There is also a smaller sensory space called The Den, which is home to our hens and provides a sheltered location for growing vegetables and flowers, as well as composting. Weekly timetables incorporate varied and progressive outdoor learning opportunities for all our learners and include blocks of Forest School and horse-riding. Through our partnership with Tannoch Stables, right, pupils are able to undertake RDA Awards, and children are also presented for John Muir Awards where appropriate.



Residential trips are the ultimate outdoor learning experience for many children in Scotland, but these activities require a lot of careful planning and risk assessment for those with complex additional support needs. Our first camping expedition to Mugdock Country Park, left, and below left, was a truly magical adventure for staff and young people.



Understanding the importance of learning outdoors...

'The core values of Curriculum for Excellence resonate with long-standing key concepts of outdoor learning. Challenge, enjoyment, relevance, depth, development of the whole person and an adventurous approach to learning are at the core of outdoor pedagogy. The outdoor environment encourages staff and students to see each other in a different light, building positive relationships and improving self-awareness and understanding of others.' (1)

'Never have we been so far from merging with the natural world and so divorced from nature. By 2050, 66% of the world's population is projected to live in cities. According to a study sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency, the average American spends 93% of their time indoors.' (2)

'We know the benefits playing outdoors delivers for children in terms of improved health and wellbeing, building resilience and connecting with nature. Scotland has a wealth of great outdoor space, including in the heart of our cities, and the expansion of early learning and childcare provides us with an opportunity to increase the amount of time children spend playing in these wonderful spaces.' (3)



Weekly sessions are held at The Children's Wood, allowing children to explore tools and different areas of the curriculum: Left, pumpkin carving and right, chalk dust patterns for Diwali.



Learners love the canoeing trips organised for us by Metro Outdoors.



References

- (1) *Curriculum for Excellence Through Outdoor Learning*, Learning and Teaching Scotland (2010)
 - (2) Li, Qing, 'Forest Bathing Is Great for Your Health. Here's How to Do It' in Time Magazine, 01 May 2018 accessed 21 September 2020 at <https://time.com/5259602/japanese-forest-bathing/>
 - (3) *Scotland's Outdoor Learning and Play Coalition Position Statement*, Maree Todd, 2018, accessed 21 September 2020 <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/news/scotland-commits-life-enhancing-outdoor-play/>
- Taking Learning Outdoors*, Learning and Teaching Scotland (2007)



Opposite The Den, left, Workmates and ENACTUS GCU Students worked together with pupils to develop a Living Wall, and above, centre and right, classes get busy growing with resources kindly provided by the Food for Thought Fund.

We use the outdoors to provide alternative spaces for RME (celebrating Diwali, left), Enterprise (Rainbow Cones, centre) and Literacy (The Green Man, right).



The Garden is used for everyday learning as well as special events such as The Big School Bird Watch and Sports Day. It has also been the venue for our 'Out to Play' residency from EcoDrama, left.

Forest School, led by Joni McKay Forest School, has had a really positive impact on behaviour and allows for natural, sensory, child-led play.



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