



EVERY CHILD OUTDOORS

Summary

- *The RSPB believes that every child should be entitled to regular contact with the natural environment – bringing educational benefits, as well as improving physical and mental health, and inspiring environmentally-responsible citizens.*
- *The Children, Schools and Families Select Committee recently concluded that a lack of adequate funding should not be a deterrent to schools offering – or pupils participating in – school trips and visits (so-called ‘learning outside the classroom’).*
- *Pupil premium funding to schools represents an opportunity to ensure that every disadvantaged child in England can have at least one high-quality learning outside the classroom experience per year (calculated to cost £25 per child).*
- *It is crucial that alongside a slimmer curriculum and greater freedoms for schools, the Government also reinforces the value of learning outside the classroom, and retains values for environmental-sustainability in the new curriculum.*

1. The RSPB’s work with schoolchildren and nature

The RSPB has over a million members, including 192,000 under the age of 18. Each year 60,000 pupils enjoy a learning outside the classroom (LOtC) experience on one of our nature reserves. We also run many other activities for schools including the annual Big Schools Birdwatch, in which 100,000 children participate by discovering wildlife in their own school grounds.ⁱ

2. **The benefits of learning outside the classroom** are now widely recognised and reported, including in a number of Ofsted’s recent thematic reports.ⁱⁱ These include the recommendation from Ofsted that schools should “ensure that all pupils have access to out-of-classroom learning to support their understanding of the need to care for their environment and to promote their physical and mental well-being”. The latest research from the University of Essex also investigates the diverse connections between contact with nature and the positive impact on children’s health, wellbeing and life pathways.ⁱⁱⁱ

3. **In March 2010, the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee** concluded: “Learning outside the classroom supports pupils’ learning and development. It has the potential to enrich and enliven teaching across all subjects [and] all children should have opportunities to experience environments away from their local area, and to visit museums and galleries and other sites of interest, including the natural environment”.^{iv}

4. **The former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) introduced** a number of projects following the launch of its LOtC Manifesto in November 2006:
- setting up an independent Council for LOtC
 - producing an online ‘Out & About’ package of guidance for teachers
 - supporting the development of a Quality Badge for organisations providing LOtC
- These items were welcomed as contributing to the preliminary promotion of LOtC, and beginning to address the barriers preventing all children from having access to it.

5. However, the Children, Schools and Families Committee's recent report found that further Government support is necessary. It recommends that *"the Department must provide adequate funding to achieve maximum impact"*, calling *"on the Department to ensure that families' ability to pay is not a deterrent to schools offering or pupils participating in school trips and visits. We commend to the Department the principle of subsidies for children from low-income families for school trips"*.
6. The RSPB believes that **the proposed Pupil premiums** represent an opportunity for schools to ensure that every disadvantaged child in England can have at least one high-quality learning outside the classroom experience per year (calculated to cost £25 per child). We encourage the Government to provide sufficient funding and guidance to schools to enable them to provide such LOtC activities as part of their overall complement of support for every disadvantaged pupil.
7. A **significant barrier to LOtC has also been reported to be an over-crowded curriculum**, preventing teachers from undertaking educational visits. The RSPB therefore welcomes moves to a less prescriptive and slimmer curriculum, and the granting of increased freedom to schools to provide an excellent education. These are expected to be legislated for in this autumn's Education and Children Bill. However, the RSPB believes it is crucial that alongside this the Government should also *"reinforce the message to schools about the value of learning outside the classroom and support its appropriate use more widely across its programmes"*, as recommended by Ofsted in October 2008.
8. The current guidance on the aims and values of the national curriculum states that it:

... should reflect values in our society that promote personal development, equality of opportunity, economic wellbeing, a healthy and just democracy, and a sustainable future. These values should relate to ourselves, [...] our relationships, [...] our society, [...] and] our environment, as the basis of life and a source of wonder and inspiration that needs to be protected.^v

Through the Education and Children Bill, **these values should be retained and enshrined** as one of the underlying features required to be taught by all schools through the new curriculum.

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ⁱ For more information, see www.rspb.org.uk/schools

ⁱⁱ Ofsted thematic reports: 'Learning outside the classroom: how far should you go?' (October 2008); 'Education for sustainable development: improving schools – improving lives' (December 2009); 'Learning: creative approaches that raise standards' (January 2010)

ⁱⁱⁱ University of Essex, Interdisciplinary Centre for Environment and Society (2009) 'Nature, Childhood, Health and Life Pathways'

^{iv} House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee: 'Transforming Education Outside the Classroom', Sixth Report of Session 2009–10 (March 2010)

^v Values of the National Curriculum: <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/aims-values-and-purposes/values/index.aspx>