

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET – 24 FEBRUARY 2010

CURRICULUM OUTDOORS STRATEGY

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT:

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval for the new 'East Ayrshire Curriculum Outdoors' strategy which will be embedded in a Curriculum for Excellence across all East Ayrshire education establishments.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Cabinet paper of 19 August 2009 'Revised Model for the delivery of Outdoor Education in East Ayrshire' created a new role for the Outdoor Education Service. The revised model of delivery of outdoor education transferred the focus from direct delivery to strategic support for schools and centres to become self sufficient in the delivery of outdoor education. The revised model aimed to collaborate closely with other providers of outdoor education and develop partnerships and shared services where possible. East Ayrshire Curriculum Outdoors strategy outlines the vision, rationale and developments to achieve this new approach.

- 2.2 This strategy, including the vision and entitlement aspiration is East Ayrshire's response to the Scottish Governments policies and programmes outlined below:

- Curriculum for Excellence
- The Early Years Framework 2008
- Taking learning outdoors: partnerships for excellence 2007
- National Outdoor Learning Framework (ongoing)
- Learning for Our Future: Scotland's First Action Plan for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2006
- Scotland's Biodiversity, It's In Your Hands 2004
- Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009

- 2.3 Access to outdoor learning through the development programme will contribute to the realisation of the following Community Planning Partnership Single Outcome Agreement (2008-2011) targets:

- Outcome 3 - Access to learning opportunities to improve quality of life and well being increased
- Outcome 4 - Educational and skills attainment in schools increased
- Outcome 4 - Educational wider achievements (non-academic achievements) and skills for work/vocational programmes increased as

defined by the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence

- Outcome 4 - Participation by young people in community based learning and active citizenship increased
- Outcome 5 - Development of early education and childcare services to support children and families promoted
- Outcome 5 - Healthy lifestyles for children and young people promoted
- Outcome 6 - Health and well being of the local population improved
- Outcome 10 - Attractiveness of communities improved
- Outcome 11 - Participation by people of all ages in community activity increased
- Outcome 12 - The natural and built environment through sustainable development improved

3. AIMS AND VALUES OF THE REVISED SERVICE

3.1 Curriculum for Excellence recognises that learning is embedded in experience. By taking learning outdoors we remove some of the barriers that the traditional classroom can put up between children and young people and develop first-hand, real-life experiences. Outdoor learning is 'hands-on' and direct, and the knowledge that pupils gain from it is sustained and often unforgettable. Contextualised, applied learning outdoors often stimulates and intrinsically motivates learners to engage with learning longer and with less disruptive behaviour. Outdoor learning can be the space for learning beyond subject boundaries, so that learners can make connections between different areas of learning. Through interdisciplinary activities of this kind, children and young people can develop their knowledge, understanding, enterprise, citizenship, organisational and leadership skills, creativity, teamwork and the ability to apply their learning in new and challenging contexts. The wealth of opportunities for personal achievement, associated with outdoor learning enriches the life experience of learners. Taking part in these activities play an important part in widening a child or young person's horizons and develop their confidence and achievement. These achievements must be recognised for the significance they have to learners, their families and communities.

3.2 Direct experience of the complex interdependence of life on Earth enables reinforcement of the link between cognitive and affective learning, providing a bridge to advanced understanding. This gives learners a real context to explore, understand, develop and apply the values of wisdom, compassion, integrity and justice.

3.3 Research demonstrates that outdoor learning can add significantly to children and young people's learning experience and their achievements and this can be closely linked to the four capacities as summarised below:

3.3.1 Developing 'successful learners'

- Outdoor learning can have a positive impact on long-term memory.
- Outdoor learners develop their knowledge and skills in ways that add value to their everyday experiences in the classroom

- There can be reinforcement between the affective and the cognitive, with each influencing the other and providing a bridge to higher order learning
- Outdoor learning has the potential to raise attainment and improve attitudes towards the environment
- Outdoor learning fosters the development of specific academic skills, as well as improved engagement, achievement and stronger motivation to learn

3.3.2 'Developing confident individuals'

- Outdoor learning can impact positively on children and young people's attitudes, beliefs, and self-perceptions, for example: independence, confidence, self-esteem, locus of control, self efficacy, personal effectiveness, coping strategies.
- There are examples of outdoor learning programmes yielding benefits in the promotion of positive behaviour and improved physical self-image and fitness.

3.3.3 'Developing responsible citizens'

- Outdoor learning brings a renewed pride in community with greater sense of place, of belonging and responsibility
- There is significant evidence of the effect of outdoor learning on social development and greater community involvement
- In outdoor learning, pupils develop more positive relationships with each other, with their teachers and with the wider community
- Outdoor learning increases knowledge and understanding of the natural world and environmental systems and processes, and that this knowledge and associated affective development are related to responsible attitudes to the environment

3.3.4 'Developing effective contributors'

- Outdoor learning can impact positively on children and young people's interpersonal and social skills such as: social effectiveness, communication skills, group cohesion and teamwork

4. OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- 4.1 Existing research evidence suggests that contact with nature may be an effective component of coping with anxiety and stress, increasing a sense of wellbeing and mental health and contribute towards a healthy cognitive development of children. It is also a treatment for children with poor self-discipline, hyperactivity and ADHD. (Strategies to Reduce Aggression: *Investigating the links between the Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Mental Health 2007 RSPB*)

- 4.2 Further international and UK research provides evidence that children engaged in learning outside the classroom have greater levels of physical fitness and motor skills development. (*Every Experience Matters 2008 FACE*)

5. OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND MANAGING RISK

- 5.1 The Government Better Regulation Commission 2006 report called for recognition that risk can be creative and exhilarating, whilst also acknowledging that risk needs to be managed. The report concluded that 'childhood is a time for learning and exploring, and wrapping children in cotton wool, or minimising all risks, however small, for fear of litigation, was having a negative impact on children's play opportunities and their more general freedom to explore and encounter the world, appropriate to their age.' (*'Staying Safe': 2008 Department for Children Schools and Families*)
- 5.2 Outdoor learning aims to offer children and young people the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. This risk may be of benefit because it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about risk and consequence in a controlled environment.
- 5.3 Curriculum for Excellence encourages young people to have the skills to assess and manage risk and protect themselves and others by reducing the potential for harm.
- 5.4 The Early Years Framework similarly outlines a vision of the best start in life for children where they are entitled to take part in physical activities and to play, including outdoors, and have an opportunity to experience and judge and manage risk.

6. OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- 6.1 All East Ayrshire schools are participating in the international 'Eco-schools' programme. School Grounds and Biodiversity are two of the nine evaluated components of the programme. 'Curriculum outdoors' will support schools achieving Eco-School status.
- 6.2 The report titled: 'Scotland's Biodiversity: It's In Your Hands' (2004) noted that 'greenspace' comprises between 10% and 40% of the area of the major Scottish towns and cities. This is a huge resource, potentially rich in biodiversity and is close to the majority of the people in the country. There are tremendous opportunities in East Ayrshire to combine increased biodiversity with better access, learning facilities and promote healthy living more generally. The education of the people of East Ayrshire in relation to the area's rich and varied biodiversity is an important factor in the success of this Biodiversity Action Plan. One of our challenges is to raise awareness across the community of the importance of biodiversity. Educational programmes will be constructed to help ensure that young people aware of the significance of biodiversity to our cultural, social and economic well-being. This will help to ensure that this generation can pass on their knowledge and understanding

as well as an environment still rich in biodiversity to the next generation. (*Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan, Safe Guarding Our Natural Environment 2001*).

- 6.3 East Ayrshire Council has had a ranger service since 1981 which has offered an environmental education programme for schools throughout East Ayrshire. Over the last 5 years there has been a change of focus from traditional nature based walks to activities which assist the classroom teacher in delivering cross-curricular objectives. The introduction of the eco-schools agenda has increased the demand for more project driven activities and lessons which focus on the local environment and sustainable development. The development of the Curriculum for Excellence has given Countryside Services the opportunity to develop the environmental education programme in partnership with the Education and Social Services department. A new programme is being launched on March 2nd 2010 and will be curriculum and project driven. It will be 'children led' and encourage personal, social and community education. The resource pack is made up of lesson plans which will complement ranger led activities, ideas for field studies work in the local environment and an outline of other activities available through East Ayrshire Council and our partners.

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 Officers responded to the new strategy by establishing an Outdoor Learning Advisory Group who considered the following actions beneficial for the authority;
- A strategic vision
 - Clear entitlement
 - Policies/rationale set out for children and young people in regards to outdoor learning and outdoor education
 - Structured framework for schools which is challenging progressive and relevant
 - A short term group to develop this work
 - Guidance to schools

8. VISION AND ENTITLEMENT

- 8.1 The advisory group after consultation with wider stakeholders arrived at the vision: 'All children and young people in East Ayrshire, at all stages 3-18, across all subject areas and beyond should get regular opportunities to learn outdoors.'
- 8.2 The 'Outdoors' should be an essential context for learning which adds value to young people's experiences and helps deliver a Smarter, Healthier, Greener and Safer Scotland.
- 8.3 All children and young people (3-18) should learn outdoors as part of the East Ayrshire programme of the Curriculum for Excellence to ensure a broad, deep and progressive curriculum framework. This is based on the entitlement to

help children and young people understand the world and Scotland's place in it and also develop a better understanding of the environment.

9. COST IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The outdoors as a resource for learning is cost effective because East Ayrshire Council currently owns outdoor space in all Educational Establishments which has potential for learning. There are in addition many other accessible outdoor spaces owned by East Ayrshire Council and Community Partners.
- 9.2 In 2009, the total primary school estate was 630,046m². The indoor floor area was 93,674m² representing 14.8% of potential teaching space. In 2009 the total secondary school estate was 549,177m². The indoor floor area was 104,006m² representing 18.9% of potential teaching space. This is similar to the national averages.
- 9.3 East Ayrshire's total land area of 127,033 hectares comprises 3% urban land and 97% rural land. East Ayrshire has a rich and varied landscape with much to offer in terms of natural heritage, scientific interest and the built environment. Thirteen separate and distinct landscape types are present. East Ayrshire contains one special protection area, two special areas of conservation and 21 sites of special scientific interest. There is one local nature reserve, 128 designated and provisional wildlife sites, 51 raised bogs and one country park. There are many other non-designated areas and linear features throughout East Ayrshire, such as rivers and hedgerows, which are of local wildlife value and function as wildlife corridors.
- 9.4 The outdoors accrues no heating or lighting costs and maintenance arrangements are already in place, being substantially less than cleaning indoor spaces. The transfer of learning from indoors to outdoors will help contribute to 80% Carbon emission reduction targets agreed by Scottish Government for 2050, through the possible temporary reduction of energy use in schools whilst learning outside.

10. DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

- 10.1 Strategy development and communication will be steered initially through 5 sector groups (Early, Primary, Secondary, Special & Partners) with the support of the Outdoor Education Service Development Officer. These groups will consider barriers, challenges and opportunities for the specific sectors within existing resources.
- 10.2 The volume of learning outdoors will be audited as a baseline for self evaluation and improvement planning.
- 10.3 The schools estate potential for learning outdoors will be audited and integrated in improvement planning processes both at school and authority levels. This audit can be done within existing resources, through coordinating

Active Schools, Ecoschools, Outdoor Education Service, ground maintenance and other audits.

- 10.4 The learning potential of greenspace environments within walking distance of schools will be audited through reference to 2008 East Ayrshire Council open space audit in the first instance. This development work will be carried out in partnership with local partners; Royal Highland Educational Trust, Dean Park Ranger service, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, East Ayrshire Woodlands, etc.
- 10.5 As directed by the 2009 Outdoor Education Service review, the Service will continue to support school staff by providing a professional development programme and actively seeking investment for schools to help them make physical improvements to their school grounds. The programme will demonstrate best practice in various aspects of outdoor learning and school grounds use, design and management and create an evidence base that demonstrates the value of outdoor learning for whole child development.
- 10.6 A Communication and Professional Development programme will be implemented utilising GLOW (schools intranet).

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 It is recommended that:

- (i) Cabinet endorse East Ayrshire Curriculum Outdoors strategy,
- (ii) Annual reports are presented to Cabinet by the Director of Educational and Social Services;
- (iii) otherwise, note the contents of this report.

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Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

AS/WW
7 December 2009

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Single Outcome Agreement (2008-2011)
2. Investigating the links between the Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Mental Health 2007 (RSPB)
3. Every Experience Matters 2008 (FACE)
4. Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan, Safe Guarding Our Natural Environment 2001

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