**Outdoor Learning at Stockwell Academy**

Outdoor Learning should be clearly evident within our curriculum and woven across as many subjects as possible. It supplements the curriculum and enhances it without adding unnecessary workloads. For example, where it is possible to teach a lesson well indoors but better outdoors, the choice to move it outdoors should not result in more workload. In fact, the teacher workload will stay the same or be reduced and the main focus should be on enhancing the children’s learning.

**Troubleshooting outdoor learning:**

Getting started – This is where we need to have patience and allow time for the practice of outdoor learning to get going. The initial set up will be full of niggles and errors and sometimes, things just won’t go to plan. This is fine! How often do we teach the children that it is good to make mistakes? We need to learn from where we go wrong and, inevitably, our practise will get better.

Behaviour, timings, staff ratio, break times and toilet routines are all things that we will improve with as we increase the frequency of outdoor learning. The goal is that the children will be used to the outdoors and will come to expect it in every year group. This should eliminate behaviour issues that Year 6 faced in 2021 as it was clear that being outside was too much of a change from the norm of being inside and resulted in a reduced session.

Timings don’t have to go to plan and neither do objectives! There will always be something that you can take away from the lesson, even if the children didn’t meet the academic objective.

For example:

Children struggle with multiplying by 10

Teacher takes children outside

Behaviour standards were set beforehand and children were on task but didn’t quite understand or achieve the objective

Children did, however, work as a team to find 10 objects, learned to share objects, stayed within boundaries, were respectful of the environment, used matching skills and comparison skills when gathering objects, returned objects responsibly after use, failed in a *controlled* environment and *reflected* on why things didn’t work.

All of the above skills are bringing your class closer together and are matching the Outdoor Learning Skills Progression Document. They share in success and failure together and learn to find something positive in negative situations. Child-led learning may lead them to ask to try again, suggest improvements or to collaborate to problem-solve what they couldn’t work out.

Even if behaviour goes awry, it is just another thing to reflect on. Remember, for the children who are new to being outside or if your class has never done the subject outside before, you will have dips in engagement and behaviour AT FIRST. You will be surprised at how quickly they settle however, when you increase the frequency of which you teach outdoors and reflect with the children on how the session went.

The staff ratio will be something that you will need to manage as a year group or phase. During Covid, outdoor lessons should allow children to work in groups, overseen by the adults available and regular exposure to lessons outdoors will set a routine of how we expect the children to behave outside, where they can and cannot go and you will see improvement in their independence, leadership and they will start to lead lessons more and more. Toilet routines can also be included here, as the children understand that x amount of time today is shorter than y amount of time that they had yesterday. The teacher can also set routines of using the toilet before going outside.

**What if I am covering a teacher and am expected to teach outside?**

Please liaise with the partner teacher here – if it isn’t practical and there are solo staff members who are covering, then outdoor learning may not be possible. However, this refers back to the start where we need to allow for failures and things to go wrong! If you as a cover teacher take the children out and the objective is not achieved, how is this any different to the same thing happening in the classroom? We never expect that **every** child will achieve an objective during a cover lesson as there are things that we as teachers will do when a lesson starts going wrong to correct it. It is not fair to expect a cover teacher to do the same. Remember, if the lesson goes awry, there will be plenty of hidden positives that did happen from just being outside. Having the mind-set to allow for failure and look for the silver lining is so important when starting out in teaching outdoor learning.

**What if other children are out during break times? Will we have more than the area where the outdoor classroom is to use?**

I am happy to say ‘YES!’ to the latter, we have the full field and the tree tunnel that can be used for outdoor learning and we have more projects in the pipeline to continuously improve our area. Please plan your lessons accordingly and try to avoid other classes. Where you can’t, reinforce behaviour expectations and staff members on duty should also be mindful that learning is taking place whilst their children are playing.

**I am not particularly confident in planning an effective outdoor lesson so any support with that would be great.**

The more we teach outdoors, the more lesson plans, resources, ideas and support we can offer each other! Already, we have had successful themed days which can be replicated to suit different ages and topics. Also, ask the children! If you are planning to hook the children in or reinforce a skill, tell them a little story and then ask them, what might we find? What could have happened? What could we use to…? If it works, great, if not, the children have failed in a controlled environment and can reflect on WHY something didn’t work! This builds resilience!

I am always available to consult with for any topics that you have and we have a growing bank of resources and websites to help support and inspire great lessons!

**I am not an outdoorsy person! I don’t like being cold, wet or covered in dirt! Give me a nice warm classroom any day!**

At the heart of all we do, especially in the area that we are in, is the children. They have such limited experiences and simply need to be offered the opportunities that children in more affluent areas have. To quote several staff members, our children can often only see Greatfield Estate as their world, with a trip to Hull or the coastline as a change from the norm, and maybe even not then. It’s not to say that our parents let the children down, but rather, they themselves may not have the means or knowledge to give their children these opportunities. Imagine something in life that you love doing. You may have a pet dog, a hobby etc. Now imagine that you never knew that thing existed. You wouldn’t know the contentment it could bring or the places in life it could take you to, nor the friends you would meet along the way.

Some of these children may love the outdoors so much, that one day they want a career in it. The temptation of comfort and ease may not always be in the children’s best interests. Checking the weather forecast, preparing good clothing and footwear and remembering that your attitude will hugely affect how the children perceive the lesson, are all important factors to remember. I am here to support you in any way I can, whether outdoor learning is your thing or not. All I ask is that you keep in mind that the children will love these opportunities and that we are at the start of our journey to becoming a beacon of excellent outdoor learning to all of the other schools.

**Lastly, I need to hear all the negative feedback! The grumbles, gripes the stressed out sessions that felt like a failure and the outbursts of ‘WHY DO WE EVEN DO OUTDOOR LEARNING?!’**

Staff need to feel comfortable in venting frustrations but this does come with certain criteria. We are building a mind set in both staff and children, that outdoor learning is exciting, positive and something that we are all engaged with. Whenever you have frustrations, it would be massively helpful to me for you to come to me directly and not sit with the problem unresolved. Negativity can manifest and the children are so quick to pick up on this. My vision is that any visitor that comes to the school will know that we are strong in outdoor learning because the children tell them of all the exciting things that they have done outdoors and staff point out successful lessons and ‘lightbulb’ comments from the children where outdoor learning has facilitated the teaching.

I appreciate that there are people who are not as confident with outdoor learning or may even dislike being outdoors! But all I ask is that you speak to the children who have had large amounts of outdoor learning. Listen to the passion that they speak with, the enthusiasm and their excitement at the prospect of learning outside tomorrow or the next day. **We are doing this all for the children**, we’re shrugging off the stereotypes of Stockwell and the surrounding area. Our children CAN achieve academically, CAN be responsible, CAN show pride in their school and area, CAN be resilient, independent learners, CAN be part of a class, a team and a community. Outdoor learning WILL improve their well-being, WILL improve academic attainment and WILL improve their life chances. If we are the driving force behind it, watch them imagine, watch them believe and watch them achieve.

**The How-To guide for Outdoor Learning**

1. What is your objective? If academic, what do you want the children to have shown and achieved by the end of the lesson?
2. Be creative – is this a short supplement to a lesson that will finish indoors or will it all be outdoors? Time pressures will naturally lessen outside and you will see the children physically show that they are not feeling restricted in a classroom and that they have room to move around. Don’t force objectives outside if they don’t go – outdoor learning should not feel like a chore. How many resources do you need? If the weather changes, can you adapt? Have you set expectations before going outside?
3. Still stuck? Talk to a colleague, consult the resources we have available and talk to your children! Always allow for spontaneous lessons as well!
4. Let yourself fail. If this lesson goes completely wrong, you have something to reflect on and improve on. Don’t let it dishearten you – remember, you will get it eventually and there will never be a lesson where the children haven’t improved on some kind of skill.
5. The lesson – is there an introduction or hook? A journey out or starter? Main activity or development? Reflection and sharing or evaluation and assessment? Journey back or Mini plenary? More? How often do you need to break up the learning and where can you allow the children to have more time if they engage more than you thought? Always plan in time for clean-up and reflection. Clean up, because each and every staff member must model and reinforce looking after our equipment and area. Reflection is needed because the children suddenly realise what they have done, some will show the lightbulb moments and some will tell you that they learned things that you never even planned for. Could the children find objects to represent what they did that lesson? It also serves well for the next lesson as they can remember reflection circles well.
6. Aftermath – What went well? What was woeful? How would you change it next time? If several things went wrong – great! You have plenty to work on as a class. All the holistic skills that outdoor learning teaches, such as responsibility and respect, don’t come after one session!
7. Enjoy it! You are outside getting fresh air and you are creating class memories. Delight in the shy children finding their voices, marvel at their creative ideas and take the time to think on the fact that you are close to nature, getting fresh air, exercising and seeing your practice get better!
8. Feedback to staff! We need to share successes more! How often do you discuss negative situations in a classroom or with a child? What if we shared positive experiences? What if that positivity inspires another staff member? What if their children benefit from this positivity?! What if? What if What if??!!

**Performance management**

We all have objective 2: *To continue to implement our bespoke curriculum, ensuring quality first teaching has a significant impact on the acquisition of knowledge, language skills and progression, in all subjects – for all children.*

Part of achieving this is to make sure that: *The curriculum design continues to meet the needs of our children and reflects the values of our school and the wider HCAT community.*

Outdoor learning is an excellent way to ensure that you meet this objective. We want our children to imagine, believe and achieve. There is no more of an immersive environment than that of one which is tangible, real and familiar! The children anchor their understanding to their experiences outdoors and their imagination flourishes as they play and work with others who are also flourishing!

Coming back inside to discuss the science they just learned or to write about what they have just done is far less daunting to them when they have literally experienced the topic that you are teaching. They believe in their own ability and feel like they are successful as outdoor learning can help to level the playing field and allows all of the children to share in the successes of the lesson.

They have a shared and individual sense of achievement in whatever they do! Building confidence, **any** confidence, in our children is so vital for them to have a successful educational journey. Planning in small achievable steps such as finding items, following a treasure map or finding a special item, ensures that you have every child either on their way to, or achieving these small goals. Most importantly, there are no children left at the start line, embarrassed to ask for help or telling themselves that they must be stupid because they can’t achieve what their peers have.

The last part of objective 2 is: *That Outside Learning is an integral part of the curriculum.*

To achieve this, please identify at least one writing topic where the hook lesson will take place outside (also supports achieving objective 1 in performance management!). This should hopefully be a gentle way of increasing your outdoor learning time without it feeling overwhelming. The lesson should typically be recorded through pictures or filmed, but can also be evidenced as part of a display or working wall – e.g. leaves that the children collect and then write poems on.

Other outdoor learning can be achieved through geography, initially, make this your focus alongside the literacy hook. As we move into January, start to think of other areas where you can increase this. Remember, it should not be forced if you can teach it better indoors.