

# Learning outside the classroom

How far should you go?

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At a time when the government is actively promoting learning outside the classroom, this report evaluates the importance of such learning in primary and secondary schools and colleges. It identifies strengths and weaknesses in practice and shows how schools and colleges overcome common barriers that can limit successful learning outside the classroom. In doing so, it provides models that others could consider.

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# Contents

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<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Key findings</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The value of learning outside the classroom</b>	<b>7</b>
Examples of good practice	7
<b>Contributing to the Every Child Matters outcomes</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The importance of place</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Leading and managing learning outside the classroom</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Provision outside the school day</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Integrating learning inside and outside the classroom</b>	<b>13</b>
Free movement between the indoor and outdoor environments	13
Day visits out of school	15
Residential visits out of school	16
Planning skills-based and work-related learning	17
<b>Evaluating learning outside the classroom</b>	<b>18</b>
Evaluating quality	18
Evaluating inclusion	18
<b>Overcoming barriers</b>	<b>20</b>
Health and safety	20
Learning outside the classroom as an 'extra'	21
Financial costs	21
Behaviour	22
Workload	23
<b>The role of coordinators for educational visits, local authorities, and Learning and Skills Councils</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Notes</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Further information</b>	<b>26</b>
Publications	26
<b>Websites</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Annex</b>	<b>27</b>
Schools, colleges, local authorities and providers visited or providing evidence for this survey	27

## Executive summary

Learning inside a classroom is a tried and tested method of organising schooling. However, teachers and learners have always valued the additional opportunities for learning provided by a range of activities conducted outside the classroom. These include day and residential visits, field studies, investigations conducted in the local area, sporting events, and music and drama productions. In organising such activities, schools and colleges have often drawn on the services of a range of providers, including commercially run outdoor education and sport centres, as well as the education departments of museums, art galleries, theatres and concert halls. Recently, the Government has placed increased emphasis on such activities with the publication of the *Learning outside the classroom manifesto* and the training and guidance associated with it.<sup>1</sup>

This report evaluates the impact of learning outside the classroom in 12 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, one special school, one pupil referral unit and three colleges across England where previous inspections had shown that curricular provision, in particular outside the classroom, was good, outstanding or improving rapidly. Inspectors also visited or contacted 13 specialist organisations, including providers of learning outside the classroom, and held discussions with representatives from five local authorities.

All of the schools and colleges surveyed provided exciting, direct and relevant learning activities outside the classroom. Such hands-on activities led to improved outcomes for pupils and students, including better achievement, standards, motivation, personal development and behaviour. The survey also found examples of the positive effects of learning outside the classroom on young people who were hard to motivate.

Only six schools in the survey had a detailed knowledge of the Government's manifesto and even they were unsure how it linked with other national programmes and guidance. Despite this, the most effectively managed schools and colleges included learning outside the classroom as an integral part of a well planned curriculum which ensured the coherent and progressive development of knowledge, skills and understanding.

The management of learning outside the classroom was not consistently good and the schools and colleges surveyed did not always exploit its potential or evaluate its impact sufficiently. However, they had all been successful in overcoming several common barriers to learning outside the classroom, including concerns about the health and safety of participants. The approaches they adopted provide useful models that other schools and colleges could consider.

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<sup>1</sup> *Learning outside the classroom manifesto* (DFES-04232-2006), DfES, 2006; [www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/resourcematerials/outsideclassroom/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/resourcematerials/outsideclassroom/).

## Key findings

- When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development.
- Only six schools in the survey had a detailed knowledge of the Government's *Learning outside the classroom manifesto* and even they were unsure of how other national guidance and programmes, such as the National Strategies, linked to it.
- Learning outside the classroom was most successful when it was an integral element of long-term curriculum planning and closely linked to classroom activities.
- The primary schools in the survey made better and more consistent use of their own buildings and grounds and the neighbouring area to support learning than the secondary schools.
- Too many residential and other visits considered during the survey had learning objectives which were imprecisely defined and not integrated sufficiently with activities in the classroom. This was particularly the case in primary schools.
- The schools in the survey relied very heavily on contributions from parents and carers to meet the costs of residential and other visits and had given very little thought to alternative ways of financing them.
- Of the schools and colleges visited, only three had evaluated the impact of learning outside the classroom on improving achievement, or monitored the take-up of activities by groups of pupils and students. The vast majority in the sample were not able to assess the effectiveness, inclusiveness or value for money of such activities.
- The schools and colleges had worked hard and successfully to overcome the barriers to learning outside the classroom, including those relating to health and safety, pupils' behaviour and teachers' workload.
- Schools and colleges received valuable support from local authorities and local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) in meeting health and safety requirements for visits. They received limited support for assuring the quality of the learning resulting from such activities.

## Recommendations

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) should:

- reinforce the message to schools about the value of learning outside the classroom and support its appropriate use more widely across its programmes.

Local authorities and their partners should:

- build on their successful work in assuring appropriate health and safety practices by better supporting and encouraging schools in enhancing the quality of learning outside the classroom as a means of raising achievement.

Schools and colleges should:

- ensure that their curriculum planning includes sufficient well structured opportunities for all learners to engage in learning outside the classroom as a key, integrated element of their experience
- evaluate the quality of learning outside the classroom to ensure that it has maximum impact on learners' achievement, personal development and well-being
- ensure equal and full access for all learners to learning outside the classroom by monitoring participation in activities by different groups of learners and removing any barriers.

## Introduction

1. Learning inside a classroom is a tried and tested method of organising schooling. However, teachers and learners have always valued the further opportunities for learning that can take place outside the classroom, including:
  - activities within a school's or college's own buildings, grounds or immediate area
  - participation in dramatic productions, concerts and other special events
  - involvement in clubs, musical groups and sporting activities held during break-times and before or after the end of the school day
  - educational visits organised within the school day
  - residential visits that take place during the school week, a weekend or holiday.
2. Recently, the Government has placed increased emphasis on this area of work through the publication of the *Learning outside the classroom manifesto*. This is intended to make the case for learning outside the classroom and to support schools, colleges and other educational providers in improving such provision. The DCSF and its partners are developing training and guidance through a package called 'Out and About', which is related to the manifesto, to support work in this area.<sup>2</sup> From September 2008, organisations other than schools and colleges that provide opportunities for learning outside the classroom will be able to apply for a 'quality badge', the award of which will show that they have

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<sup>2</sup>. Latest information for the 'Out and About' package is in the manifesto newsletter: [www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/resourcematerials/outsideclassroom/newsletters/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/resourcematerials/outsideclassroom/newsletters/).

met demanding standards in terms of the quality of provision and health and safety requirements.<sup>3</sup>

3. These developments relate to several other government schemes including:
  - the extended schools programme, which is designed to provide pupils with a rich mix of services and activities in a safe environment outside normal school hours<sup>4</sup>
  - pilot projects to provide pupils with five hours each week of cultural activities in and outside school<sup>5</sup>
  - the 'Staying safe action plan', which emphasises the importance of school trips and announces further support and reduction in bureaucracy for schools providing them.<sup>6</sup>
4. This report illustrates the good practice seen in the survey schools and what can be achieved, so that it can be developed by others.

## The value of learning outside the classroom

### Examples of good practice

5. The first-hand experiences of learning outside the classroom can help to make subjects more vivid and interesting for pupils and enhance their understanding. It can also contribute significantly to pupils' personal, social and emotional development, as the following typical examples show.

During a science activity in the school garden, two fascinated Year 3 pupils used a magnifying glass to explore various habitats. 'Why does it live there?' asked one girl, when she discovered a woodlouse under a stone. She and her partner considered various possibilities: 'The stone protects it.' 'It doesn't want the sun.' They recorded their ideas and later compared them with other pupils' responses. Through direct observation and experimentation, these pupils were able to arrive at sound conclusions based on evidence, fulfilling an important requirement of the National Curriculum programme of study for science.

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<sup>3</sup> The badge will be known as the 'Learning outside the classroom quality badge'.

<sup>4</sup> For further information on extended schools, see [www.teachernet.gov.uk/extendedschools/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/extendedschools/).

<sup>5</sup> For further information, see [www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/media\\_releases/2150.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/2150.aspx).

<sup>6</sup> For further information, see [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/stayingsafe/](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/stayingsafe/).

On a residential visit, Year 6 pupils confronted their fears as they crawled for some time, in pitch darkness, through a warren of underground passageways. They relied on adult instructions and the encouragement of friends, who were also nervous, to reach the end. One girl's responses encapsulated those of many. Arriving back in the daylight, she was delighted at what she had achieved. Her belief in herself rocketed and she soon went back underground, this time without adult help. The experience developed the pupils' confidence and trust in each other, while also honing their skills in giving precise and encouraging instructions.

A Year 11 pupil, who was studying the Second World War as part of his GCSE course, spoke about a school visit to Germany: 'This really brought my understanding to life. It gave me pictures in my mind.' He also spoke poignantly of a visit to a concentration camp: 'It made me feel guilty about what we have.'

Year 10 pupils, preparing for a visit to the National Portrait Gallery, were clearly looking forward to the opportunity to compare their own drawings and paintings with those of established artists. They expected this to add substantially to their ability to contrast artistic features in different works and help them develop their own skills. This gave extra relevance and interest to their examination studies.

6. Learning outside the classroom can also help to combat under-achievement, as illustrated in the following example.

Groups of about 12 pupils from Years 5 to 8, who were underachieving in English and mathematics, spent two hours a week after school at a 'playing for success' centre, where they took part in climbing, canoeing, dry-slope skiing and other outdoor activities.<sup>7</sup> Staff used these experiences as stimuli for work in mathematics, writing and computing. Evidence from the schools and the centre showed that, within a few weeks, the standard of pupils' work had improved noticeably. Their responses to questionnaires showed that their confidence and self-esteem had also risen. One pupil wrote: 'I have learned so much here. It has built up my confidence and I have learned to try my best and have a go.' A typical comment from a parent described the way her daughter had returned from the centre 'looking so animated and stimulated – quite different from a normal school day'.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Playing for success' is an initiative devised by the DCSF that uses out of school hours study support centres at football clubs and other sports grounds. Its purpose is to raise standards of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology among pupils who may be struggling or demotivated. For further information, see [www.playingforsuccessonline.org.uk](http://www.playingforsuccessonline.org.uk).

This example was one of a number that demonstrated how activities outside the classroom redressed some level of unmet need, within the school day, for some learners.

## Contributing to the Every Child Matters outcomes

7. In each of the schools and colleges visited in this survey, learning outside the classroom improved young people's development in all five of the Every Child Matters outcomes, especially in two areas: enjoying and achieving, and achieving economic well-being.<sup>8</sup>
8. Of the schools inspected by Ofsted between 2005 and 2007, 1,663 had outstanding achievement and standards. Of these, 1,343 (81%) also had an outstanding curriculum. Only four (0.3%) had a curriculum which was less than good. In the same period, 4,391 schools were judged to have satisfactory achievement and standards. Of these, more than two-thirds also had a satisfactory curriculum, with only 12 (0.27%) having a curriculum that was outstanding.
9. This evidence indicates that a high quality, well planned curriculum promotes high achievement. It might be argued that a curriculum could promote high achievement without including any learning outside the classroom. However, evidence during the survey showed that well organised activities outside the classroom contributed much to the quality and depth of learning.

As part of their work in geography and science, the pupils in one school pursued a series of investigations independently outside the classroom into questions which they had set themselves. For example, they conducted fieldwork, such as determining why a village had two railway stations but no main bus route. These first-hand experiences of places could not have been provided within the classroom. The school had evidence which indicated that such activities had helped the pupils to attain above average standards in both subjects.

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<sup>8</sup> Every Child Matters aims to ensure that children's services work together so that every child and young person has the opportunity to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. For further information, see [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk).

A visit to a farm proved to be a highly stimulating experience for one Reception class. Two weeks later, when the inspector visited, the children were still talking enthusiastically about what they had seen and done. They were also proud to show the writing that they had produced about the farm. This was of a better standard than might be expected from children of their age but, more importantly, a stark improvement on the writing they had done before the visit.

10. Further evidence of the contribution of learning outside the classroom to achievement came from the pupils themselves.

'The history trip to Belgium affected me emotionally. My writing improved because I could empathise with how the soldiers felt in the trenches.'  
(Secondary pupil)

'Trips help us to learn more stuff than we can in the classroom.'  
(Primary pupil)

11. Learners of all ages involved in the survey said that they enjoyed working away from the classroom. They found it 'exciting', 'practical', 'motivating', 'refreshing' and 'fun'. They made such comments as:

- 'You see rather than listen.'
- 'We learn in a fun way.'
- 'We like learning by doing.'

12. The joy that the Reception pupils in one school felt as they energetically explored the school grounds was obvious. In another school, pupils who had listened passively in a lesson dominated by the teacher became animated and involved once they were given the opportunity to conduct their own research outside the classroom.

13. It was evident from the survey that learning outside the classroom could make an important contribution to pupils' future economic well-being and to preparing them for the next stage of their lives.

One secondary school organised regular 'enterprise days' where Key Stage 3 pupils took part in a range of activities, such as making kites or producing a newspaper. This gave them opportunities to work together towards shared aims and to develop skills such as leadership, teamwork and effective communication.

A primary school successfully achieved similar outcomes by giving its pupils carefully chosen investigative science challenges, in mixed-age groups, outside normal lessons.

14. Pupils and students in colleges and secondary schools said they benefited considerably from work experience and work-related learning placements. In particular, these helped them to consider carefully, and with much greater understanding, their career and course options.
15. In addition to the outcomes already described, learning outside the classroom also contributed to the three other Every Child Matters outcomes, namely being healthy, staying safe and making a positive contribution. This happened, for example, when the children and young people took on different and additional requirements to promote their own and each other's safety when out of the classroom; by undertaking extra physical exercise; or by joining in events within the local community or with other schools and colleges.

### **The importance of place**

16. Particular places can have special significance, bringing extra depth to pupils' and students' learning and experience.

Each year, in an event called 'Our Theatre', hundreds of pupils from Southwark plan and perform their own interpretation of a chosen Shakespeare play on the stage of the Globe Theatre. The setting allows young people to work where Shakespeare did, and imagine his time in a way that would be impossible in a classroom.

A school in the North East uses the Gateshead stadium for its annual sports day. The staff and the pupils commented on the increased motivation they derive from the opportunity to appear at a high status, professional venue where local and national sporting heroes have trained and competed.

The staff of the National Portrait Gallery reported that visiting pupils were clearly inspired by being told that they partly owned the building and its works of art.

A primary school used a beautiful local church for a fortnightly assembly. The architecture and atmosphere helped to promote the pupils' deep spiritual reflection and development which, in discussion, even the youngest recognised. In another school, in the face of some parental opposition, the headteacher felt it was extremely important to continue taking pupils each year to a mosque because simply being in that place contributed much to the pupils' understanding of Islam. It also helped to promote community cohesion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Section 21(4) of the Education Act 2002 (as inserted by section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) requires governing bodies in maintained schools in England to promote community cohesion in their schools. This duty came into effect on 1 September 2007.

## Leading and managing learning outside the classroom

17. The success of learning outside the classroom depended very much on the leadership of the schools and colleges. The best practice occurred when leaders:
- were strongly convinced of the need for a broad and motivating curriculum
  - were passionate and confident about improving learners' achievement, aspirations, character and personal development, and saw learning outside the classroom as a key means to do this
  - promoted a strong sense of common purpose among staff and an expectation that activities outside the classroom would be a regular part of the curriculum
  - supported the staff with robust planning and systems that promoted safe, exciting and well integrated learning
  - emphasised learning outside the classroom clearly in job descriptions and person specifications so that staff knew what was expected of them from the moment they applied to work in the institution.
  - The areas for improvement in leadership and management, which are explained later in this report, included the need to:
    - evaluate the impact of learning outside the classroom on pupils' and students' attainment and progress
    - ensure that learning outside the classroom was a feature of all subject areas and not confined to a few
    - make better use of the grounds and immediate locality to promote learning outside the classroom.

## Provision outside the school day

18. Many of the schools and colleges in the survey provided opportunities for pupils and students to take part in a range of additional activities during breaks and lunchtimes or before and after the end of the teaching day. One of the key benefits was that the activities enabled pupils and students of different ages to pursue similar interests together. Thus, primary pupils from different classes worked together very successfully and with pride to grow vegetables in the school garden. Similarly, in a secondary school, staff and pupils sang together in a flourishing choir conducted by a science teacher. Such activities enriched the range of what the schools and colleges could offer. In addition, they secured the commitment of the pupils and students, not only to specific activities but also to the whole life of the institution, greatly improving its ethos.
19. The schools and colleges visited were able to show how such activities also contributed to raising standards. For example, out-of-hours physical education activities did much to increase students' participation in sport and to develop their levels of fitness and skill. This echoed the findings of other investigations

such as Ofsted's inspections of music provision: these have shown that the standards of performance achieved in choirs, productions and instrumental groups are often very high and considerably higher than those found in classroom lessons.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, a recent survey of extended schools indicated that provision outside the normal school day was having a positive impact on the achievement and personal development of children and young people, especially those in danger of underachieving.<sup>11</sup>

## Integrating learning inside and outside the classroom

### Free movement between the indoor and outdoor environments

20. The curriculum guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage says that, where possible, the indoor and outdoor environments should be linked 'so that children can move freely between them'.<sup>12</sup> The extent to which this happened within the Nursery and Reception classes visited during this survey varied. The best practice is illustrated in the following example:

Young children in the Foundation Stage moved independently from indoors to outdoors, staying with their own choices of activity. They were used to this free-flow, which enabled them to use their imagination and pursue their ideas with autonomy. It also helped them to develop their understanding of staying safe. They knew the routines and expectations well, which helped them to behave more independently or collaboratively as appropriate. They responded well to the questions and guidance of adults, who had been deployed carefully to ensure constant supervision inside and outside. Resources in the outdoor area were few but carefully chosen, including creative play items such as boxes or shapes, which could be used for different purposes and encouraged the children's imagination and independence. These were changed often, according to the teacher's planning, to meet particular identified needs and were compatible with the resources indoors.

21. However, in some of the schools visited, outdoor areas were not easily accessible and, even where they were, they did not always provide pupils with such a rich range of choice or opportunity. Too often, a lack of suitable canopies or waterproof clothing unnecessarily limited the use of these areas.
22. All the primary schools visited used their buildings and grounds effectively to support teaching and learning. They also used the facilities in the local area productively, such as a wood or nearby shops. In the best instances, the pupils

<sup>10</sup> For further information, see *Provision of music services in 15 local education authorities* (HMI 2296), Ofsted, 2004; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2296](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2296).

<sup>11</sup> *How well are they doing? The impact of children's centres and extended schools* (HMI 070021), Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070021](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070021).

<sup>12</sup> For further information on the Early Years Foundation Stage, see [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/).

had the freedom to move between the different places purposefully and with autonomy, hardly noticing whether they were in a classroom or not. They were 'just learning', with staff ready to give appropriate support when needed. One teacher commented:

'The classroom is just a room at the end of the day. You don't have to have the lesson there.'

23. Some schools have made an explicit link between the use of school grounds and education for sustainable development.<sup>13</sup> They effectively promote pupils' understanding that care for their immediate surroundings is the first step in caring for their planet. Work observed included enhancing the school grounds and neighbouring open space by planting bulbs, looking after school woodland or taking an active part in community projects. The survey showed that primary schools were more effective than secondary schools in using their grounds and locality to support learning about sustainability.
24. Examples of effective work linking the curriculum to learning outside the classroom included a mathematics lesson where pupils examined shapes in the playground to extend their understanding of geometry; pond-dipping; exploring plants; using the school library independently; finding different building materials; and a survey of the traffic passing the school. Pupils in one school were awestruck as they watched chicks hatching. Larger scale activities included painting a playground mural; a local river study; working with a willow-weaver to create sculptures for the school grounds; a visit to a local cockle fisherman; and fieldwork in a nearby shopping centre.
25. Many of these activities were supervised by teaching assistants, although they were always planned or overseen by teachers, sometimes in conjunction with pupils. In one school, for example, pupils of all ages regularly helped to plan topics and activities and decide on the approaches. They often chose to learn outside the classroom. Combining the experience of teachers with the perceptions of pupils ensured that the activities were not only exciting but also led to high achievement.
26. The secondary schools visited made little use of free movement between activities inside and outside the classroom. Through flexible timetabling, some gave their pupils good opportunities to learn through short, focused activities within the local area or school grounds. However, timetabling constraints meant that little emphasis was placed on such activities in most of the schools. As a

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<sup>13</sup> *Schools and sustainability: A climate for change* (20070173), Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/20070173](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/20070173).

result, provision in some subjects, notably geography, was unnecessarily limited.<sup>14</sup>

## Day visits out of school

27. All the secondary schools and most of the primary schools visited provided a broad range of visits for pupils during the school day. The extent to which the schools ensured that these visits built on or enhanced learning in the classroom varied. It was better at secondary than at primary level.
28. A few primary schools prepared their pupils carefully for the planned visits, so that they would gain the maximum benefit, as in the following example:

In preparing a Year 5 class for fieldwork, the teacher used the interactive whiteboard to show photographs and a map of the village to be visited. Through a lively discussion, the pupils were helped to draw on their previous learning in geography and to decide how they would analyse and evaluate what they might find on the visit and use the information when they returned to the classroom.

29. However, this level of rigour was too often missing from the planning of primary school day visits. The objectives for the visit were rarely defined carefully enough, or related sufficiently to classroom work. This was particularly the case with visits to external providers, such as museums, galleries, field centres or theatre workshops.
30. One of the main reasons for using these providers was to capitalise on their expertise. Very often, staff from the providers rather than the schools contributed much of the teaching. However, because there tended to be little liaison or planning with the schools before the visit, it was difficult for the providers to know what the pupils already knew or were meant to learn. Many providers produced worksheets and other educational materials; these were of high quality and available freely to the schools. However, schools often used these uncritically, without ensuring that they were relevant enough or adapting them sufficiently to their own classes' particular learning activities.
31. In the best primary visits, staff, parents and other volunteers supervising the pupils were given clear guidance about the expected learning and how to promote it, for example by asking key questions. However, this was not always done well, with the result that the focus on learning in the minds of adults and pupils was diluted. The organisation of day visits, too, meant that the actual time spent on learning was often short and, when set against travel, lunch and a visit to the shop, was given too little priority. The visits therefore did not make the best use of the resources available to build on pupils' knowledge,

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<sup>14</sup> This reflects the findings of a recent report, *Geography in schools: changing practice* (070044), Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070044](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070044). This showed that statutory requirements for fieldwork were not met in two thirds of the secondary schools in the sample of schools visited.

skills and understanding. Despite these weaknesses, discussions with the pupils showed that the visits promoted some worthwhile learning and enjoyment.

32. Approaches to planning visits in the secondary schools in the survey were generally more rigorous. Members of staff intending to lead a visit were usually required to discuss and refine learning objectives with a senior manager beforehand to ensure that it added sufficient value to the pupils' learning, particularly in examination courses, and that the benefits outweighed what could have been gained from the lessons missed. This was necessary because, in many secondary schools, staff not involved in a visit would be concerned that the visit took time away from other areas of learning.
33. Secondary school pupils invariably spoke with enthusiasm about the relevance of the visits and the way that their learning had improved. One commented: 'I can now remember better because I can visualise the practical experience we had.' Some secondary schools exploited these advantages further by arranging repeat visits to a centre or college over a period of time, so that pupils could receive expert support in preparing for external qualifications, for example in leadership or outdoor activities.
34. When visiting an external provider, such as a museum or art gallery, secondary schools were less likely than primary schools to transfer responsibility for organisation and teaching to the provider. They also tended to have a clearer educational purpose. A representative from one provider summed up the view of many when she said:

'Primarys look for a good experience. Secondaries fit it more to their scheme of work.'

## Residential visits out of school

35. There were similar contrasts between primary and secondary schools in their approaches to planning residential visits.
36. A small number of the primary schools in the survey organised residential visits entirely themselves. These tended to relate the visits very closely to their curriculum objectives, such as designing a visit that built successfully on the class's science, geography and history work.
37. However, in common with the situation nationally, the primary schools in the survey relied increasingly on commercial centres to arrange and provide residential visits because of concerns about health and safety and the high workload for staff, especially in small schools. The centres provided a menu of enjoyable and challenging activities. They used appropriately qualified instructors in well organised and often large-scale residential environments where safety and security were the highest priority. Schools chose the activities in which their pupils took part, for which the centres published learning objectives.

38. The activities contributed well to pupils' learning and personal development. However, it was uncommon for teachers to liaise closely with the staff of the centres beforehand to plan how the chosen activities could draw on, and develop further, the learning that had taken place at school. The teachers' professional skills and knowledge of the pupils' particular needs were not used well enough and the residential visit became an isolated special event.
39. Many primary schools provided residential visits for Year 6 pupils, usually after the end of key stage national tests. This timing meant that such activities did not contribute to pupils' learning at Key Stage 2 as much as they could have. The high demand at that time of the year also made the residential visits more expensive. As with day visits, this did not mean that such visits were not valuable but that they could be improved.
40. This was in marked contrast to the approach of secondary schools where residential visits were carefully planned to build on what had been learned in class and focused closely on curricular objectives and examination requirements, as well as on individuals' personal development. Whether they made the arrangements directly themselves or delegated them to commercial companies, the schools maintained a close oversight of the activities and learning objectives.
41. In addition to the activities already described, most of the secondary schools in the survey arranged social or recreational residential trips, such as skiing, or sightseeing in London, but most of these took place at weekends or during vacations.

### **Planning skills-based and work-related learning**

42. It was common for the secondary schools in the survey to organise vocational or work-related courses that involved placements for pupils over full terms or the school year, often for a half-day or day each week. Some of the schools monitored the quality of such provision very carefully by visiting teaching sessions and checking pupils' progress. Some secondary pupils achieved very well in such courses because of the schools' careful planning of the experiences with employers or colleges, linking the experiences closely with work in school. For example, pupils on a vocational technology course at a college were able to go back to school at the end of the day to continue their practical work and discuss it with their teachers.
43. Learning outside the classroom in colleges is frequently integral to courses and indeed, very often, a key course requirement. Some further education courses cannot meet the qualification's specifications without residential visits. For example, uniformed public services courses require students to attend military establishments, police training centres and outward bound centres. Several programmes cannot work effectively without visits and residential programmes where students are exposed to wider, relevant cultural or vocational environments; gain practical experience; or demonstrate and develop

leadership and management skills, such as working in teams, communication and problem-solving. One business studies student said of the activities on the course: 'Everything we do is related to our course or a job.' Students on a childcare programme in one college had successfully planned a trip and undertaken risk assessments to prepare them for their future responsibilities. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities prepared for an outward bound residential course by engaging in a health and safety awareness and personal development briefing session. For some of the young people, it was their first experience of independence from home.

44. Each of the three colleges visited provided a good range of relevant enrichment activities for students, which involved learning outside the classroom. The students themselves contributed much to planning and organising these activities, which ensured their relevance. One college offered 80 programmes, 50 of which were run by students for students.

## **Evaluating learning outside the classroom**

### **Evaluating quality**

45. All the schools and colleges in the survey analysed achievement and standards and the quality of teaching and learning in lessons which took place in classrooms. However, only three of the schools and none of the colleges had conducted a rigorous analysis of the contribution that learning outside the classroom made to the curriculum or its impact on pupils and students.
46. Senior staff rarely observed learning activities outside the classroom to assess and assure their quality. Approximately half the schools, mainly secondary, conducted some evaluation with pupils, often in the form of a questionnaire, at the end of particular activities. However, there were very few examples of pupils and students being interviewed to identify what they had learned from their work outside the classroom and what improvements they had made as a result. Staff used anecdotal information to describe improvements in pupils' and students' behaviour, motivation or attitudes but they did not record or analyse this information systematically.
47. The lack of detailed evaluation meant that schools and colleges were not able to assess accurately the strengths and weaknesses of their provision outside the classroom or to bring about necessary improvements.

### **Evaluating inclusion**

48. All the schools and colleges in the survey were committed to inclusion and equal opportunities. Many of the activities that they organised outside the classroom had a wide appeal, with pupils and students from different backgrounds and with varying needs working together successfully and enjoyably.

49. However, only three of the schools and none of the colleges analysed the take-up of activities by different groups of pupils. The remaining institutions did not know to what extent boys and girls, lower and higher attaining students, those entitled to free school meals, or learners from different ethnic backgrounds took part in these activities or had equal and fair access to them.
50. The three schools that analysed participation used the information to try to bring about improvements. For example, they specifically encouraged under-represented groups to take part in activities and, in order to remove barriers, asked pupils why they chose not to participate. One school changed the time of choir rehearsals to attract boys who also wanted to play outside at lunchtime. Another was considering altering the timing of buses at the end of the day, so that pupils who lived some distance from the school were not prevented from taking part in extra-curricular activities.
51. In some cases, extra-curricular activities were not open to all. These included sports teams and musical groups for which pupils had to be selected or auditioned. The reasons given for this included the need to extend the opportunities for higher attainers. However, the schools and colleges did not always have explicit selection criteria or make alternative arrangements for others who might wish to take part. In the better examples, there were different tiers of provision, so that those not selected at the highest level could still be involved.
52. Occasionally in the secondary schools it was not possible to take all eligible pupils on a residential visit because of restrictions on numbers. Generally, the pupils saw this as fair, mainly because those who missed out on one visit were given priority the next time. The schools knew which pupils had participated but did not know whether particular groups of pupils were over or under-represented and therefore could not redress any inequalities.
53. Some pupils and students missed residential visits, not because of restrictions on numbers but because of their own reluctance to attend or their parents' disinclination to let them go. When this happened, especially in primary schools, the schools provided alternative activities to give the pupils similar experiences. For example, a teaching assistant in one school arranged for pupils to make a promotional video around the school site. Although such activities can be good, they can also provide further encouragement for some pupils not to attend a residential visit.
54. Since September 2007, all schools have a duty to promote community cohesion. Unless they have effective mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring that all learners have equal and fair access to activities outside the classroom, they cannot be certain that they fulfil the aspects of that duty relating to the cohesiveness of the school community and promote equality of opportunity.

## Overcoming barriers

55. This section of the report focuses on factors that might discourage schools and colleges from making learning outside the classroom an integral part of their work and shows how those in the survey had overcome them.

### Health and safety

56. A 16-year-old's perspective on geography fieldwork included the following observation:

'Health and safety is one of the main issues. It's impossible to take large groups anywhere really interesting, so coursework is limited to local areas and small-scale studies.'<sup>15</sup>

57. The Government recognises that concerns about health and safety, and fears of litigation in the event of accident or injury, can be barriers to taking young people out of the classroom. As part of its Staying safe action plan, it has tried to 'strike the right balance between protecting our children and allowing them the freedom to develop and enjoy childhood'.<sup>16</sup> According to the Health and Safety Executive 'the overwhelming majority of educational visits are carried out safely and responsibly by teachers who take the time and effort to get things right. The benefits of such trips to pupils can be immense. Exposure to well managed risks helps children learn important life skills, including how to manage risks for themselves'.<sup>17</sup>
58. All the schools and colleges in the survey were determined that, because of its importance, learning outside the classroom would happen. They organised clear, appropriate and well understood procedures for managing health and safety and risk assessment. These were based on guidance from the local authority and the LSC and overseen by the coordinator for educational visits, senior managers and governors.<sup>18</sup>
59. All the school policies were explicit about the ratio of adults to young people on visits. They also had efficient systems for ensuring that appropriate checks were made on teachers and all adults, including support staff, parents, carers, governors and other volunteers who might supervise young people.<sup>19</sup> Some of the schools made considerable efforts to train or brief such volunteers, so that

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<sup>15</sup> 'Is geography a boring subject?' *The Guardian* (Education supplement), 29 January 2008.

<sup>16</sup> For further information, see [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/stayingsafe/](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/stayingsafe/).

<sup>17</sup> For further information, see [www.hse.gov.uk/schooltrips/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/schooltrips/index.htm).

<sup>18</sup> Since 2002, all schools have been asked to appoint a member of staff to act as educational visits coordinator.

<sup>19</sup> It is necessary for schools to ensure, as appropriate, that adults working with children have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau and against List 99. The latter, drawn up by the DCSF names those people whose employment has been barred or restricted, either through misconduct or on medical grounds.

they were clear what was expected of them, not only in relation to health and safety but also in promoting an activity's learning objectives. In all cases, expectations about health and safety were discussed with the learners. Through their frequent involvement in learning outside the classroom, they had developed a very clear understanding of their responsibility for their own and others' health and safety. The schools inspected in the survey ensured that if any activities, such as outdoor pursuits, were particularly hazardous, they used centres with appropriate accreditation and checked the qualifications of the instructors and, when appropriate, their own staff.

## Learning outside the classroom as an 'extra'

60. Some of the schools visited reported that, in the past, they had viewed learning outside the classroom as an 'extra' or special treat, confined to termly or yearly trips for each class. However, by reviewing their practice and re-assessing the value of learning outside the classroom, they were exploiting its advantages to better effect and it was now an integral part of the curriculum.
61. During the survey, some headteachers reported that staff, governors and parents had expressed concern that time spent outside the classroom might reduce academic attainment. However, they had been able to present evidence to show that a broad and balanced curriculum, with learning outside the classroom as a powerful element, supports higher achievement.<sup>20</sup> As a result, they had gained the support of the sceptics.
62. Of the headteachers interviewed, only six had any detailed knowledge of the Government's *Learning outside the classroom manifesto*. Several headteachers and others interviewed in the survey expressed concern that there was insufficient publicising of its content and that not enough had been done to present a coherent picture of how it might relate to other government programmes, including the National Strategies,<sup>21</sup> This was not helpful to them in arguing the case for learning outside the classroom.

## Financial costs

63. In the schools visited there was a long tradition of asking parents to make a considerable financial contribution to learning outside the classroom, for example by covering transport costs and entrance fees. In law, schools may not charge for any activities within the school day other than musical instrument lessons, and even then only in certain circumstances. However, they can request voluntary contributions and are permitted to point out to parents that visits and other activities will not take place if sufficient contributions are not received.<sup>22</sup> This means that, in practice, learning outside the classroom is rarely

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<sup>20</sup> For example, evidence from *The curriculum in successful primary schools* (HMI 553), Ofsted, 2002; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/553](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/553).

<sup>21</sup> For further information, see [www.nationalstrategies.org.uk](http://www.nationalstrategies.org.uk).

<sup>22</sup> For further information, see [www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/c/chargingforactivities/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/c/chargingforactivities/).

provided free, even when it is an integral part of the curriculum. The schools visited saw this as a barrier to extending such work because they were reluctant to ask parents to contribute too much too often.

One school, however, had a policy that all visits should be provided free because they were seen as an essential part of the curriculum and given equal status with other aspects of its provision. It met the costs from its budget or through fund-raising. Most of the headteachers interviewed, however, had not given sufficient thought to how to finance learning outside the classroom other than through parental contributions. They had not considered whether devoting a part of their budget to visits might not have as much impact on their pupils' learning as spending the same amount, for example, on employing a new teaching assistant or purchasing more computers. A few headteachers had not appreciated that such choices were available to them. The fact that so few of the institutions visited conducted a detailed evaluation of learning outside the classroom meant that they were not able to compare the effectiveness, or the value for money, of different types of provision and expenditure.

64. Nevertheless, all the schools surveyed had found effective ways of reducing costs to parents. Almost all made some funds available to support cases of genuine hardship and could show effective and tactful use of these to ensure some pupils did not miss out. Some schools subsidised some visits and made particular use of the provision made available free or at reduced costs by organisations such as the national museums, English Heritage, Globe Education, the Birmingham Royal Ballet and the National Trust. Schools in London made use of the free public transport available to them. Making residential visits at off-peak times and focusing particularly on activities that could be pursued locally were other strategies used to reduce costs.

## **Behaviour**

65. Most of the headteachers interviewed recognised that concerns about pupils' behaviour could be a barrier to organising learning outside the classroom. Some of the secondary schools had punished poor behaviour by not allowing pupils to go on visits and trips. However, in the majority of the schools visited, there was a belief that learning outside the classroom could help overcome difficult behaviour rather than be an extra risk factor. The pupils and students themselves supported this view, saying that one of the attractions of learning outside the classroom was that everyone behaved well because they were motivated and active. In the wide range of examples of learning outside the classroom observed during this survey, inspectors saw nothing but good or very good behaviour. This echoed the findings of an earlier Ofsted report that showed that pupils' attitudes and behaviour during outdoor and adventurous

activities were good and often exemplary, 'with mature responses to challenging situations'.<sup>23</sup>

66. Pupils whose behaviour in other circumstances had been reported as poor often responded well to involvement in high quality, stimulating activities, as the following example shows:

A group of 15-year-old boys in a pupil referral unit (PRU) who had been excluded from mainstream school in the past took part in a weekly session where they learned how to handle small motor boats on the Thames Basin. They all progressed well, taking considerable responsibility for their own and each other's health and safety, and working collaboratively. This work led directly to the possibility of their gaining demanding accredited qualifications and the possibility of future employment. Their behaviour was exemplary and they thoroughly enjoyed these sessions. The PRU staff noted that their attendance in full-time education had increased markedly while on the programme. For many, it rose from about 30% to over 80%.

## Workload

'It is a joy to go on school trips but organising them is such a hassle... getting the transport, collecting the money and sending out the letters.'<sup>24</sup>

67. This sums up a common theme, namely that staff want to take their pupils out of school but can find the workload, especially the preparation, excessive. The schools and colleges sampled did not underestimate this, pointing out that learning outside the classroom often requires much goodwill from members of staff, requiring them, for example, to visit locations beforehand and to plan them in their own time. However, they had all found ways of reducing the workload and had built these into their practice.
68. The most effective single strategy was the use of well trained administrative support staff to organise transport, make bookings, collect money and contribute to preparing risk assessments.<sup>25</sup> This allowed teachers to concentrate on the educational planning and preparation.
69. Teachers' workload was also reduced where local authorities or centres provided generic risk assessments for common activities which could be adapted to suit the particular visits. In addition, many providers produced work sheets and teaching materials which teachers could use in their preparation. However, as noted earlier, these were sometimes used too uncritically. Within

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<sup>23</sup> *Outdoor education: aspects of good practice* (HMI 2151), Ofsted, 2004; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2151](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2151).

<sup>24</sup> 'In-class learning no match for inspiring trips', *Times Educational Supplement*, 4 January 2008.

<sup>25</sup> This has been made more possible by the 2003 workforce remodelling agreement which brought changes to teachers' conditions of service and enhanced the roles of school support staff. For further information, see; [www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/remodelling/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/remodelling/).

schools, advice and support from the coordinator for educational visits also ensured that the staff organising visits focused only on what really needed to be done in preparation and thus avoided superfluous effort.

70. Where learning outside the classroom was an integral part of the curriculum, much of the planning, particularly of educational objectives and the practicalities of the visit, had already been completed. This further reduced the demands on staff.

## The role of coordinators for educational visits, local authorities, and Learning and Skills Councils

71. In 1998, following a series of tragic incidents, the then Department for Education and Employment published a guidance document, *Health and safety of pupils on educational visits*; it has been updated and remains current. In 2002, the then Department for Education and Skills stated that it was 'good practice' for local authorities to appoint outdoor education advisers and for schools to identify coordinators for educational visits, principally to ensure that health and safety requirements were met.<sup>26</sup> Local LSCs also have health and safety officers who work with health and safety personnel from colleges, following the same national guidance as schools. The fact that each local authority draws up its own health and safety procedures has led to some inconsistency nationally. Nevertheless, because of the expertise built up within authorities, schools value the guidance they issue and are confident that, by following it, they will have covered all reasonable expectations and requirements.

Preparing for visits was made much easier for schools in one area because the local authority provided exemplars and pre-written risk assessments for the most common types of activities and visits which they were likely to undertake. These had been written by corporate health and safety officers and were designed for schools to adapt. This saved them time and money and gave additional confidence to the staff and parents.

72. Discussions with outdoor education advisers showed that the number of accidents reported on activities outside the classroom was considered by them to be low and they were confident that the young people taking part were as safe as reasonably possible. However, they expressed a common concern that the unremitting focus on health and safety left them too little time to encourage and improve further the educational value of activities outside the classroom. Many of these advisers, however, were developing training and guidance for schools on promoting high quality, as well as health and safety, in activities outside the classroom.

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<sup>26</sup> For further information, see; *Standards for LEAs in overseeing educational visits* (0564), DFES, 2002; [www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=2576](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=2576).

73. All the schools visited had appointed a coordinator for educational visits. In most of the primary schools, this was the headteacher. In secondary schools, it was more often a senior member of staff. In some schools, an administrator rather than a teacher fulfilled the role. In all cases, the coordinators carried out their roles effectively in line with national and local guidance. Appropriate checks on health and safety processes were made by senior staff or governors or both, according to each school's policy. Where possible, in the light of experience, schools had streamlined procedures they considered bureaucratic. The coordinators often shared their expertise with colleagues, providing reassurance and practical help during the planning and preparation of visits. In some schools, they were also involved in promoting and assuring the educational benefit and quality of educational visits, although this was consistently a minor aspect of the role.

## Notes

Between May 2007 and March 2008, six of Her Majesty's Inspectors inspected 12 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, one special school, one pupil referral unit and three colleges, selected because inspection reports showed that they had good, outstanding or rapidly improving practice in relation to learning outside the classroom. Inspectors also visited or contacted 13 specialist providers of learning outside the classroom, such as museums, residential centres and arts organisations, and held discussions with representatives of five local authorities.

## Further information

### Publications

*Health and safety of pupils on educational visits* (HSPV2), DfEE, 1998;  
<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=HSPV2&>.

*The curriculum in successful primary schools* (HMI 553), Ofsted, 2002;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/553](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/553).

*Outdoor education: aspects of good practice* (HMI 2151), Ofsted, 2004;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2151](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2151).

*Learning outside the classroom manifesto* (ISBN 978-1-64478-861-3), DfES, 2006;  
[www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/resourcematerials/outsideclassroom/](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/resourcematerials/outsideclassroom/).

*Children's plan: building brighter futures*, DCSF, 2007;  
[www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/).

*How well are they doing? The impact of children's centres and extended schools* (HMI 070021) Ofsted, 2008; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070021](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070021).

*Geography in schools: changing practice* (HMI 070044) Ofsted, 2008;  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070044](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070044).

Staying safe action plan (ISBN 978-1-84775-106-5), DCSF, 2008;  
<http://www.ttrb.ac.uk/viewArticle2.aspx?contentId=14132%20>.

### Websites

The Early Years Foundation Stage; [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs/).

Health and Safety Executive  
Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP); [www.oeap.info](http://www.oeap.info).

## **Annex**

### **Schools, colleges, local authorities and providers visited or providing evidence for this survey**

#### **Primary schools**

Arden Hill Infant School, Warwickshire  
Bishop Sutton Primary School, Bath and North East Somerset  
Brockwell Junior School, Derbyshire  
Cheam Common Junior School, Sutton  
Gateway Primary School, Westminster  
Higher Bebington Junior School, Wirral  
Kelvin Grove Primary School, Gateshead  
Magdalene Gates First School, Norfolk  
Ryarsh Primary School, Kent  
St Peter's Church of England Primary School, Southwark  
Tatham Fells Church of England Primary School, Lancashire  
Thornhill Lees Church of England Infant School, Kirklees

#### **Special school**

Claremont School, City of Bristol

#### **Secondary schools**

Alcester Grammar School, Warwickshire  
Allerton High School, Leeds  
Chilwell School, Nottinghamshire  
Didcot Girls' School, Oxfordshire  
Emmanuel College, Gateshead  
Farrington Community Sports College, Sunderland  
St Thomas More Roman Catholic Comprehensive School, Greenwich  
The Hayfield School, Doncaster  
Whitburn Church of England School, South Tyneside  
Whitecross School, Gloucestershire

#### **Pupil Referral Unit**

Project 16, Islington

#### **Colleges**

Hills Road Sixth Form College, Cambridgeshire  
North East Worcestershire College, Worcestershire  
Telford College of Arts and Technology, Telford and Wrekin

## **Local authorities**

Cambridgeshire  
Cornwall  
Salford  
Southwark  
Sutton.

## **Organisations visited**

Birmingham Royal Ballet  
Boreatton Park PGL Residential Centre, Shropshire  
Delaware Adventure Zone for Learning (DAZL) Playing for Success Centre, Cornwall  
English Heritage  
Globe Education  
Islington Boat Club  
Kingswood Residential Centre, Isle of Wight  
Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester  
Royal Horticultural Society  
The National Trust.

## **Organisations providing further information**

National Portrait Gallery  
Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel  
Royal Shakespeare Company.