



OUTDOOR LEARNING POLICY

Approved and signed by the Learning and Standards Committee

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CHANGES

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Policy implemented

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1. Aim

In line with the Discovery MAT vision we aim to embrace outdoor learning as a method of offering a greater range of quality learning experiences and opportunities. These opportunities will improve and promote knowledge of the environment and sustainability; provide a rich curriculum; help children to develop life skills and promote mental health and wellbeing across the schools in the trust.

2. Policy Development

This policy has been formulated with consideration to the following documents:

Discovery MAT Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

Discovery MAT Managing and Supporting Positive Behaviour Policy

Discovery MAT Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Policy

DfE The National curriculum in England Framework Document December 2014

DfE Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage Setting standards for learning development and care for children from birth to five. Published 31 March 2021 effective 1 September 2021

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2018) A green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment.

Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2011) The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature (CM8082)

In addition, this policy should not be considered in isolation but used and interpreted in conjunction with all other relevant Discovery MAT policies including, but not restricted to, Health and Safety, Inclusion and Safeguarding.

3. What is Outdoor Learning?

Outdoor learning encompasses a range of activities, situations and learning opportunities including onsite learning within the trust premises, local visits to outdoor spaces and residential visits further afield. Outdoor learning provides experiential learning for curriculum subjects, improves understanding of the environment and encourages physical activity linked to health and wellbeing. In addition, use of outdoor space encourages children to develop resilience, confidence and risk awareness.

Outdoor learning is an approach to learning which can be incorporated into every area of the curriculum. Being outdoors allows children and young people to engage directly with the environment through a hands-on approach, allowing them to make connections on their learning journey. Rather than being infrequent and informal, taking classes outdoors should be seen as an integral part of classroom activities and used to meet both the curricular and non-curricular needs of students.

By learning about the local environment, children and young people start to make sense of the social, cultural, physical, geographical and ecological make-up of the landscape – how their culture, the land they live on and the living organisms that share it with them has been shaped and is unique to them.

Outdoor learning gives children opportunities to explore themes that have high levels of personal relevance and interest. Effective outdoor learning is experiential by nature so helping students to find answers to questions asked through curiosity enables them to “learn how to learn” more independently.

Children and young people learn by making decisions and taking responsibility for themselves and others. Learning outside in your local environment can provide greater opportunities to take responsibility for yourself, others and the natural world. Effective learning happens when children and

young people experience situations where they need to consider different courses of action and then make decisions – the consequences of these decisions directly affecting themselves and others. For the purposes of this policy outdoor learning is defined as: an effective teaching tool that encompasses all aspects of the Discovery MAT ethos and focuses on the purposeful use of outdoor space to enhance, extend and complement children’s learning and life experiences.

4. Outdoor learning and Health and Wellbeing

Evidence shows that outdoor activity supports and promotes positive mental health. Individual health and wellbeing benefits of contact with nature include better sleep, reduced anxiety and stress levels, increased social connectedness and improved cognitive and motor development all of which contribute to positive functioning in an education environment. Connection with green space is associated with stress reduction, enhanced cognitive function, improved self-esteem and reduced levels of depression and anxiety.

5. Equality of Opportunity

Outdoor learning is inclusive; allowing all children to participate and develop skills.

Outdoor learning across Discovery MAT strives to help and support the integration of children who would normally find formal school education challenging. Involvement with outdoor activities enhances social and emotional learning skills for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties improving outcomes in education and life experiences.

In conjunction with our HUT and SEN provision we look to use outdoor learning to enhance and extend provision for those children who find classroom learning difficult. In addition, following current theoretical study, we look to provide and develop outdoor areas as safe spaces for emotional relief from common stress factors many children face in modern life.

6. Outdoor learning and STEM

As a STEM focused trust we see outdoor learning as a key utility in providing, supporting and encouraging STEM activities within the curriculum.

Outdoor learning promotes the development and use of the 6 key STEM learning skills:

- **Problem Solving** - how to approach a task.
- **Creativity** - think outside the box.
- **Inquiry Skills** - questioning why something is as it is.
- **Observation** - looking closely.
- **Flexibility** - change the way you try things if it doesn’t work.
- **Collaboration** - working together.

7. Outdoor learning within the Curriculum

We look to embed outdoor learning within the curriculum by:

- Encouraging children to engage with, understand and care for outdoor space and the natural environment.
- Developing the outdoor spaces available at all the trust sites to enable children to engage in motivational, effective and purposeful learning.

- Providing opportunities to engage with the wider outdoor environment by providing residential and offsite visit opportunities.
- Ensuring staff are confident to use creative and engaging planning in all areas of the curriculum that includes regular outdoor activities.
- Providing specialist training for those staff interested in developing and promoting outdoor learning.

8. Health and Safety

All outdoor learning is carried out with the safety of children, staff and visitors within the school as a priority. All health and safety regulations are followed in line with government guidelines (Health and Safety at Work act 1974). The current Health and Safety policy for the MAT and for the individual sites should be followed and Risk assessments should be completed and/or checked for any specific outdoor activities such as camp-fires and gardening. Risk assessments should be stored on sharepoint for the benefit of all staff. Outdoor learning on site should not require special equipment or resources, teachers to be an expert in outdoor education or complicated risk assessments. However, best practice should involve risk/benefit plan that allow children to undertake controlled risks which develops their overall resilience.

Most outdoor learning activities carry no higher risk than activities and situations faced by learners on a daily basis. However specific issues when outdoors with children and young people include ensuring children are suitably dressed, fed and hydrated. Consideration of conditions such as temperature, wind and rain. External risk elements such as stray dogs, animal droppings or road traffic can be serious health hazards.

Strategies for overseeing and moving children from one place to another and knowing exactly who is where at any given time should already be an embedded part of a teacher's professional day-to-day practice so existing practice should be adapted to the outdoor environment. Systems for making sure that students bring whatever they need to be physically comfortable outside with them, managing the group and maintaining contact and control in a "classroom without walls" should already be in place, prior to leaving the school.

Health and Safety for residential trips and off-site visits require compliance with and completion of the EVOLVE database.

9. Assessment and Recording

Good practice in assessing outdoor learning should allow children to demonstrate "performance of understanding" and they should be given tasks that show they can build on existing knowledge and skills and use what they have learned to generalise, apply exceptions, give explanations, make predictions, evaluate, find examples and solutions, list strategies or argue by analogy. Assessment may be pupil or teacher led, peer or self-assessment. It will be used to inform and determine next steps.

10. Evaluating the success of the school's outdoor learning policy.

Annually, provide all children with an evaluation questionnaire of the outdoor learning they have participated in and find out what they have learned from it.

Monitoring of planning documents for inclusion of outdoor learning throughout the year.

Assessment and Recording.

Outdoor learning opportunities within Discovery MAT academies include:

- Forest School activities
- Junior Ten Tors (JTT)
- Local area visits
- Nethercott Farm

- City trip
- Go Kart racing
- RHS gardening scheme
- REACH
- Woodland Trust – Green Tree School award

II. Further information and resources

For more information on outdoor learning and use of school grounds including training courses:

- Learning through landscapes
- Institute of Outdoor Learning
- Learning outside the classroom
- Muddy Puddle teaching
- Forest Schools

For educational resources and ideas linked to outdoor learning including curriculum linked lesson plans:

The woodland trust <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk>

Kew endeavor <https://www.kew.org/learning/endeavor>

NFU education <https://education.nfuonline.com>

RHS campaign for school gardening [home / RHS Campaign for School Gardening](#)

Alfresco Learning <https://alfrescolearning.co.uk>