Play Scotland Members Briefing on Outdoor Classroom Day
November 2018

Motion S5M-14384: Ruth Maguire, Scottish National Party

“That the Parliament notes that Outdoor Classroom Day takes place on 1 November 2018; understands that this is a global campaign to celebrate and inspire outdoor learning and play believes that thousands of schools, including many across Scotland, will be participating by taking lessons outdoors and prioritising playtime; considers that outdoor learning improves children’s health, engages them with learning and leads them to develop better social skills, enhanced problem solving and team working skills; commends the work of organisers to promote participation by schools in Outdoor Classroom Day, which takes place on two dates each year to fit with term times, and notes the hope that such events will encourage more time learning outside every day.”

Outdoor Classroom Day is a proven catalyst for more time spent outdoors at school – including playtime

The campaign is about more than just one day. It is a campaign to inspire more time outdoors every day – playing, learning, exploring and having fun, both at school and at home.

To achieve this, the campaign has three aims:
1. outdoor learning is part of every school day for every child
2. every child has great playtime/recess at school every day for at least 60 minutes, with the longer-term aim of 90 minutes
3. schools act as advocates for more time outdoors, so that outdoor play becomes part of every child’s everyday life.

Outdoor Classroom Day 2018 in numbers

As at 30 October 7pm there are
- 3,016,686 Children involved globally in 2018
- 543,616 Children involved in the UK & Ireland so far
- 3,562 schools across the UK
- Over 40,000 schools have got involved since the campaign started.
- Including 630 schools across Scotland, out of a total 2,514

To see the current sign ups view: https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/

25% of all the schools across Scotland are signed up to say THEY believe in outdoor learning and
The state of Outdoor Learning and Play in Scotland

The Muddy Hands report published today sets out a snapshot survey of the schools that took part in Outdoor Classroom Day 2017. There is no other global comparison of outdoor playtime length and frequency of outdoor learning.

The report suggests that:

- Worldwide 1 in 8 (12%) children have less than 30 minutes of playtime a day at school
- Worldwide 1 in 5 (17%) never have lessons outdoors

In Scotland the picture is mixed:

Scotland is now amongst the best in the world in offering outdoor learning - overall Scottish teachers surveyed took children out for lessons more frequently than anywhere else

- 4 out of 5 schools (81%) went outdoors for lessons once a week or more
- Compared to three quarters in Australia, two thirds (66%) in England and half (56%) in the US.

But from the responses to the survey, we are not doing as well in offering outdoor play at school:

- 7 out of 10 schools that responded (71%) have less than 1 hour of outdoor playtime a day
- In England it is 57%, in Australia only 35%
- Except for the US, our children have amongst the shortest playtimes at school across 30 countries where schools responded.

Why is playtime at school and around the school day so important?

The evidence is clear, compelling and robust. Play is not just a ‘nice to have’. It is not ‘a shame’ children don’t play outdoors as much as they used to. It’s a ticking time bomb – the mental and physical health of our children is at risk.

It is through playing outdoors that our children can

- Improve their physical health
  - Children are 2.5 times more active outdoors compared to inside, and
  - they sustain physical activity for longer.
- Improve their mental health
  - Being outdoors makes us happier. We all know this – just think about how you feel when the sun shines on your face – but multiple research studies from across the world show, that whatever the weather, as long as we are dressed right, children – and adults – feel less stressed, more relaxed and happier if they have been outdoors.
  - Being outdoors regularly and often helps children identify a safe, quiet space where they can reflect.
Outdoors and away from screens helps children build positive relationships, making and sustaining friendships and develop the social skills they will need throughout life.

- **Improve academic progress**
  - Children NEED time to assimilate learning.
  - After playtime outdoors children are more attentive to lessons, more on task
  - In a study of more than 2500 children in Spain, exposure to ‘total surround' with a 5% increase in the progress of working memory, 6% increase in the or working memory and 1% reduction of inattentiveness.¹

- **Outdoor play helps connect children to the places they live and the planet around them**
  - We only love what we know.
  - Playing outdoors for sustained periods of time regularly and often leads to greater care and concern for the environment.
  - More green space in deprived urban neighbourhoods in Scotland is linked to lower levels of perceived stress and improved physiological stress as measured by diurnal patterns of cortisol secretion.²

As Sir David Attenborough says: “No one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced.”³

Research by Tim Gill (author of ‘No Fear’ and researcher) compared outdoor learning with outdoor play and found that while outdoor learning is important for understanding scientific facts, it was outdoor play that leaves children with a LOVE of the outdoors, so they want to protect it.

These findings are echoed in the Outdoor Classroom Day 2017 survey of teachers. Across the UK:
- 74% of teachers said that children are more engaged in learning after playing outdoors
- 83% said playing outside fosters an understanding of the environment
- 94% said playing outside makes children more creative
- 98% said outdoor play fosters social skills
- And 84% said it makes children happier.

Children who are happier at schools, more attentive in lessons and feel healthy are far, far more likely to succeed in school and grow up happy and healthy all their lives. All of these reasons are why in Finland 15 minutes of every hour at school has to be outdoors and is for children's own free time.⁴

Overall Scottish teachers that responded to the survey are pretty robust – and across the UK 24% said that ‘nothing' stops them taking lessons outdoors and 16% said ‘nothing' stops outdoor play.

One teacher in Scotland said:

“We usually ignore wet playtime and put our waterproofs on and get outside. I give up my break time to supervise this. Midges can be pretty brutal at times, however we still go outside”

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¹ Research by Segura and Stephan (2015)
² Research by Picketts et al. (2016)
³ Attenborough (2012)
⁴ Research by Van den Bulcke et al. (2016)
⁵ Research by Gill (2015)
⁶ Research by Lehtinen et al. (2018)
Why does outdoor play matter so much in Scotland?

Children in Scotland are at very serious risk of being overweight, of being inactive, and of experiencing poor mental health outcomes.

**Obesity**
- 14% children aged 2 to 15 are at risk of obesity, with a further 15% at risk of being overweight.  

**Mental health**
- 10% of 5-16 year-olds in the UK have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem.
- 26% of S4 pupils have signs of emotional and/or behavioural problems.
- The total number of CAMHS referrals in Scotland increased by 13.5% between 2013 and 2016.
- The long-term economic costs of poor mental health are huge and early intervention is key.

**Sedentary behaviour is amongst the biggest killer here in Scotland**
- Among 11-15 year-olds, only 21% of boys and 15% of girls got at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity of at least moderate intensity, the Scottish, UK, and international recommendation.
- This puts Scotland at the bottom of a ranked table of 40 other nations compared by The Global Matrix 3.0 On Physical Activity For Children And Youth.

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Why does this campaign work?

- Getting involved in Outdoor Classroom Day is a non-threatening introduction to the power of outdoor learning and significantly – **the importance of playtime**
- It introduces schools to experts (like Scotland’s own Juliet Robertson who wrote the campaign’s guide to outdoor learning), so they know how to get started
- It raises awareness of freely available tools such as the Play Strategy document on Loose Parts Play, (available on the Play Scotland website) which schools can use to revitalise their playtimes
- But most of all it makes it a NORMAL part of every day, simply common sense

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The impact of Outdoor Classroom Day so far

- 22% of schools worldwide (19% in the UK) increased playtime after getting involved in the campaign  
- 44% of schools increased outdoor learning (38% in the UK)
- The Australian Government has been encouraging every teacher to join in today by inviting them via their September payslips as well as letters to schools (and financially matching the funding from the corporate sponsor)
- In Indonesia, President Joko Widodo wants 60% of all school time to be out of the classroom and is launching this
initiative on Indonesia’s Outdoor Classroom Day TODAY – where over 500,000 children are signed up.
- Inspired by the campaign, today also marks the launch of a ‘month of play’ sponsored by four huge corporates (Persil, Ikea, Lego and National Geographic), because they too recognise there is a crisis facing our children and young people’s opportunity to just play.
- At least 1.5 million volunteers have got involved so far, helping schools get more children outdoors.
- At least 3 million parents and guardians have been told, via their children’s schools, that time to play is important.

With over 26,000 schools worldwide taking part in 2018, Outdoor Classroom Day makes playtime and getting outdoors part of every school day.

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Conclusion: key messages

- Of the teachers surveyed across the UK, 99% said they believe play time outdoors throughout the day is critical for children to reach their full potential.

- The Scottish Government has committed to encouraging and supporting inclusive play- based outdoor learning as part of the Outdoor Learning Coalition

- But playtime at school is important too. Playtime supports children’s social, emotional and academic development within the school day.

- When schools stand up and tell the world that they believe outdoor play is important, then parents listen, and the wider community listens.

- If we want Scottish children to be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors who want to protect the places they grow up in and the environment of the planet, then they need to play outdoors.

- If we want happy children, they need to play outdoors.

- We have to make playing outdoors everyday routine again.

- By supporting Outdoor Classroom Day not just today, but on 23 May and 7 November next year, and by supporting the goal that playtime at school should be at least 60 minutes long, the Scottish Government sends the message that we believe time outdoors for play is important, not just at school, but every day.

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More information: [https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/](https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/)
Download the full report: [http://www.playscotland.org/playful-learning/outdoor-classroom-day/](http://www.playscotland.org/playful-learning/outdoor-classroom-day/)
Appendix: Additional data cut for November 2018
From 2017 Outdoor Classroom Day data, looking at ALL schools (ages 3-18), pulling out statistics for Scotland.

1) Frequency of Outdoor Learning
Comparing all countries with >40 schools responding and ALL SCHOOLS being the average worldwide.

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<th>Row Labels</th>
<th>Less than once a month</th>
<th>About once a month</th>
<th>Once a week or more</th>
<th>Every Day</th>
<th>Total responses</th>
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Frequency of Outdoor Learning (all schools)
2) **Length of time outdoors for breaks (ALL SCHOOLS 3-18)**
Comparing all with >40 schools responding and ALL SCHOOLS being the average worldwide.

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<th>Countries</th>
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<th>30 minutes to an hour</th>
<th>60 to 90 minutes</th>
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**PLAYTIME OUTDOORS**

*Note Wales & NI have different education systems to England. The indications are that they get more play and learning time outdoors than is average in England, but we didn’t have enough responses to compare this time.*
References
3. Full data in appendices and in the report: https://www.dropbox.com/s/d9ondudc5ym7duf/Muddy%20Hands%20Global%20Report%20November%20%5B4%5D.pdf?dl=0
12. Prisk, C. and Cusworth H. (Nov 2018) From muddy hands and dirty faces to higher grades and happy places Outdoor learning and play at schools around the world. Outdoor Classroom Day