



# CarmarthenShire Outdoor Schools



Logo by Whitany Jones - Ysgol y Felin



# Our Outdoor Schools Champion

It is impossible to overstate just how much the outdoors has brought me personally and professionally, not just in terms of my physical and mental well being, but also with the immense pleasure I gain from communicating my passion to others, so they too can enjoy and care for our environment.

I was really lucky to have grown up with parents and schooling that placed an understanding of the natural world and wildlife at the heart of my development as a child. Once that seed was sown I was then able to feed that curiosity by engaging with the woods and rivers around my home, and then, years later, as an adult, make the outdoors central to almost everything I do. However, I can clearly recognise that many children are not so fortunate today.

I believe the two most important factors in fostering a healthy regard for the wild and nature are inspiration and access. Sadly, a prevailing myth that our natural environments are dangerous has seen much of our wilderness fenced off and marked out of bounds, stifling any possibility of safely introducing young people to the many wonderful wild worlds we have on our doorsteps, and causing the growth of a computer games and television-based culture that is seeing far too many staying indoors.

It is vital that our teachers are given the tools and time to help install and nurture an interest in getting outside, and I am immensely proud to be the patron of Carmarthenshire Outdoor Schools and all the work they do to support schools to achieve these goals. I only hope that their initiative and ideals can continue to grow, benefitting both future generations and installing the lifelong compassion we need to guarantee the future conservation of our marvellous countryside throughout Wales.

Will Millard

[www.willmillard.com](http://www.willmillard.com)



# What is an Outdoor School?

An Outdoor School pretty much is what it says on the tin: a school that has made a commitment to using the outdoors to enhance the learning and the wellbeing of the children and the adults.

*“An Outdoor School teaches pupils to become fully engaged with, and confident in their local environment. Through regular visits to their local outdoor areas the children develop a strong sense of well-being and enjoy physical activity. They acquire a useful knowledge of ecology and sustainability and develop communication skills by sharing this knowledge with others.”*

– Pembrokeshire Outdoor Schools

The objectives of an Outdoor School are:

- \* To ensure that children are fully engaged with and curious about the natural world
- \* To give them a sense of ownership of their local environment
- \* To increase the physical and emotional wellbeing by taking part in regular outdoor activities
- \* To develop personal and social skills such as confidence and communication
- \* To increase knowledge, understanding and skills relating to the ecology and sustainability of their local area



# Why be an Outdoor School?

## Benefits for your children

### Environmental

A connection with nature is so important for developing empathy for the environment; a study by the RSPB found that over three-quarters of people who felt connected to nature had changed their behaviours in the previous year out of concern for the environment compared to significantly fewer of those who did not feel connected. By taking learning outside we can establish in our children a passion for the outdoors creating active citizens and stewards of the environment.

### Personal and Social

Many studies have proven the positive effects of getting outdoors on personal and social skills. A programme of well planned, novel experiences in an unfamiliar environment can boost self-esteem and confidence, aid speech and language development and promote independence. An evaluation of two Welsh, pilot Forest Schools by National Foundation for Education Research reported that the children involved in the initiative demonstrated increased confidence, self-esteem and team working skills all of which will prove beneficial back in class.

### Emotional Wellbeing

Getting outside and connecting with nature will have a positive effect on the mental health and wellbeing of people of all ages. It has been found to ease the effect of ADHD, anxiety, depression and stress. A recent National Trust survey revealed that 80% of the happiest people in the UK said that they have a strong connection with the natural world, compared with less than 40% of the unhappiest.

### Physical Wellbeing

By giving young people time outdoors to experiment with different terrains their motor skills will develop more quickly and they will be stronger with better coordination. Time outdoors can also help tackle health issues such as obesity, gastro and respiratory problems and sleep deprivation. A participant in the National Trust study 'Natural Childhood Report' observed "If you watch a child playing outside they're just doing so many physical tasks – they run for hours, dig and climb. If you told them to do it they wouldn't, but they want to because they're playing. You won't get that level of physical activity with anything else."

### Cognitive

By offering these types of learning experiences, especially if they are not having them outside of school, can develop a huge range of skills. They can act as a bridge to higher order learning and creativeness. Tim Gill, a British child play expert suggests that 'Climbing a tree is an immersive, 360-degree experience that virtual or indoor settings simply cannot compare with.' Learning in the outdoor environment lends itself to a wider range of learning styles and multisensory experiences making learning more accessible. It has also been found to raise attainment, reduce truancy and improve discipline. A study by Glasgow University Psychology Department found that there was a statistically significant impact on children's attention after spending time in a woodland based playgroup compared to time in the classroom.



# Why be an Outdoor School?

## Benefits for your school

- \* Happier, healthier, more engaged pupils
- \* Real life context for teaching and learning
- \* Celebrate work you're already doing
- \* Positive accolade for the school with a certificate
- \* Opportunity to share best practise with other schools
- \* Access to training related to outdoor education
- \* Opportunity to engage wider school community
- \* Compliment other school based initiatives such as Healthy Schools and Eco Schools
- \* Recognised as good practice by ESTYN



# Why be an Outdoor School?

Wales is at the forefront of creating a more sustainable future. This is evidenced in Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). Outdoor learning can help us work towards the goals of this Act and create:

**A prosperous Wales:** outdoor learning encourages learners to understand the links between curriculum areas which promotes lifelong learning and develops critical thinking and innovation skills and lead to changes in life expectations and success.

**A resilient Wales:** children and young people have opportunities to develop skills to assess and manage risk when making decisions and develop perseverance.

**A healthier Wales:** learning outdoors can lead to lifelong recreation. Being active while connecting with the natural world are ideal for physical and emotional wellbeing.

**A more equal Wales:** outdoor experiences can fundamentally change personal, peer and staff perceptions whilst promoting inclusion and equality.

**A Wales of cohesive communities:** outdoor learning activities span social divisions and can help build stronger communities.

**A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language:** the great outdoors offer a wealth of opportunities to celebrate Welsh culture.

**A globally responsible Wales:** Frequent and regular outdoor learning encourages young people to engage with the natural world, understand the global significance of sustainability issues and inform personal decisions that contribute towards a greener Wales.



# How to be an Outdoor School?

There are 5 steps to becoming a Carmarthenshire Outdoor School. You might be doing some of them already!

## 1. A whole school commitment to outdoor learning

A shared vision should be adopted across the school that recognises the importance of taking learning outside and a commitment to introducing this at every level (including the adults) throughout the year.

## 2. Incorporate outdoor learning into the planning in every class

All children should be given regular opportunities to experience outdoor learning and this should be reflected in the planning and resourcing in every classroom. In Carmarthenshire this is likely to include wet weather gear!

## 3. Identify a suitable Outdoor School site

A site should be chosen that encourages children to become familiar with their own local outdoor environment; they may wish to share the site with their friends and family outside school hours. If your school is in a town you may wish to visit a local park.

## 4. Regular visits to the Outdoor School site for every class

Visits to the site should be frequent and take place throughout the year. This encourages children to develop a sense of ownership of the site and pride in their locality while having a chance to familiarise themselves with the site and explore during different seasons. We recommend at least one visit a term for every class.

## 5. Celebration of the commitment the school has made and the work they have done

A new school ethos will need a lot of effort and commitment and this should be celebrated! This may take the form of school displays, assemblies or team teaching. An annual celebration day will be held at the end of the school year in Carmarthenshire where new Outdoor Schools will be presented with their Carmarthenshire Outdoor Schools certificates and others will be invited to share best practice and find out what other schools have been up to in the outdoors.

Once you become an outdoor school there is no assessment process or renewal system, you simply ensure that you are living up to the name by adhering to the above steps and making an effort to work with other schools by attending meetings. If you no longer feel that you are you simply take down your certificate.



# Outdoor Schools Timetable

## Summer Term

June/July	Chairperson to invite new schools to join the project
July	Chairperson meet with new schools to explain the project/answer any questions

## Autumn Term

Sept	Representatives from all schools meet <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* discuss aims/objectives of project</li><li>* existing Outdoor Schools share experiences/best practice/project benefits</li><li>* staff training for the year discussed/planned</li></ul>
Sept/Oct	Complete questionnaires to establish baseline attitudes towards outdoor learning
Sept/Oct	New Outdoor Schools identify Outdoor School learning site
Nov/Dec	New Outdoor Schools develop a whole school timetable for use Outdoor School site

## Spring Term

Feb/Mar	Staff training on agreed topic
Jan-Apr	All classes to visit Outdoor School site
Jan-Apr	Increased use of onsite outdoor areas in all classes

## Summer term

Apr-July	All classes to visit Outdoor School site
Apr-July	Increased use of onsite outdoor areas in all classes
June	Celebration Event
June/July	Whole schools planning to incorporate more outdoor learning for next year



# Lead Schools

Four schools in Carmarthenshire were the first to become Outdoor Schools and are now acting as lead schools. Each has improved their outdoor learning provision in different ways including changes in teacher's planning, making improvements to outdoor areas, new outdoor resources and staff training..

They are happy for you to contact them or to visit them to find out how they have been getting on with being an Outdoor School.

**School:** Heol Goffa, Llanelli

**Head Teacher:** Nikki Symmons

**Outdoor Schools Coordinator:** Peter Welton

[pwelton@heolgoffa.ysgolccc.org.uk](mailto:pwelton@heolgoffa.ysgolccc.org.uk)

**What they've been up to:** making daily use of their lovely outdoor spaces, encouraging multisensory experiences plus having a go at Geocaching.



**School:** Teilo Sant, Llandeilo

**Head Teacher:** Roy James

**Outdoor Schools Coordinator:** Aled Prytherch

[aprytherch@ysgolccc.org.uk](mailto:aprytherch@ysgolccc.org.uk)

**What they've been up to:** every class has spent whole days at their Outdoor School site plus using the onsite outdoor areas more in Key Stage 2.



**School:** Llandeilo Primary, Llandeilo

**Head Teacher:** Karen Towns

**Outdoor Schools Coordinator:** Delyth Rees / Nicola Morris

[drees@llandeilo.ysgolccc.org.uk](mailto:drees@llandeilo.ysgolccc.org.uk) / [nmorrison@ysgolccc.org.uk](mailto:nmorrison@ysgolccc.org.uk)

**What they've been up to:** every class using the on site Forest School area plus fantastic whole school activities for Empty Classroom Day.



**School:** Ysgol Y Felin, Llanelli

**Head Teacher:** Helen Wynne

**Outdoor Schools Coordinator:** Melanie Towns

[mtowns@yfelin.ysgolccc.org.uk](mailto:mtowns@yfelin.ysgolccc.org.uk)

**What they've been up to:** working with their wider school community to improve their outdoor areas and develop a school garden.



# Appendices

## 1. Useful contacts in Carmarthenshire

## 2. Useful websites

Sites with useful information, resources and activities ideas

## 3. Pupil, staff and parent questionnaires

Completing these questionnaires before you become an Outdoor School will offer a record of your starting point to reflect on once you are into the programme. They can also act as a way to let people across the school community know about the programme.

## 4. Guidance

Some information on safety and sustainability. Most of what you do in relation to these topics will be very dependant on your site and your school's existing policies.

## 5. Ideas

Some ideas to try in the outdoors. Most of the useful websites in Appendix 2 offer a host more.



# Useful Contacts

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**Pembrokeshire Outdoor Schools**

[info@pembrokeshireoutdoorschools.co.uk](mailto:info@pembrokeshireoutdoorschools.co.uk)

<http://pembrokeshireoutdoorschools.co.uk/>

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**Catrin Rees** - Carmarthenshire Healthy Schools Coordinator

[CLRees@carmarthenshire.gov.uk](mailto:CLRees@carmarthenshire.gov.uk)

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**Education Department** - National Botanic Garden of Wales

01558 667 150

<https://botanicgarden.wales/learning/>

[kay.bailey@gardenofwales.org.uk](mailto:kay.bailey@gardenofwales.org.uk)

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**Angie Rekers** - Carmarthenshire based, freelance, outdoor learning specialist and Forest School leader and trainer

[rekerspower@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rekerspower@yahoo.co.uk)

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**Gyles Morris** - Director of Naturebase, environmental education and field studies centre, Lampeter

01570 471795

<http://www.naturesbaseeducation.co.uk/>

[gyles@naturebase.co.uk](mailto:gyles@naturebase.co.uk)

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**Marie Turk** - Incredible Edibles Carmarthenshire. Volunteer initiative supporting local communities with growing their own.

07814397999

[marieturke@hotmail.com](mailto:marieturke@hotmail.com)

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# Useful Websites

<http://pembrokeshireoutdoorschools.co.uk/>

The Pembrokeshire site offers more information on the Outdoor Schools concept. It also houses a bank of activity ideas

<http://www.bridgendreach.org.uk/school-resources/i/315/desc/outdoor-schools-pack/>

Bridgend have been working on their own Outdoor Schools project and have produced some good resource packs

<http://www.tavernspiteschool.co.uk/outdoor-learning.php>

Take a look at Tavernspite School's website to get an idea of the whole school ethos adopted there

<http://www.ltl.org.uk/>

Learning Through Landscapes offer ideas for resources and activities, training and strategic support

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/approaches/outdoorlearning/index.asp>

Education Scotland offers more strategic support

<http://www.outdoorlearningwales.org/resources/resource-library/>

OLW offers case studies into the benefits of taking learning outdoors as well as lesson plans, mostly designed by teachers

<http://www.countrysideclassroom.org.uk/>

Used to be called Growing Schools and great for resources, activities and lesson plans as well as interesting blogs and a useful newsletter

<http://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/activity-sheets>

The Wildlife Trust offer ideas relating to wildlife

<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/>

<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/mediafile/100146207/Getting-outside-the-classroom-learning-pack.pdf>

The Woodland Trust have a range of activity ideas sorted by age and a very comprehensive guide to outdoor learning

<https://www.opalexplornature.org/identification>

OPAL have a range of lovely resources to help you ID the flora and fauna in your outdoor areas. You could complete one of their surveys as an activity

<https://uk.pinterest.com/>

Pinterest is a really good place for ideas for resources and activities

<http://thewaleswewant.co.uk/about/well-being-future-generations-wales-act-2015>

Welsh Government law relating to sustainability

# Pupil Questionnaire

## Before starting the project

Would you like to have more lessons outside?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Does your school do a lot outdoors?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Do you think you would enjoy working outdoors more often?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Would you be able to learn new and interesting things outdoors?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Would you feel happier and more confident working outdoors?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Do you think working outdoors would make you feel fitter, stronger and healthier?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Would you be able to develop your literacy and numeracy skills outdoors?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Do you like being outdoors more than being indoors?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Do you think everyone should learn to be confident outdoors?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Do you think being outdoors is good for you?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

## After starting the project

Have you enjoyed working outdoors more?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Are you proud that your school is an Outdoor School?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Has working in the outdoors made you feel happier and more confident?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Has working in the outdoors helped you feel fitter, stronger and healthier?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Do you think your school does a lot of outdoor education?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Were you able to develop your literacy and numeracy skills by working outdoors?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Do you think you learn better in the outdoors?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Have you learnt a lot during the Outdoor Schools programme?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Do you feel confident at exploring and being outdoors?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

Do you think that you are now more familiar with your local outdoor areas?

YES / NO / NOT SURE

# Staff Questionnaire

As a new Carmarthenshire Outdoor School we want to keep a record of all the ways our school is developing and improving during the project. Please answer the following questions to give us an idea of where we stand at the start of the project.

**How often do you take children outside for learning?**

Daily, weekly, termly, never

**Other than PE what type of lesson do you teach outdoors most frequently?**

Maths, Literacy, Science, Art, Geography, other \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your biggest barrier to taking learning outdoors?**

Behaviour, H&S, cost, curriculum constraints, other \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you think that learning outdoors would improve the development of your pupils?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Would taking learning outdoors keep interest levels of your pupils at a higher level?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Do you feel you have sufficient resources to take learning outdoors?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Do you feel you have sufficient training to take learning outdoors?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Do you feel confident in the outdoors?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Do you feel happy in the outdoors?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Do you feel confident in identifying natural things such as flowers, birds and trees?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

# Parent Questionnaire

Your school is one of the first schools in Carmarthenshire to become a Carmarthenshire Outdoor School. The aim is to teach children to be fully engaged with and confident in their local environment through developing the school's provision for outdoor learning and regular visits to their local outdoor areas. This in turn will develop physical and emotional wellbeing and increase attainment.

It would be much appreciated if you could answer the following questions to give us an idea of where we stand at the start of the project.

**How often does your family engage in outdoor activities?**

Very regularly, regularly, sometimes, rarely

**What kind of activities does this include?**

Bike riding, walking, sports, beach, imaginatively play, other \_\_\_\_\_

**Would you like to spend more time outside?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Do you feel confident in the outdoors?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Do you feel happy in the outdoors?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Do you think it is beneficial for your family to be in the outdoors?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Would you like to see your child participate in more activities related to the National Curriculum in the outdoors?**

Strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree

**Do you have any particular knowledge or skills relating to the outdoors that you would be happy to share with staff, pupils and/or other parents?**

Please give details

**Would you be interested in taking part in activities or training in relating to the outdoors?**

Yes No

# Guidance

## Before you go outside

- \* Audit children's/teachers/carers perceptions of the outdoors
- \* Plan outdoor experiences integrated into your programme of work (not add-ons)
- \* Discuss with your class why you're taking learning outside
- \* Brief parents
- \* Brief other adults that will be involved in the sessions including health and safety information and their role in the session. These might include staff or parents/carers
- \* Familiarise yourself with your site: boundaries, natural resources, risks
- \* Work out the best route for getting from the classroom to the site
- \* Check the weather
- \* Ensure suitable clothing and footwear for adults and children
- \* Share relevant health and safety information with your class

## Keep it sustainable

Your site maybe be rich in natural resources but you want it to stay that way. If you don't have one already, establish a whole school guide for use of natural materials. This might include information about removing or burning materials, cutting or picking materials, establishing paths or moving your activities around so one area doesn't become too trampled.

You won't be the only ones using the wood. Encourage the children to mindful of all living things on your site, from minibeasts to trees.

# Guidance

## Keep it safe

Your school should have a health and safety policy that will contain useful information like education trips, recommended adult to child ratios and administering first aid.

Adequate risk/benefit assessment should be completed in relation to the site and the activities and where possible risks should be removed/reduced. These should be established in consultation with all staff and should act as working documents.

Accident and emergency procedures should also be established so everyone knows what to do if something happens, including the children. An emergency whistle can be used to indicate that something has happened and that the children should stop what they're doing and await further instruction.

Remember: your behaviour will be different outside—so will the children's!

## Outdoor Kit Bag

Fully stocked first aid kit

ID charts

Mobile phone (check signal!)

Bug pots/trays

Emergency blanket

Magnifying glasses

Roll mat

Binoculars

Water for drinking

Pencils/paper

Hand sanitiser/wet wipes

Camera

Extra clothing e.g. gloves/hats

Sun cream (gain permission first)

Hazard tape

Emergency shelter

Rope

Folding saw and secateurs

# Ideas

## Getting to know your outdoor site

Negotiate the boundaries of your learning space with your class and make it clear that these must be observed to stay safe. Repeat this at the start of (at least) your first few sessions. With younger groups you can follow the leader to mark them out or put up temporary markers.

**Hazard triangles** - ask the children to identify potential risks but focus on how to manage these rather than worrying about them.

**Find something interesting** - tell us something about it (fact or fiction), find differences/similarities, sort items, identify new items.

Don't be afraid of not knowing things, instead model lifelong learning, inquisitiveness and a wonder in nature. You could photograph or have a box for items no one knows to research later.

**Flora ID/hunt** - what have you got on your site?

**Colour match** - give the children a colour (could be a gem stone, a toy animal, a paint colour chart) and ask them to find natural items that match their colour.

**Seasonal walk** - identify the signs of the season on your site. Repeat this at other times of year to identify/monitor/record changes.

**Sensory walk** - encourage the children to use hearing, smell and touch as well as sight to explore their site. If you are lucky you might be able to use taste as well but you should be sure of what you're eating before you eat it and establish clear rules about eating things with the children. This experience could be heightened through the use of blind folds.

**Penny walk** - let chance guide you through your site by flipping a coin at each turning to decide which way to go.

**Hunt** - start by search for something related to the rest of your outdoor session or whatever you're doing back in the classroom e.g. a Gruffalo.

**Hide and seek** - a fun way to explore your site

If it's close enough or on site, use play times to encourage the children to explore your site.

# Ideas

## **Knowledge and understanding**

Bug hunts

Pond dipping

Planting/growing

Collecting and identifying

## **Creativity**

Creative play - mud kitchen, music walls, role play

Free make - provide natural materials to make things e.g. clay, sticks, leaves, willow

Environmental art - collage, sculpture using natural materials

Leaf rubbing

Musical instruments

## **Problem solving**

Devise own activities - how can we use this space?

Develop trail/activity for younger children

Age of a hedgerow/tree

Measuring the flow of a stream

Den building/animal homes

Team building activities - build

## **Outdoor skills**

Fire lighting

Knots

Traditional building/craft/sustainable woodland management techniques

Compass skills

Geocaching