

Policy Overview

A new statutory requirement for access to and engagement with nature within education

June 2024

Who we are

The Education and Learning Policy Group at Wildlife and Countryside Link want greater inclusion of nature within all education settings. This briefing sets out the Group's proposed approach to start discussions with stakeholders and policymakers.

You can find the full policy document [here](#).

What is the issue?

Nature and wildlife are under threat. The United Kingdom faces a dual nature and climate crisis which will negatively impact future generations the most.

Preparing children with the skills for a changing world must be a fundamental responsibility of our education system.

The opportunity to access and engage with good quality natural spaces is not equal for all children (students) in UK. Because of this, their mental health, wellbeing, attendance, and attainment is suffering.

A recent survey of 3000 children conducted by Save the Children showed that:

- 70% of children are worried about the world they will inherit.
- 75% are asking the Government to take stronger action on their behalf.
- 60% felt that climate change and inequality are affecting their generation's mental health in the UK.
- 56% believe it is also causing poorer child mental health globally.

Give access to nature at school

Every place of learning should be somewhere that children can access and engage with nature and wildlife every day, regardless of where they live, or their individual circumstances.

We are calling for:

- Better school grounds that are safe spaces for nature and for children to engage with the natural world and learn outdoors.
- Networks of schools where grounds can be accessed and shared locally, to enable all children to benefit from time spent in nature.
- Funding for schools to buy clothing and equipment so all children and teachers can safely spend time outdoors as part of the school day.

- Outdoor learning to be used for different lessons across the curriculum such as English, Maths, and Art so it doesn't get "stuck" in STEM subjects alone.

Prepare our teachers

70% of teachers say they aren't prepared to teach children about nature loss and climate change.

Children are curious and anxious about what they see and hear in the news and on social media about climate change. Not having the right information available can lead children to find answers themselves and this is not always from reputable or safe sources.

We are calling for:

- Teachers across subject areas to be supported to upskill and learn about how to engage their pupils with the natural world and respond to children's questions on nature loss and climate change.

Make nature and climate a part of daily school life for all pupils

Nature loss and climate change are societal challenges that will impact all of us.

Children deserve to learn in an environment that can talk about these topics factually, safely, and in a way that offers hope and practical ways for how we can tackle these challenges together.

This means bringing these topics out of the sciences alone and making them available to learn about across all subjects within the curriculum.

We are calling for:

- Curriculum reform to include nature and climate across subjects.
- For clear plans from the Department for Education on how successful short-term projects will be scaled up to ensure all schools can benefit from funding and support in this area.

Further Reading

Nature Connectedness: [Nature Connectedness Research Group - Research centres and groups - University of Derby](#)

Inequality of children's access to the outdoors: [Survey reveals inequality in children spending time outside during pandemic - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Inequality of population access to the outdoors:
[Mapping access to nature in England 01.05.23.pdf \(wcl.org.uk\)](#)

Health benefits of time spent outdoors: [The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

Impact of time spent in nature on academic performance: [Natural Connections Demonstration Project, 2012-2016: Final Report and Analysis of the Key Evaluation Questions - NECR215 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)



Learning outdoors impacts on attendance and behaviour: [Links between natural environments, learning and health: evidence briefing - EIN063 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)

Access to nature in education and labour market readiness: [Future Skills Questionnaire \(FSQ\) | The Careers and Enterprise Company](#)

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 86 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world and animals.

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