



#ThisisLfs

Towards a whole setting approach
to Learning for Sustainability:
Inspiration & Insights



Saltersgate School, Dalkeith

Local Authority: Midlothian

Supports children and young people with additional support needs (5- 18yrs)



Summary

Saltersgate School provides education for primary and secondary aged children from across Midlothian who have additional learning needs. This is the story of how they set up outdoor learning across the school and the Hut@Vogrie.

“Our students have complex additional support needs, so outdoor learning is very important to many aspects of their lives”...

“This is a work in progress. Staff and students are still developing their confidence to teach and learn outside. However, the culture of the school has shifted, there is no need to wait for ‘an expert’ to deliver outdoor learning, we are all learning as we do it”. Mary Higgins, Teacher

The Beginning...

Several years ago, Saltersgate School was offered the use of an old golf Starter Hut at [Vogrie Country Park](#). They slowly turned the hut into a hub for their outdoor learning. It became a base, a safe space, a destination, a bird hide, an equipment store and much more.

A self-selected group of senior students used the hut every week of the year. From this base they would explore the park, look for and learn about wildlife, feed and watch birds and engage in the natural world. They undertook conservation tasks such as planting trees and creating habitats. They learnt about the environment from the rocks and soil, to the trees and animals.

It was a real success. The students worked on [SQA National Qualification of Eco-Awareness](#) at National 1 and 2, and the [John Muir Award](#).

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How did Saltersgate involve the whole school in its outdoor learning programme?

The school needed to understand and address any barriers to outdoor learning that classes might be facing.

Clothing and Equipment To keep students warm and dry in all weathers a grant was secured to buy clothing that would fit all students - waterproofs, boots and wheelchair covers. There was a donation of a wheelchair ramp for access to the hut. Another grant enabled the school to buy fieldwork equipment: nets and trays, binoculars, identification guides and litter pickers.

Adequate staffing - an extra pair of skilled hands Many of the students present challenging behaviours. This can make trips out of school very demanding or nearly impossible. This project coincided with the introduction of [Pupil Equity funding](#) (PEF). Saltersgate's PEF focus was Health and Wellbeing, and they appointed specialist Learning Assistants to support all classes on outdoor learning visits to Vogrie. These Assistants were to provide advice and guidance to class teachers and teams, and provided an important extra pair of skilled hands.

Skills - a learning process for staff and students At first, this project was beyond the comfort zone of many staff. Challenging behaviours, complex needs, physical disabilities and variable weather, made outdoor learning daunting. However, as time passed, school staff brought their own individual creativity and expertise.

'Staff are now increasingly skilled and confident to explore their own practice outside. Student Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) targets are being set and met outdoors. Physiotherapy led Mobility Opportunities via Education (MOVE) targets are being worked on at Vogrie. Teams are designing and delivering their own, progressive, differentiated and fun outdoor learning. Ideas are being shared across the school, bringing different strengths to the project'. Mary Higgins, teacher

How do you know it is working?

Pupils say ...(June 2018, sample 80 students)

- 94% enjoyed their trips to Vogrie
- 93% showed positive behaviour
- 93% were engaged on trips to Vogrie.
- Relationships with staff and other pupils reported to be 72% more positive at Vogrie.

Saltersgate staff say ...

"Excellent for meeting health needs re. motor-skills, building stamina and core muscles".

"Being out significantly reduces chances of X self-harming".

"W has really gained confidence outside".

"Taking our class to Vogrie has given us the confidence to take them to other places".

"The whole class would be devastated if we couldn't go".

The next steps for Saltersgate are to provide more training for staff and to formalise the collection of different outdoor teaching and learning ideas, and share them across the school.

Three Tips:

1. Start at the beginning with something small that you can manage.
2. Look critically at the barriers to a project. See what can be done to overcome each of them, one by one.
3. Invest in lots of welly boots!

Thanks to Mary Higgins, Teacher, Saltersgate School, **March 2019**

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