



The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Wednesday 29th May 2024

Proposal for the Establishment of Publicly Funded Outdoor Primary Schools in Scotland

Dear Mr Swinney,

I am writing to propose an innovative and much-needed addition to our education system: the establishment of publicly funded outdoor primary schools in Scotland. This initiative is supported by the Scottish Outdoor Learning Association (SOLA) and a growing number of educators and parents who have witnessed the profound benefits of outdoor learning on children's education and development.

The Case for Outdoor Primary Schools

Over recent years, outdoor early learning and childcare programs have gained significant popularity, demonstrating that children who engage in outdoor learning show enhanced physical health, improved mental well-being, and improved academic achievements. Traditional classroom settings do not cater to all children's learning styles, often leaving children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) and those facing challenges within conventional settings struggling. Outdoor schools offer an alternative, more adaptable environment where children thrive through play-based and project-based learning, significantly benefiting their social and emotional development.

Parents are increasingly requesting flexible schooling options, including home education and flexi-schooling. The rising trend of deferring school entry for young children reflects parents' concerns about their children's readiness for formal education. Outdoor schools provide a viable alternative that aligns with parents' desires for a more personalised and developmentally appropriate educational experience.

Proposal for Government Support

SOLA's proposal to the Scottish Government advocates for direct funding of outdoor primary schools, ensuring that all children, regardless of socioeconomic background, have access to high-quality outdoor education without the burden of high private school fees. We propose extending the existing 1140 hours model for Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) into the Primary sector, offering funded school places that are funded directly by the Scottish Government. This model bypasses the fractured local authorities' budgeting system, ensuring consistent and reliable funding.

The current 1140 hours model for Early Learning and Childcare is already working successfully for families as well as private providers, proving its effectiveness and efficiency. By extending this model into the Primary sector, we fully believe it can further enhance educational outcomes while potentially reducing the overall cost of providing education.

A similar funding model is already in place at Jordanhill School, which is state-funded by direct grant from the Scottish Government and is non fee-paying. Jordanhill School's catchment area encompasses predominantly owner-occupied housing in West Glasgow and regularly records among the best exam results in Scotland. This demonstrates the effectiveness of direct government funding in providing high-quality education.

Outdoor schools would not only follow the Curriculum for Excellence but also incorporate learning for sustainability, fostering a deeper connection with nature. The proposed schools would emphasize experiential learning, allowing children to learn through direct interaction with their environment. This approach supports holistic development and prepares children for future challenges by nurturing critical thinking, creativity, and resilience.

A critical aspect of this proposal highlights the need to overcome the complacency and misappropriation of funds in the hands of local authorities across Scotland. Mismanagement and a lack of innovation have long hindered educational reforms. Establishing a dedicated funding stream from the Scottish Government would enable outdoor schools to operate with the flexibility and responsiveness required to meet the diverse needs of today's children.

Personal Experience and Advocacy

Ms. Don, during her visit to Little Bugs Outdoor Nursery at the beginning of May, witnessed firsthand the significant benefits of outdoor education and the efficacy of this educational model. Her experience reinforces the need for this progressive step towards a more inclusive and adaptable education system in Scotland.

Furthermore, I have personally observed an outdoor primary school south of the border working progressively and excelling at meeting the needs of all children. In addition to my observations, my own experiences teaching in state primary schools, developing outdoor settings for Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), and now focusing on the development of outdoor after-school provision and outdoor flexi-schooling options have shown me the tangible benefits of outdoor education. These experiences have demonstrated how outdoor settings foster a supportive and enriching learning environment for every child.

Request for a Meeting

We believe that the introduction of publicly funded outdoor primary schools represents a crucial opportunity to address the growing concerns of parents and educators, reduce mental health issues among children, close the attainment gap, and support all learning styles. This approach aligns with the principles of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), ensuring that each child receives the personalised support they need to thrive. As society moves towards more sustainable living, outdoor schools can play a pivotal role in shaping future generations to be environmentally conscious and resilient.

I kindly request a meeting to discuss this initiative further and explore the possibilities of making publicly funded outdoor primary schools a reality in Scotland. Your support in this endeavor would be greatly appreciated and could significantly impact the future of education in our country.

Thank you for considering this proposal. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss this initiative

Kind regards,

L. Licznerski

Founding Director

Scottish Outdoor Learning Association