

## Muirhouse Primary

North Lanarkshire

A whole  
school  
approach to  
learning in  
local  
greenspace



The work in Muirhouse Primary school has been led by principal teacher Fiona McHahon. For the past two years she has been championing outdoor learning as a key part of the schools approach to learning. It was of importance that outdoor learning was included on the School Improvement Plan.

This drive to use outdoor learning more regularly also sat well with the schools Nurture Group Network, who used the 'Six Principles of Nurture' in their work. A huge part of this involves the understanding that :

*“Children's learning is understood developmentally” and the*

*“importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing.”*

In order to achieve this as a nurture group, we have included the Outdoor Learning and play approach as one of our main vehicles for delivery, informed by current research and evidence.

### **School grounds**

“Our strategy was to make us of school grounds as well as local greenspace. This cut down on transport and time costs, and helped the children develop a deeper connection with the learning and places we visited” says Fiona.

“Our school is situated in a built up area of Motherwell, North Lanarkshire but we are very lucky to have a large wooded area in our school grounds. Over the past few years I have been developing this area for the children to use. I was able to secure funding and arranged for some of the wooded area to be fenced and gated in, which means that only one class at a time is out in it.” This has allowed it to become wilder in nature with grass growing longer and trees flourishing. A visitor to the grounds would immediately notice the different look and feel of this area – as well as the abundance of nature in the space.

The spaces in the school are used at break and formal lesson time – and have proved ideal in helping children and adults attitudes and behavior when in greenspace. The children really value spending quiet, quality time in these spaces. This popularity has caused a headache of over use, which has led to the school EcoWarrior group timetabling the use of it carefully.

### **Beyond the school boundary**

The P7's in Muirhouse undertake the “John Muir Award” using the local woodland areas. They came up with a set of Countryside rules to help encourage appropriate behaviours in our school grounds and local green spaces, informed by what they had learned outside the school grounds. This applying of knowledge and understanding would not have worked without the wider experience they had and the work with the rangers in delivering this.

The older pupils all have sessions using the area around Adders Gill and Dalzell Estate, both local wooded greenspace within walking distance of school. These areas are also rich in history, both ancient and modern, with a number of working farms, managed woodlands (including orchards) and natural spaces. These spaces are close to school, yet required some ‘discovering’ by staff, with assistance from local rangers. The lessons in these spaces do focus on them as a theme, often using them to ignite childrens imagination and engage them in caring for the spaces through better understanding of them.

*“If children do not grow up knowing about nature and appreciating it, they will not understand it. And if they don’t understand it, they won’t protect it. And if they don’t, who will?”*

Sir David Attenborough

Younger children in P1 also visit these spaces on seasonal walks, looking for signs of spring and autumn, often engaging parents in volunteering to help the walks. This introduces children early to the spaces, as well as a wider community, many of whom may not have visited these local green spaces before.

### **Support for staff**

Fiona goes on “In order to address the staff’s development and knowledge of outdoor learning, I enrolled myself and another teacher on the “Teaching in Nature” course, jointly run by Grounds for Learning and The Clyde and Avon Valley Partnership. I was able to feedback to staff on staff meetings and lead In-service days about the benefits of outdoor learning and provide clear exemplars of introductory outdoor lessons and how these can be developed over time. We created an Outdoor Learning space on our School’s First-class account, which enabled me to upload resource ideas and lesson plans for all staff to use. I included a list of useful websites and organisations that would be beneficial to staff. These included ideas for teaching literacy and numeracy outdoors to more specific nature interpretation activities.”

Looking at the Whole School Interdisciplinary Learning Overview, Fiona was able to create and develop topics that would link to nature, seasons and outdoor learning as a tool for learning. This has helped the school develop a programme where outdoor experiences are planned for and are a fully integrated, progressive and curricular led.

Key to this progression in outdoor experiences was to embed the use of outdoor spaces in numeracy and English – ensuring that pupils were outdoors regularly through the seasons. This also helped staff develop skills and confidence – starting in the grounds and building to trips outside the grounds. Many of the maths sessions are short, simple tasks to allow pupils to apply new skills in different contexts. Literacy sessions often build on creative or functional writing – using changing seasons or the increased sensory experience of being outside. Additionally, pupils use playground games, new rules and directions as contexts for functional writing tasks.