

# Learning in Local Greenspace

St John's Primary, Blackwood

Outdoor  
Classroom  
Day

Local  
greenspace  
discovery

**St John's Blackwood** is surrounded by rolling farmland of between the Clyde and Avon Valleys. This greenspace however is working land, and therefore difficult for the school to access. Teacher Ruth Quadrelli has therefore had to explore this local space with a view to what spaces could be used for learning, beyond the school grounds. World Outdoor Classroom Day provided the opportunity to plan a long morning outdoors, exploring local greenspace, supported by the learning through the Teaching in Nature course.

The school itself has good grounds, and adjoins a community garden that the school is particularly active in using. Building on the pupils and staff skills in working outdoors, Mrs Quadrelli decided to explore local greenspace, supporting a topic about nature. Because the school already uses space outside the school gates, there are annual permissions already in place. A pre-visit had taken place to allow the teacher to plan activities and risk assess the whole route, putting in place a few key gathering places or spaces to be particularly alert.



The spaces discovered were about a mile walk from school. The pupils had to cross and then walk along the main road through the village and over the motorway. While judged a reasonable risk, the school balanced a few benefits of using this route. Firstly, it gave pupils an opportunity to practice and demonstrate crossing and walking alongside a road that for many is their local school access. Secondly it introduced the idea that local greenspace could be accessed from the village, assisting with pupils geographic knowledge.

Most of the walk was along a dead-end, single-track lane. With staff at the front and rear to warn of cars, some simple activities were started and observations of spring were noted. Despite living surrounded by farmland, a number of the children were keen to be close to the cows in fields. The rest of the group were soon engrossed in a challenge to find as many differing green leaves as they could – comparing shape, colour, texture, size and source. Having taken along some simple laminated identification sheets, pupils were soon using tree names as they passed by various examples.

The first space that Mrs Quadrelli had planned to use was a small corner of a plantation forest – just off the side of the small lane. The first task of the group was to gather and share a risk assessment of the space. Here the teachers helped pupils judge the real risks we faced in the space. Primarily these were being alongside the road and (deep) stream, plus being aware that many branches were at head height. The pupils list of risks was much longer, however a short discussion helped them understand the few that really needed a control measure or awareness.

The pupils worked in small groups to undertake a few simple activities here. The previous tree identification activity, taking bark and leaf rubbings, as well as a piece of transient art with natural materials. The group rotated around these activities, with minimal teacher involvement as the pupils were completely engaged. There was then a tour of each groups work, allowing pupil feedback and questioning.

At this point a local nursery arrived to use the space for their weekly Forest School, and so as planned the Primary group moved on up the small lane. The lane ended in a group of houses, and the and with much excitement the group dived into the ‘secret footpath’ they discovered in the Rhododendron’s, as planned by the teacher.

Having previously gained permissions, we used this space for lunch and lighting our fire bowl. During our time here there were two more activities – helping toast some popcorn and creating ‘woodland beasties’ with clay and natural materials. This activity led to much





discussion about adaptation – why animals, trees and birds are shaped or coloured the way they are.

From here it was a long walk back to school, during which there was time for discussion about the age of houses we passed and more tree identification. A number of pupils were now very adept at this, having only learned a few key trees earlier that day.

In the last section of greenspace of the lane we paused to share our thoughts about a countryside walk. Many pupils expressed real pleasure and fascination with what they had learned, others confessed to finding the walk hard work yet pleased they had completed it.

The work and learning from the day was used back at school to create reports, creative stories and research history of a few of the old houses passed on our walking school trip. The underlying theme of health and wellbeing was also highlighted, with a number of pupils pleased that they had walked further than they thought possible, and many pupils returning with families at the weekend to show off ‘their space’.

### Resources

[www.beyondyourboundary.scot](http://www.beyondyourboundary.scot)

[www.outdoorclassroomday.org.uk](http://www.outdoorclassroomday.org.uk)

[www.clydeandavonvalley.org](http://www.clydeandavonvalley.org)