



2024

Appendix 3

Ambassador Schools Programme Evaluation Report

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

HELEN WRIGHT



The Peak District National Park

Ambassador Schools Programme

Evaluation Report

Introduction

Ambassador Schools is a flagship project delivered by the Peak District National Park (PDNP). The project aims to:

- Build lasting relationships with schools and communities
- Promote the benefits of outdoor learning and connection to nature
- Enable young people to enjoy, care for and take pride in the Peak District National Park

The project was launched in 2022 and currently has 20 schools signed up. The schools are spread across the PDNP and within 30 minutes travel of its boundary. The Ambassador schools include a mix of primary and secondary schools.

The Evaluation:

The PDNP is looking to understand more about the impact of the project and whether it has influenced change over two years of operation.

Has the Ambassador Schools Programme influenced the school's curriculum or how the curriculum is taught?

For example:

- are there more outdoor lessons?
- Are there more visits to green spaces and/or the National Park?
- Is there more use of the Peak District as an example of a local National Park in lessons?

Many of the Ambassador Schools have received in-school activities, learning resources and visits out to the PDNP. How have these interventions been received in schools by teachers and young people? What is the lasting impact of these interventions and where has there been effective added value?

What would support schools to gain more out of the Ambassador Schools Programme and how would they like to see it develop?

This evaluation aims to help the PDNP to understand the impact of the Schools Ambassador Programme on the schools' communities, to form a baseline for assessing change and to plan effectively for the future.

The Process

Meetings were arranged with the lead teachers at seven schools, selected by the PDNP Ambassador Schools team. These included primaries and one secondary. The schools are situated within the National Park and on the outskirts of the National Park in surrounding urban areas.

The schools visited were:

Village primary schools within the PDNP	Urban primary schools on the outskirts of the PDNP
Litton Primary, Litton	Anns Grove Primary, Sheffield
Youlgreave Primary, Youlgreave.	Burbage Primary, Buxton
Lady Manners, a secondary in Bakewell	Pye Bank Primary, Sheffield
	Spire Juniors, Chesterfield

Hadfield Infants was approached but the school was unable to arrange a meeting at the time.

Conversations with the teachers were based on the Evaluation Brief and the Ambassador Schools feedback questionnaire which the PDNP had sent to schools in the summer term, for which only one return had been received. Whilst the conversations were led by the questions, they tended to go into greater depth in different ways, depending on the unique circumstances within each school.

From these conversations, common themes did emerge which related to the geography and size of the schools. Small rural schools located in PDNP villages reported similar experiences and larger schools in urban areas outside the NP faced a different set of circumstances and therefore responded to the opportunities provided by the Ambassador Schools programme differently. Responses and conversations have therefore been grouped into 'Small Primary Schools within the PDNP' and 'Urban Primaries on the outskirts of the PDNP'

What has happened in the schools so far?

PDNP- led activity

Visits by PDNP staff into some schools to deliver assemblies, mapping and wildlife habitat activities.

Provision of online resources to support outdoor learning activity and a classroom-based introduction to the Peak District National Park

A teacher's Continuous Professional Development (CPD) day at Aldern House: the Ambassador Schools Conference in September 2024

Quarterly newsletter to keep schools up to date, with contributions from Ambassador schools.

Funding to support some school visits to PDNP

School-led activity

Set up a school Eco Committee- Litton, Pye Bank

Outdoor learning in the local area for curriculum-based topics- Litton, Youlgreave, Anns Grove, Burbage, Lady Manners

Communications about Ambassador Schools and the PDNP to parents and the local community via school emails, newsletters and community newsletters- Youlgreave, Litton, Pye Bank

PDNP themed well dressing- Youlgreave

Wet weather kit for all children to enable outdoor play every day- Spire Juniors

Working on Global Goals- Litton

Embedded PDNP into curriculum- Burbage, Anns Grove, Youlgreave

Project in a Box- Think Climate- Pye Bank

Coach trip visits to PDNP- Anns Grove, Spire Juniors, Burbage



Teachers participate in nature connection activity at Aldern House

The Conversations

Do you feel that your school has an increased connection to the Peak District National Park as an Ambassador School?

Small primary schools within the PDNP

Yes- being a part of the programme has added value to the outdoor learning and increased the school's awareness of the PDNP, building on teaching and learning which had already been started. The schools' local PDNP rangers have visited to deliver outdoor learning in the school grounds or in the local area. The schools communicate regularly to their local communities about their PDNP- linked activity, such as a PDNP themed well dressing, feedback from the Ambassador Schools conference, and Ambassador School updates are contributed to the village newsletter.

Urban Primaries on the outskirts of the PDNP

Yes, mainly through annual coach trips to the PDNP (Longshaw, Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow, Goyt Valley) and some classroom teaching

Secondary school

Not increased but the PDNP is already embedded in the Geography curriculum at Year 7

Has the Ambassador Schools Programme helped to increase your teaching about the PDNP?

Small primaries within the PDNP

Yes- the schools are teaching about the PDNP outdoors and embedding outdoor learning into the curriculum as their local environment offers the perfect opportunity. The PDNP ranger visits have provided expertise which has helped the schools to enrich their curriculum and add value to their provision.

Urban Primaries on the outskirts of the PDNP

Some schools are teaching about the PDNP in the Geography curriculum as their local environment topic, or when studying rivers and mountains, picking PDNP examples to study,

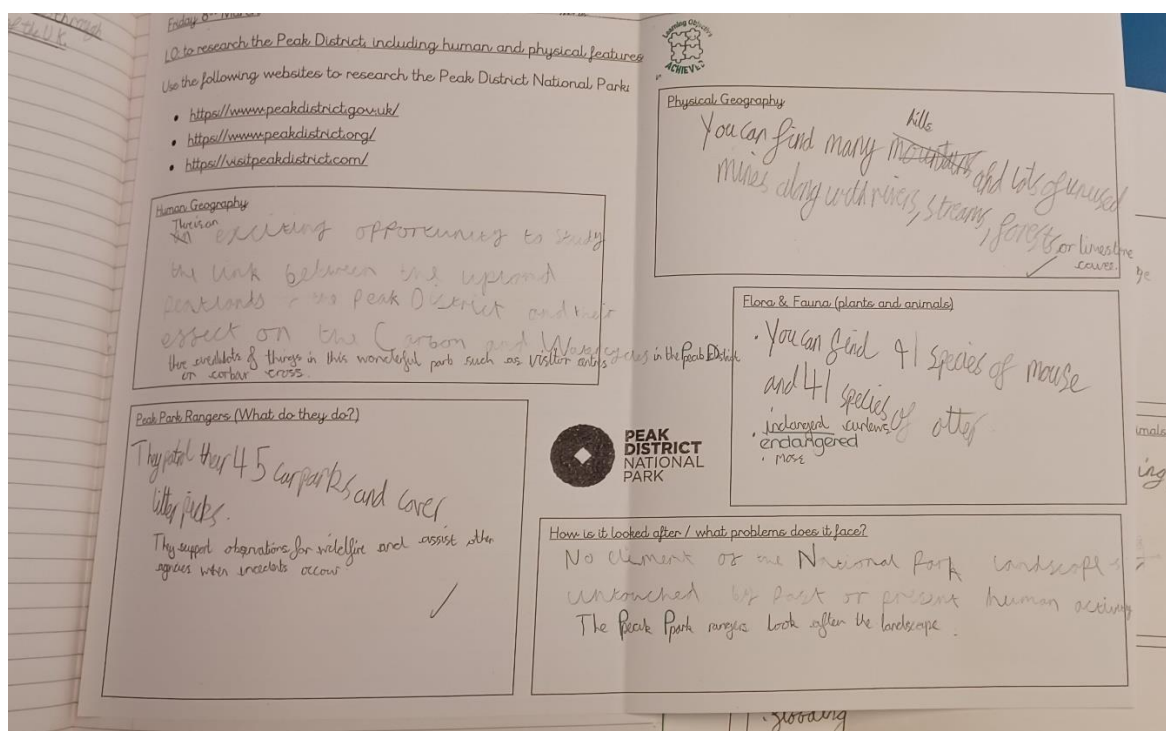
Burbage Primary incorporated the PDNP as a Geography topic for Y2 and Y5 as they were writing a new curriculum at the time of joining the Ambassador Schools Programme.

Some schools which are new to the programme are planning to develop classroom teaching on PDNP.

*Support and Development- could schools already teaching PDNP curriculum topics share planning?

Secondary

The PDNP is already a key part of the Y7 Geography curriculum, looking at quarrying, tourism and conservation, special qualities, and landscape past and present.



A research worksheet on the PDNP from Burbage Primary school

Children's responses

The children's responses show that where there is a PDNP topic in the curriculum, the children have developed an understanding of what the PDNP is about.

What do I know about the PDNP?

Buxton is on the border

It's got Mam Tor, Goyt Valley, lots of woods

It's full of countryside, grassy, not busy

You can't build there without permission because it's a place for nature

People can enjoy nature, climb hills, get good views, dog walks, cycle, drive

It's protected for wildlife and beauty

There are only a few roads

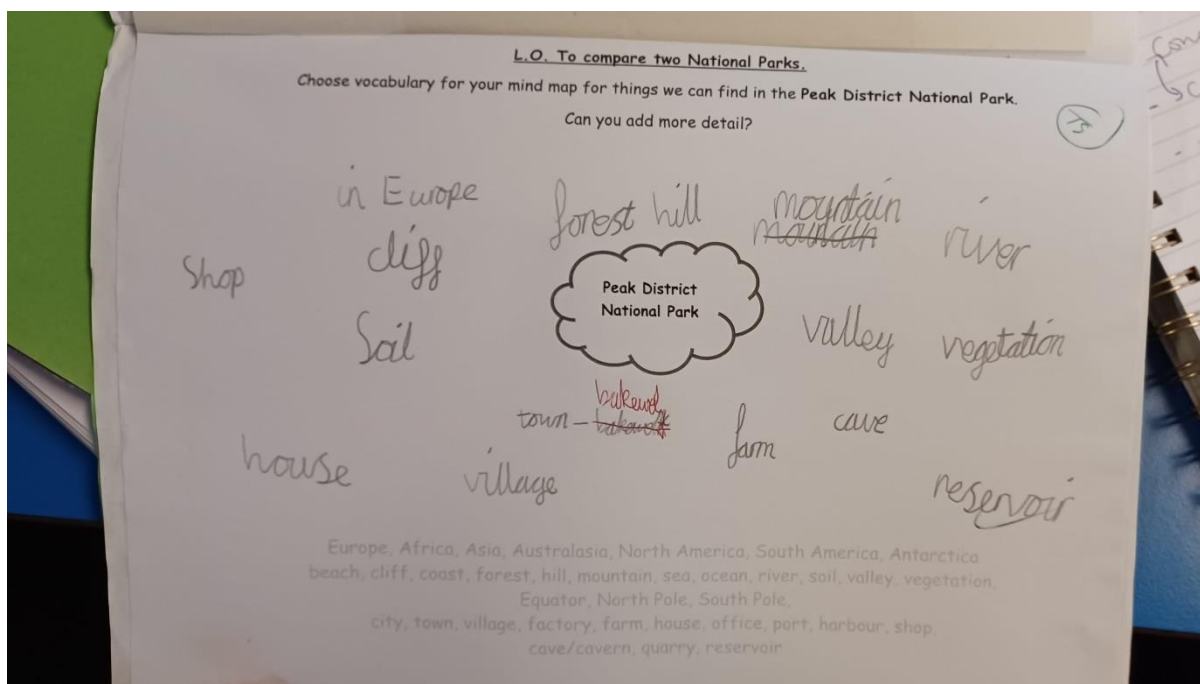
There are rules about fires and wild camping

It's a good place to visit but people mustn't harm it

It was the first National Park in Britain, it's a protected area so people can't build on it without planning permission. There is a lot of land which is not built on which is important because of the limestone and the different landscapes. Also people visit from cities to see the scenery and to do different things like walking, sledging which they can't enjoy as much in the city. There is more space, peace and quiet.

I remember that the PDNP is a really big area

They showed us a map of the PDNP and there was the White Peak and the Dark Peak.



A PDNP mindmap from Burbage Primary School

Have you used any of the online resources provided by the PDNP?

All Primaries

Schools which are embedding the PDNP into their curriculum and teaching about the PDNP in the classroom have used the online resources and found them useful. The website was noted as a benefit.

Some schools would like to make more use of the resources but first they need to plan the PDNP/outdoor learning into the curriculum, and in some cases increase whole staff awareness and practice.

Schools which are focused more on the outdoors opportunities were not really aware of the online resources but now plan to investigate.

Secondary

No, not aware.

*Support and Development- could the resources be linked to curriculum topics to make them easier and quicker to find?

Has the Ambassador Schools Programme helped to increase outdoor learning for your school?

Small primary schools within the PDNP

Yes-there is increased outdoor learning and activity.

Being small schools makes it easier to be flexible about taking children outside. The schools are surrounded by countryside and have outdoor spaces to explore either within their school grounds or in their local community within walking distance. They have received specialist

input from PDNP rangers and the learning team. The schools have positive support from the parents and community for the outdoor learning work they do and share their experiences and achievements regularly.

The lead teachers are aiming to match curriculum topics to outdoor learning locally to ensure these opportunities form part of the curriculum for each class.

Urban Primaries on the outskirts of the PDNP

The primary schools situated in urban environments tend to be more limited in what they can achieve with outdoor learning. Due to larger class sizes, outdoor learning activity requires more planning, staff resource and confidence to feel that outcomes will be achieved. The schools all have green spaces within the school grounds or close by and these are made use of at playtimes and through directed activity such as Forest Schools. The lead teachers at these schools are already aware of the benefits of outdoor learning for the children and are doing what they can but feel limited in being able to do more.

*Support and Development: The lead teachers all suggested that whole staff training for outdoor learning would be beneficial to build skills and confidence to plan and lead outdoor learning sessions.

Secondary school

The secondary school connection to the Ambassador Schools Programme is currently through the Geography department. The school has extremely limited time and staff resource to enable more outdoor learning than it already covers within the Geography curriculum. Outdoor learning for Geography includes a local environment walk, orienteering, a quarry visit, field study strips and field sketching.

Children's responses

The children's responses below show a wide range of outdoor activity that they have enjoyed both with school and outside of school

What I enjoy doing outdoors

With school

A walk to Solomon's Temple- woods- sketching

Pooles Cavern Walk

Gardening club

Den building, Fire, s'mores and snacks

Pond, Wildlife area in school

We saw a heron and we've seen other wildlife

Seeing nature

We've been rock climbing, we went to Longshaw but it was in Y4 and I can't remember much. We went down by the pond where it was wet and boggy-I enjoyed it there

We went to Hucklow on a really, really long walk

We went to Whitehall and did outdoor adventure, we went in caves and did weaselling

We've had a river walk and been to the community orchard

I like listening to birds and frogs

I like the fresh air

Outside of school

Swinging and looking at trees

Trampoline up to the trees

Bird watching, climbing, being outdoors with friends, sledging.

Where I live I'm near a forest area and I like it there, I build dens and have my own little space

I go to the park with my friends and I like it there

It's a bigger space and more open

I like being surrounded by nature

I like hearing all the animals

I go bird watching with my Grandad when I'm feeling stressed I just call him and we go. I've got a book with all the names of birds in.

I like having all the space

Has your school organised visits to the PDNP and/or to other green spaces?

Small primaries within the PDNP

Yes, within the local area – village schools have small class groups and can take the children to places of interest on foot or in the school grounds. Most opportunities need to link into the curriculum, particularly in KS2 when there is less flexibility with time.

Urban Primaries on the outskirts of the PDNP

Yes, to Longshaw, the Goyt Valley, the Nightingale Centre in Great Hucklow and Whitehall. Funding is essential for coach travel to the PDNP. The schools are very keen to organise many different trips for the children and this happens frequently, as funding and staff resources allow. Extra time from the lead teacher is required to source funding and extra staff are required to support a trip for a class of 30 children. Annual class visits to the PDNP tend to be the norm- however some teachers are concerned that they are not doing enough and that as an Ambassador School they should be trying to get out to the PDNP more often but opportunities are limited.

Some urban schools are making use of local areas and partnerships with local organisations, e.g. Heeley in Sheffield, Solomons Temple and Grin Low Woods in Buxton-

places the groups can walk to which reduces the need for funding. However with big class sizes extra staff resource is still needed. Sometimes these opportunities are taken up by smaller groups within the school.

Some urban schools have big outdoor spaces within the grounds and Forest School provision, this opportunity varies between whole class provision and/or small group sizes.

Secondary school

As part of the Geography curriculum, students go on a field study trip, visit a local area e.g quarry, do field sketches and orienteering in the school grounds. This is already a part of the curriculum.

*Support and Development- how to make the most of linking outdoor spaces to curriculum topics within the school grounds or within a short walking distance of school.

The benefits for children's health and wellbeing of being outdoors and connected to nature is recognised by the primary schools in particular and validated by some of the children's responses here:

Children's responses: How being in nature makes me feel



What are the key challenges of being an Ambassador School?

All schools

As the children get older, into KS2 and KS3/4 the opportunities to organise outdoor learning are more challenging due to more focused learning outcomes and a tighter timetable.

Enthusiasm of other staff to have a go at leading outdoor learning. Teacher's lack of experience and low confidence is a barrier.

Urban Primaries on the outskirts of the PDNP

Cost of coach travel

Capacity of staff to support outdoor learning and trips for whole class sizes

Other

Unclear about what an Ambassador School should be doing and feeling that they are not getting it right

Contributing to the newsletter when you haven't got much to report, chasing updates from other staff.

How can the Ambassador Schools Programme be sustainable for your school?

If the school embeds outdoor learning and the PDNP into the curriculum, the PDNP can be taught as a topic for Geography. For certain topics, outdoor learning can become a core part of learning for each year group.

Regular funding for urban school groups to access the PDNP by coach

CPD for whole school staff delivered by PDNP (specialist/expertise) in school to develop everyone's skills and confidence to lead outdoor learning in the school grounds and/or in the local area.



Teachers at Aldern House try out a leaf slide activity

What could be improved?

Primaryes

Help from the PDNP to maximise outdoor learning opportunities in the local area/school grounds and training for all staff.

A loan service of kit boxes for outdoor learning or an online photo/ advice sheet of what to include in a kit box

Easy to find, topic-linked online resources. Schools are now individually responsible for creating their own curricula and whilst this offers opportunities for the PDNP to add input it also increases the time needed by teachers to devise lessons, plan and prepare. (There is generally more awareness of the need for mental health support and a reduction of stress for teachers so providing easy to find, curriculum-related resources would be beneficial.)

Enable schools to share resources/plans/activities if they have developed something which could benefit others, e.g. PDNP curriculum planning.

A means of encouraging families to visit the PDNP – information to share about events, places to go, free or discounted activities.

Secondary

Help and advice on Geography curriculum teaching- e.g. up to date issues/case studies on quarries, tourism, planning.

Other secondary and 6th form connections could be explored, particularly for students from farming families, with visits into school by specialists and some hands-on experiences.

Possible links to A-level subjects could be beneficial- Business or Media for example.

Other

Clarity on the expectations of being an Ambassador School would be helpful. Reassurance – are we doing enough? What does it mean to be an Ambassador School? What should we be doing? Regular keeping in touch.

A snapshot of the current programme:

School	Increased outdoor learning	Increased classroom learning of PDNP	Increased visits to green spaces/PDNP	PDNP interventions	Use of online resources	Added value
Anns Grove	Already doing	Yes	Yes -trip	No	No	Not sure
Burbage	Not yet	Yes	Yes-locally & trip	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lady Manners	Already doing	No	No	Yes	No	No
Litton	Yes	developing	Yes, locally	Yes	No	Yes
Pye Bank	Not yet	developing	Yes, trip	No	No	Yes
Spire	Yes	Not yet	Yes, trip	Yes	No	Yes
Youlgreave	Yes	Yes	Yes locally	Yes	Yes	Yes

Conclusions

Overall, the schools are very positive about the Ambassador Schools Programme and are keen to continue and do more. There is clearly an increased awareness of the PDNP in schools where students are taught about it in the classroom. There are vivid memories of experiences in schools where a visit to the PDNP has provided a stark contrast to the usual environment. There is a desire to build connections between the PDNP and the schools' communities. There is a broad understanding of the benefits of outdoor activity and learning for children. All the primaries expressed a desire to build more outdoor learning opportunities into the curriculum and develop staff skills throughout school in order for outdoor learning to be a sustainable element of the school's teaching.

The conversations demonstrated that the experience of being involved in the PDNP Ambassador Schools programme varies, depending on school stage and location.

Where primary schools are located in PDNP villages, they tend to have smaller numbers of pupils and a wider variety of outdoor locations to access. This enables them to take small groups out with less staff resource and to walk to nearby locations for learning, thereby cutting costs of travel. They also have links to their local PDNP rangers who deliver activities with them. They are surrounded by communities of people who live and, in many cases, work in the PDNP so they benefit from a wealth of knowledge and awareness of their PDNP environment.

In urban areas such as Chesterfield, Buxton and Sheffield, class sizes are larger, requiring more staff resource to support being out of the classroom or out of the school grounds. However, these schools are using outdoor spaces where they can. These schools all feel they need to be able to visit the PDNP in order to fulfil the expectations of the programme. This means that funding for transport and increased numbers of staff are required to support a trip for a larger number of children. Visiting the National Park is one of many trips the schools try to achieve throughout each school year. The communities surrounding the Sheffield and Chesterfield schools are made up of diverse and in many cases low-income families for whom countryside experiences are few.

Are the aims of the programme being achieved?

- **Build lasting relationships with schools and communities**

In schools where PDNP has delivered activity the relationships seem solid and communication between the schools and their communities is happening. Where funding has provided for annual PDNP visits, the relationship has lasted on that basis. All of the primaries are keen to continue to build and develop their relationships with the PDNP.

- **Promote the benefits of outdoor learning and connection to nature**

Village schools are embedding outdoor learning into the curriculum using their local environment. Youlgreave aims to plan one outdoor session per term for each year.

All primary schools have an aspiration to teach outdoors more often.

Anns Grove has developed its outdoor areas to enable more guided activity and links with the local park to deliver outdoor sessions.

Schools that are focused on getting the children outdoors report that they notice the difference in behaviour. Spire Juniors provide outdoor wet weather kit for playtimes to ensure all the children are able to play outside every day.

Forest schools' provision is present in some schools

- **Enable young people to enjoy, care for and take pride in the Peak District National Park.**

The PDNP is taught about in classrooms, raising awareness of its special qualities and the Countryside Code. At Burbage Primary the PDNP is now part of the curriculum for Y2 and Y5. In Anns Grove when they study rivers, they pick a PDNP river to focus on and with a mountains topic they pick a PDNP mountain. Online resources, when used, are appreciated and helpful.

Introductory assemblies delivered in schools have offered an effective introduction to the PDNP. Visits into school by the PDNP to lead walks or nature activities have been very well received- schools see the PDNP as the specialists and are very keen to have their expertise in school.

Facilitated and funded visits to the PDNP have created lasting memories for children and an awareness of the PDNP.

At secondary school level, the Geography curriculum in the selected school Lady Manners focuses on the PDNP at Y7, covering a wide range of topics.



Teachers participate in CPD at Aldern House

Recommendations

Development of the Ambassador School Programme will naturally be dependent on time and budget resource for both the PDNP and the schools themselves. The recommendations below are based on the feedback from schools and my own interpretation of how both schools and the PDNP can work together to achieve the aims of the programme.

- **Build lasting relationships with schools and communities**

Raise awareness of the PDNP as a place to visit- schools could be the conduit of information for families and local communities. Share information on places to visit, events, free or discounted activities, information on transport links. Ongoing provision of information which schools can embed into their emails and newsletters will help to keep the PDNP profile raised and encourage greater connection.

Outcome: increased awareness of the PDNP and opportunities to visit, building positive relationships with schools and communities

Continue to keep in touch with the lead teachers to foster mutually beneficial relationships and enable conversations. Go into schools to meet staff and to deliver activity. Involve different PDNP staff where appropriate- as well as the learning team and rangers, staff working in farming, planning, marketing and visitor centres could have some engagement.

For village schools within the PDNP continue to offer local ranger contact to build and consolidate relationships.

Outcome: Positive and sustainable relationships with schools, leading to clarity of expectations between schools and the PDNP, reassurance for lead teachers, support for teachers to deliver curriculum and activity, to organise visits and contribute to the programme effectively.

- **Promote the benefits of outdoor learning and connection to nature**

Continuous Professional Development on Outdoor Learning for whole school staff as an INSET Day- to cover activities for outdoor learning and nature connection, risk management, effective outdoor teaching- enabling the whole school to offer outdoor learning opportunities in their school grounds and/or local area. Linked to curriculum topics to enable teachers to incorporate into their timetables.

Create a lending' library' of classroom resources linked to curriculum/outdoor learning activity

Organise online resources so that they are curriculum topic linked, making it easy for teachers to find and use.

Share information and links to other outdoor learning organisations e.g. Institute of Outdoor Learning (IOL), Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) which might be helpful.

Seek funding or in-kind support for outdoor kit and resources for schools.

Outcome: Improved health and wellbeing for young people, a greater connection to and understanding of the environment, enrichment and consolidation of classroom teaching. Support for teachers to deliver. All schools would benefit from this to enable them to make outdoor learning activity sustainable within their school and embedded in the curriculum rather than dependent on one lead teacher's influence.

- **Enable young people to enjoy, care for and take pride in the Peak District National Park.**

Work with schools to support the development of primary and secondary school curriculum topics on the Peak District National Park; what it is, its special qualities, the Countryside Code with online resources, assembly visits and up-to-date case studies (KS3).

Enable schools to share their planning where relevant.

For urban schools on the edge of PDNP—when funding is available, support visits to the PDNP. As a requirement of funding support, schools could enhance a visit with classroom and outdoor teaching as pre- and post-visit activity to consolidate learning.

Continue a programme of ranger visits into PDNP schools, with opportunities to care for their local environment.

Outcome: Increased knowledge and awareness of the PDNP as an enjoyable place to visit for young people. Young people have an understanding of how to care for the PDNP.

Overview

The Ambassador Schools Programme is an asset to the Peak District National Park as it has already established relationships and connections with schools inside the National Park and in urban areas on its outskirts. These relationships and connections have enabled children to learn about the NP, to experience being in a NP landscape and to have more opportunities to learn outdoors and connect to nature and the environment. The Ambassador Schools Programme has therefore had a positive impact on schools and has influenced change in that schools are now working towards teaching more about the NP, trying to develop outdoor activities and looking for funding opportunities to support visits to the Peak District. This is the end of the second year so change is gradual and developing.

To deepen these relationships and make them more sustainable I recommend the NP put time and resource into developing professional development for primary school teachers, to be delivered at schools and to a whole school staff team as part of an INSET day. School leadership teams are increasingly aware of the importance of outdoor learning, connection to nature, learning about the environment and improving children's mental health. A PDNP INSET day can offer all of these opportunities. This would also enable all teachers to develop outdoor learning opportunities as part of their curriculum teaching, ensuring increased and sustainable outdoor experiences for children year on year. This is my primary recommendation as a means of really influencing impactful and positive change.

Funding to support school visits for children in urban areas may feel like a token gesture but if the visits are part of a whole school curriculum which teaches about the NP and delivers outdoor learning in school, supported by PDNP INSET days and online resources, this offers children a memorable experience which will be part of a much wider, educated context.