

The Nature Premium, an idea whose time has come.

We are calling on the government to invest in a Nature Premium to fund regular nature experiences for all children in education. The Department for Education (DfE) states that *'Schools and colleges also have an important role to play in supporting the mental health and well-being of children and young people. We recognise that playing and learning outside is a fundamental part of childhood and supports children's mental health and wellbeing. We also know that some children have good access to natural spaces whilst others do not, such as those living in areas of high disadvantage.'*

The Nature Premium would provide a practical means of supporting the mental and physical wellbeing of **all** children. Regular time in nature and connection with nature would help all children learn how to manage their own mental wellbeing and make them happier and healthier. All children would benefit from this investment and, at the same time, it would 'level up' children from low income and BAME families. The Nature Premium would complement current funding that supports and advises teachers how to work with children in crisis.

Having recognised that being in nature supports children's mental health and wellbeing what else could the Department for Education do? The DfE could:

- Make a statement really encouraging schools to get children outside into nature.
- Include the accepted benefits from [time in nature](#) in the [COVID-19 catch up advice](#).
- Always including the benefit of time in nature when providing mental health support resources such as during [Children's Mental Health week](#) .
- Invest in a Nature Premium for all children.

Surely children get time in nature as part of the [curriculum](#)? As part of the [science curriculum](#), children are taught about the scientific concepts that relate to the environment. In primary science, pupils are taught about habitats of plants and animals and about how environments can change. This can include positive and negative impact of human actions, such as nature reserves or littering. This is further developed in secondary science, where pupils are taught about ecosystems and biodiversity. Teachers are advised that *'Pupils should use the local environment throughout the year to explore and answer questions.....'* Some schools take this advice and get children outside but, in general, classroom-based study is the norm.

The DfE often states that *it is for schools to decide what teaching approaches and wider pastoral and extra-curricular activity to put in place, based on the needs of their pupils and drawing on evidence of effective practice.*

- **So, schools can choose to go into nature?** Yes and some schools do a fantastic job, but these are in the minority. Classroom learning is the norm. We know schools already have the flexibility to teach topics such as conservation, the Countryside Code and climate change through subjects like citizenship, PSHE education, and science. There are also voluntary schemes for children, such as the National Citizen Service and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. With the exception of the [Duke of Edinburgh Award](#), (a positive program, but in 2019/20 it was completed by less than 1% of UK children) these are classroom-based interventions rather than 'time in' and 'contact with' nature. There is some overlap but more importantly considerable difference between the relative benefits of time spent **learning about** nature and time spent **in** nature.

- **Could the DfE require schools to get children regularly into nature?** Yes, the Pupil Premium and the Sports Premium provide ring-fenced funding and statutory conditions, so there is already a working financial model.
- **Does the DfE ever include statutory requirements within the curriculum?** Yes, and it could choose to make a far stronger statement about spending time in nature other than an advisory note and non-statutory guidance of *'Pupils should use the local environment throughout the year to explore and answer questions.....'*

Is spending time in nature to improve mental wellbeing against the government policies? Not at all. The Government's set out its ambition to improve the environment within a generation in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#). This contains a key commitment to encourage children to be close to nature, in and out of school.

Is spending time in nature, understanding how we fit in the world such a bad idea? Professor Sir John Lawton said, *'I think it's a marvellous initiative, with the potential to both transform children's lives and to lay the foundations for a society that will care for our environment in the future'*.

Would spending time in nature learning about biodiversity loss contribute to the UK economy? [Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta](#) called for a transformation of our education system so that we all understand the impact of biodiversity loss on our economy.

Is the call for more children to spend more time in nature a minority view? No, in his recent documentary ['A Planet for us all'](#) Prince William quoted Sir David Attenborough, saying **"No one will** protect what they don't **care** about; and **no one will care** about what they have never experienced".

Is spending time in nature and wanting to protect our environment an extremist point view? Not at all, [research](#) shows the more time you spend in nature the more pro-environment you become and the more sustainable a life you want to lead.

- The Arch-Bishop of Canterbury Justin Welby said 'The threat to human life posed by climate change and loss of biodiversity dwarfs that of Covid-19, and yet we are still at a stage where some are content to sit back and leave it to others, or deny there is a problem at all.' (Church Times 26/02/2021 page 10 paper version).
- In September 2020 Boris Johnson signed the [Leaders' Pledge for Nature](#) while attending the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity in September 2020, – that states 'we are in a state of planetary emergency: the interdependent crisis of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and climate change – driven in large by unsustainable production and consumption – require urgent and immediate global action.
- The [Government](#) (page 41) agrees with the Committee for Climate Change that 'the delay to COP26 provides opportunities to ensure that the international response to the Covid-19 pandemic delivers a truly green, inclusive and resilient global recovery aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement objectives'.
- The [Committee for Climate Change](#) recommended that the Dept for Education considered the wider role of the education system in supporting the transition to a net-zero economy and preparing for the risks of climate change – including the need for greater public awareness and understanding, and the need for technical skills in the workforce. Their response stated 'we recognise the need for greater public awareness and understanding', but all the current actions are based around technical skills of

young people and adults. There is no provision to improve greater public awareness and understanding via schools, families and communities.

What stops all schools getting children regularly into nature?

- Schools have many demands on their time and budgets. Time in nature is often viewed as a nice 'add-on' or a 'summer-treat'. It is left to the interest of the school staff which means that the majority of children do not spend regular amounts of time in nature.
- Rebecca Pow has written that 'The evidence and insight from previous projects, such as the Government's Natural Connections Demonstration Project (2012-16), suggest that the two fundamental barriers schools face in taking their learning outside, underpinning the more traditionally cited barriers of risk, cost and national curriculum, are a lack of confidence in how to build learning outside the classroom safely and effectively into teaching practice, and simply being too busy to make sense of a wide array of potential support available to them from the voluntary, private and public sectors'.

What do children and young people think?

- Following lockdown-1, [83% of children said](#) that being in nature made them very happy.
- Two in five [children](#) don't trust adults to tackle the challenges that climate change presents, and two-thirds say leaders aren't listening enough to young people's views.

Are there any quick wins to help children remain positive about stopping the climate emergency?

- Invest in a [Nature Premium](#) so that schools understand the importance of getting children into nature and children are given agency to deal with their own mental wellbeing and given hope that the climate emergency can be prevented.
- Take advantage of the wealth of expertise within the [Consortium Turning Learning Inside Out](#) that is ready to support schools and teachers.
- Make teaching about biodiversity loss, the climate emergency and achieving net zero a statutory requirement so that all children understand these issues.
- Use the Nature Premium to embed the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within school life. Governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks to achieve the 17 Goals by 2030. Our education system would be a good way of informing children and families about the UN SDGs and raise public awareness over the remaining 9 years to fulfil our commitment to achieve the 17 Goals.
- [Progress on changing human behaviour to meet the challenges of regional and global sustainability has been slow](#). Use the Nature Premium to encourage active exposures to nature to encourage greater environmentalism in children and families.
- Use the Nature Premium to underpin the [Government's](#) ambition to increase international action on adaptation and resilience as one of the core priorities for the UK's Presidency of COP26.

Check out the infographic on page 4 – its food for thought!

If you would like more information or would like to help the campaign please contact:

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