

We are calling for a **Nature Premium** for all schools to fund regular and additional nature connection provision for children.
#NaturePremium

The Nature Premium would help children recover from lockdown and set them up to learn.

'We believe that the **Nature Premium** would improve children's mental and physical wellbeing after lockdown and demonstrate a positive investment in their future development as part of the green recovery'.

Lily Horseman, Chair of the Forest School Association

The benefit to children's mental and physical well-being has been demonstrated by government research. We are asking **Boris Johnson, Rishi Sunak, Nadhim Zahawi** and **Sajid Javid** to make the evidence-informed, economic and political decision to support a Nature Premium for early years and school children.

Lockdown has highlighted the inequalities of access to nature. This is not a new phenomenon¹, but one which now, more than ever, needs addressing.

Time in nature is crucial for children's mental and physical wellbeing: the benefits are far-reaching and well-documented^{2,3,4}. Nature provides a way to feel refreshed, revitalised, calm and relaxed. People who visit nature have greater life satisfaction, more self-worth, more happiness and less anxiety^{5,6}. Other benefits include better resilience, improvements in social functioning and social inclusion². Its benefits for physical wellbeing are critical too, obesity affects around 1 in every 5 children aged 10 to 11 in the UK⁷ and in 2014-15, the NHS spent an estimated £6.1 billion on overweight and obesity-related ill health⁸. Research published in 2018 showed that children used more energy on a school day with Forest School (playing in woods), than on a school day with P.E⁹. Wildlife Trust research also found that natural environments can play a key role in increasing physical activity levels². It could be that not all children enjoy organised games and team competition: playing in a nature rich environment is more inclusive.

Prior to lockdown, there was already a mental health crisis in the UK¹⁰, and the probability of this crisis now being exacerbated is high¹¹. It is not unreasonable to anticipate, as we emerge from lockdown, that children will experience high levels of stress, anxiety and withdrawal as a result of prolonged isolation¹².

Why invest in the Nature Premium?

The government should invest in a **Nature Premium** for children (using a similar model as the Schools Sports Premium – which funds regular PE sessions for all children).

1. For the short-term gains of:

- ☑ Supporting teaching outside to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection.
- ☑ Improvement of children's mental wellbeing outcomes – **saving short-term cost of mental health interventions that have developed during lockdown.**
- ☑ Encouraging higher levels of physical activity, **addressing obesity levels that developed during lockdown.**
- ☑ Building vitamin D levels and children's immune systems, **to help fight viruses.**
- ☑ Reconnecting children and staff to nature, **reducing stress levels.**
- ☑ Reconnecting over 4,727,090 children to nature; **children's experience with nature is varied, with almost 25% spending time outside less than once a month.**
- ☑ Benefiting ethnic minority children (33% average in primary schools), **improving their health and encouraging diversity in countryside experiences.**
- ☑ The likely return of investment. [OECD research shows that investment in early years/ primary age has a greater return than in secondary education.](#)
- ☑ Helping children manage their own safety, understand the importance of hygiene, prevent cross-contamination and play within their coronavirus safety bubble.
- ☑ Enabling schools to bring in Forest School / Outdoor Learning experts who can facilitate **nature connection/contact. The expertise exists in the outdoor education and conservation industry.**
- ☑ Enabling good quality Outdoor Learning to start immediately rather than putting pressure on teachers to go through additional training. **This is an immediate solution to the staff capacity problem.**
- ☑ It is in line with [Natural England and Defra](#) research and policies.
- ☑ It is in line with the [Chief Medical Officer's statements](#) and medical research.

2) For the medium-term gains of:

- ☑ Enabling Head Teachers to support Outdoor Learning and all its benefits avoiding difficult either/or decisions because of limited resources.
- ☑ Providing opportunities to access existing local outdoor learning provision and residential courses.
- ☑ The improvement of vulnerable children's mental wellbeing outcomes – **reducing the investment required for existing conditions.**
- ☑ Encouraging higher levels of physical activity, **addressing obesity levels that are the result of deprivation and lifestyle.**
- ☑ Fulfilling a curriculum requirement from the Ofsted framework to create an enriched curriculum.
- ☑ Improving levels of children's creativity; a [PISA criterion for 2021-22.](#)
- ☑ Compatibility with the government publication [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment.](#)
- ☑ Compatibility with Natural England and Defra research and policies.

3) For the long-term gains of:

- ☑ Building children's understanding of how they fit into the British countryside.
- ☑ Building children's knowledge of environmental issues and how they can care for their local community and the planet.
- ☑ Building the knowledge base of educators and children around biodiversity and the management of nature rich school grounds.
- ☑ Building a generation that can develop the economic value of the UK wildlife and countryside.
- ☑ Preparing students to study the new GCSE in Natural History.
- ☑ Preparing a generation that will want to contribute to the National Nature Service.
- ☑ Preparing a generation that wants to work in green industries in the environmental sector.
- ☑ Showing commitment to the [UN Sustainable Development goals](#).
- ☑ Setting a gold standard for education at an international level.

Notes:

- [Children's experience with nature is varied, with almost 25% spending time outside less than once a month.](#)
- [Time spent in the natural world provides large benefits to the economy.](#)
- The government invested £6.4 million over 4 years in 300 [Nature Friendly Schools](#) in 2019. This is the equivalent to £5,333.33 per school per year. [There are 16,769 state funded primary schools in England.](#)
- The government funds the [Sports Premium](#) so that the average state funded primary school receives £18,660 per year.
- In 2018 the government published [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#). In Chapter 3: Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing it states 'we will Encourage children to be close to nature, in and out of school, with particular focus on disadvantaged areas. It goes on to say this will be achieved by **i. Helping primary schools create nature-friendly grounds ii. Supporting more pupil contact with local natural spaces (page 75 -76)**

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