

Wild Together

Responding to the Curriculum and Assessment Review

Practical opportunities for outdoor learning practice

January 2026

Throughout this document we use the term outdoor learning to describe a broad range of learning experiences that take place outdoors. Where helpful, this includes elements of Forest School practice but is not limited to a single model.

Purpose of this briefing

The 2025 Curriculum and Assessment Review was set up to:

- Review the current curriculum and assessment system in England and consider whether it remains fit for purpose
- Identify blocks to progress and good outcomes, with particular concern for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND
- Examine how curriculum design, structure, and assessment affect learning, inclusion, and pupil engagement

The Review's purpose was not to make any immediate changes, but to make recommendations to inform future revisions of the national curriculum.

While a lot of focus has been on assessment and structure, the review also makes strong statements about how children learn best, particularly in KS1 and 2.

Although the Review does not explicitly reference outdoor learning, it identifies several areas where these approaches can clearly support its recommendations. In particular, the Review emphasises curiosity, flexible learning, and the importance of building broad and deep understanding through meaningful connections across subjects. Outdoor learning offers practical ways of creating these conditions.

We've written this briefing to help schools, but also other settings, on how this can be put into practice and bring outdoor learning into more focus, by:

- Highlighting key parts of the Review that are relevant to everyday practice
- Explaining some practical ways schools can respond now, without waiting for the policy to come into force
- Showing how outdoor learning practice can support this direction

As always, this is guidance and opinion, not prescription.

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Key messages from the Review (relevant to primary practice)

- Key Stages 1 and 2 are formative in their own right, not merely preparation for later schooling.
- Primary education should nurture curiosity, enthusiasm, and joy in learning, alongside secure foundations in literacy and numeracy.
- Breadth without depth can undermine understanding, particularly with an already overloaded curriculum.
- Meaningful, developmentally appropriate connections across subjects are valuable when they deepen learning.
- Rigid, inflexible approaches tend to disadvantage pupils with SEND and those who struggle to engage in traditional classroom settings.
- Teachers should retain professional autonomy to adapt learning to context, need, and place.

What you can do now

The Review does not require schools to wait for policy change. Many of its priorities can be addressed through existing practice.

Below are practical ways schools can implement and adapt the recommendations.

1. Use outdoor learning to deepen curriculum learning

Outdoor learning can be used to slow learning down and explore concepts in greater depth.

Examples include:

- Using natural environments to explore scientific concepts over time
- Revisiting geographical ideas through repeated, place-based experiences
- Supporting mathematical language through practical, embodied problem-solving

2. Use outdoor learning practice to support inclusion and SEND

The Review says that pupils with SEND and those who struggle with engagement are often most affected by the curriculum when it is overloaded and inflexible.

Outdoor learning can support:

- Emotional regulation and readiness to learn
- Communication and social interaction
- Confidence, belonging, and positive relationships with adults

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3. Protect time for enrichment with clear purpose

The Review values enrichment and life skills, particularly where these support engagement, wellbeing, and long-term development.

Outdoor learning can provide:

- Opportunities for collaboration, problem-solving, and shared responsibility
- Experiences that develop resilience and independence
- Purposeful physical activity in natural environments

4. Support oracy and communication through outdoor experiences

The Review highlights ongoing gaps in spoken language and communication.

Outdoor learning naturally creates space for:

- Dialogue and shared decision-making
- Storytelling and reflection
- Language-rich experiences rooted in real activity

5. Make use of physical environments to support learning and wellbeing

The Review recognises the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional benefits of learning in physical environments.

Regular time outdoors can:

- Support focus and engagement
- Reduce anxiety and stress
- Provide alternative ways for pupils to demonstrate understanding

What good practice can look like

Schools using outdoor learning well often share common features:

- Regular, planned sessions rather than one-off experiences
- Clear links to curriculum aims and wider school values
- Consistent groups and relationships over time
- Opportunities for reflection and language development
- Staff confidence supported through training and shared understanding

Inspection, accountability, and reassurance

The Review supports approaches that:

- Demonstrate clear curriculum intent
- Show thoughtful implementation
- Reflect inclusive and adaptive teaching

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Final reflection

The Curriculum and Assessment Review offers a clear and timely emphasis on depth, relationship, and meaningful learning in the primary years. Its focus on how children learn, rather than simply what they are taught, creates space for schools to think carefully about learning environments, curriculum design, and inclusion.

Outdoor learning provides practical ways for schools to respond to this direction. Used thoughtfully, it can support engagement, wellbeing, and secure understanding while remaining aligned with curriculum intent and school priorities.

Wild Together supports schools to develop inclusive, curriculum-aligned outdoor learning practice.