

My School, My Planet

Evaluation summary



“My School, My Planet has been a stepping-stone towards opening up across the key stages so that all children within the school have an opportunity to be able to learn outside. We can learn so much as a school from the outside providers who are coming in with a skill set to help us enhance their learning”
—Senior School Leader

Foreword

Learning through Landscapes is a charity deeply committed to its vision of creating a society where the benefits of spending regular time outdoors are valued and appreciated. We believe that outdoor learning, play and connection with nature are fundamental parts of education, at every stage, for every child and young person.

Yet access to these fundamental parts of education has become a matter of social justice. Increasingly we see misconceptions about the benefits of outdoor learning and play in mainstream education creating a widening gap between disadvantaged pupils and their advantaged counterparts.

2020 was a year that challenged us all. During the lockdown it became increasingly obvious how important connecting with nature is for the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people. Whilst COVID-19 swept the world, the Black Lives Matter movement shone a light on the incredible inequality rife across the globe.

To begin to tackle these inequalities, with emergency funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, we delivered My School, My Planet, a pilot project developed to improve the outcomes of children from disadvantaged ethnic groups and low socioeconomic backgrounds. The project was deployed at exceptional speed, during an incredibly challenging period, to support children, schools, and communities when they were most in need.

We were guided by Louder than Words, a non-profit organisation passionate about developing engaging community projects for hard-to-reach children and young people. Their invaluable support enabled us to explore complex educational, societal, and

environmental injustices faced by children living in disadvantaged and marginalised communities. One of many conscious decisions they supported us to make was not to use the term ‘BAME’, you will not see it in this report, as so many young people do not feel it is a fitting term to represent their identity within a progressive society.

We were surprised to see how few children selected climate change from the project themes. This challenged our perception that all young people are engaged in this issue, we thought it would be the most popular of the three topics. This misconception is prevalent across popular media and needs addressing urgently so that every child can play an equal part in the protection of the planet for their futures.

Despite this, it is clear from this report that the project has had an immediate and measurable impact on children’s ability to engage in environmental issues, in helping them feel more positive, and to gain knowledge about the natural environment, their role within it and within their society.

We need dedicated action to tackle the lack of diversity within our sector. It is essential that children and young people see themselves represented or we risk more people feeling excluded from nature because of their cultural heritage, gender or sexuality.

Above all, we urgently need to leverage funding to bring My School, My Planet to every school in the UK and tackle the social injustices felt by so many children head on.



Carley Sefton
CEO, Learning through Landscapes

My School, My Planet

My School, My Planet is an outdoor learning project, run by Learning through Landscapes and funded by a £250k Heritage Emergency Fund grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund as a response to the COVID-19 crisis.

This pilot project aspired to improve the outcomes of children from disadvantaged ethnic groups and low socioeconomic backgrounds who had the least access to the natural environment and to support their physical and mental wellbeing. It aimed to help children re-engage with learning after a significant period of time away from school during lockdown and encourage a greater connection to their natural heritage.

The schools

My School, My Planet was piloted in **49 schools** across the UK.

30 schools in England, 2 in Northern Ireland, 12 in Scotland and 5 in Wales.



Project delivery

39 specialist trainers delivered the project.

700 hours of in school support was provided.

The project ran from September to November 2020.

Children were given the choice to learn about climate change, biodiversity or soils and were supported to make lasting changes to their school grounds in response to the environmental challenges brought by these issues.

Acknowledgements

Learning through Landscapes led a network of community-based outdoor learning agencies to deliver a bespoke enriching outdoor curriculum to support children to learn about environmental issues such as biodiversity, climate change and soil degradation. These included:

- The Garden Classroom
- The Conservation Volunteers
- Field Studies Council
- Royal Horticultural Society
- STEM Northern Ireland
- Oasis Academy Trust
- Learning through Landscape's network of accredited professionals

Talented partners brought their expertise to this project, ensuring that the project was designed to tackle the complex educational, societal, and environmental issues faced by communities. These include:

- The Centre for Education & Youth (CfEY) undertook the project evaluation. This highly-specialist think and action-tank rigorously assessed the project's impact.
- Cultural consultant, Myvanwy Evans at Louder Than Words supported the team to embed diversity and inclusivity into the project through cultural mapping and journeys.
- Education and learning Advisor, Chanel McPherson-George, Head of Science at Bedford Free School provided a critique on the educational rigour of the project.
- Youth environmental activists, Dominique Palmer, Anita Okunde and Louis J. Butler brought to life the issues and lived experiences of children and young people living in marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

Finally, we want to thank The National Lottery Heritage Fund, in particular Drew Bennellick, for their continued support throughout the project.

Project evaluation

The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) was commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the My School, My Planet pilot. The evaluation is a mixed methods design combining baseline and endpoint surveys, from all participants, with qualitative data from four sampled schools. This qualitative data includes interviews with project trainers and members of the schools' Senior Leadership Teams, and a range of project artefacts from children, including images and drawings.

Gathering both quantitative survey data and qualitative evidence allows a more nuanced picture of individual children's experiences. Given the short-term nature of the project, both these forms of data collection are important to draw meaningful conclusions.

About this report

The My School, My Planet pilot intended to deliver nine outcomes, mapped onto three National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes. The following pages highlight key findings related to these outcomes that together represent strong evidence that the pilot delivered demonstrable benefits.

The children

1,029 children participated in total.

Participants ranged in age from 6 to 13 years old and averaged **9** years of age.

A wider range of children will be involved in heritage.

47

Participants came from 47 different ethnic backgrounds.



of participants came from backgrounds other than the three backgrounds most frequently reported*

Many participants came from socioeconomically disadvantaged households with over a third identified as being eligible for Free School Meals – double the national average. Teachers reported a special educational need or disability (SEND) for 16% of participants which is in line with national averages. SEND status was left blank for many participants and this may therefore underestimate the proportion that had a special education need or disability.

“I want to stop climate change and I want to stop there being wild-fires and I want trees to live longer lives.”
—Child

Intended outcomes

- A wider group of children are involved in learning about nature in school grounds.
- Children feel engaged in issues about their local environment and natural heritage.

Key findings

- My School, My Planet allowed a diverse group of children to take part in outdoor learning about their local natural heritage. This was particularly important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which many children had spent significant time indoors.
- Children’s engagement with issues about their local environment and natural heritage increased during the project. Their awareness of how their school grounds linked to environmental problems increased over the course of the project. Children demonstrated a growing feeling of agency over the local environment.
- There was compelling evidence of a shift in children’s understanding of how their local actions can have a wider environmental impact during the project.
- The project gave children an opportunity to demonstrate their engagement with issues impacting on their local environment and natural heritage, particularly in their school grounds.

How did we see this in our case studies?

- Children made environmental pledges such as wasting less food, planting trees, flowers and bulbs, and looking after animals. One child, who was described as being disengaged in the project initially, pledged to make signs to encourage children and staff at the school to protect what they had planted in the garden.
- In one school, both the trainer and headteacher reported the children’s development of a sense of responsibility towards the environment. For example, they were observed discussing the environmental importance of plants and their learning about gardening in ecologically friendly ways with their parents at the school gate.

*White Scottish/English/Welsh/Northern Irish/British; White Scottish; and Any other white background



“We went from week one where we were afraid of getting dirty, to now quite relishing rolling in the mud. So many children had never even touched a worm before, let alone put it in their hands. And it was quite amazing to see.”
—School Senior Leader

Children will have greater wellbeing.



36%

of participants reported an increase in frequency of physical activity at the end of the project.

Intended outcomes

- Children feel more connected with the outdoor environment and nature.
- Children have improved physical activity.
- Children have improved social wellbeing.
- Children have improved school motivation.

Key finding

- There were positive shifts in children's wellbeing during My School, My Planet delivery, across a number of indicators of physical and social wellbeing. In particular, the project gave young people an opportunity to increase their physical activity levels.

How do we see this in our case studies?

- One senior leader stated that the project had been a catalyst for the school to think about visiting natural sites in their local areas. As a result, the senior leader expected children to continue spending more time outside.
- In one school, of the 29 children taking part, only five reported going outside most days during the six months that they were off school. The senior leader reflected that the project helped children engage more with the outdoor environment and nature.
- One trainer reported children covering several miles a day, whilst the senior leader noted ties between physical and mental health, both of which they believed had improved because of extensive time spent outside.
- Interviewees said the project had given children opportunities to work together towards shared goals, often with peers outside of existing friendship groups. It created opportunities for children to improve social wellbeing and develop confidence. For example, one young person began the project very quiet, and ended the project making suggestions to her peers about how they might plant the garden.
- In one school, the senior leader reported that children had found the transition from remote learning back into school challenging. They felt that the project had helped ease this transition, noting that students were “very motivated” on days that involved My School, My Planet.

"I have loved being outside and finding out about biodiversity. To be honest I thought it would be really boring but it really wasn't!"
—Child

Themes chosen by children:



Climate change 7



Biodiversity 23



Soils 19

Children will learn about heritage, leading to a change in ideas and outcomes.

Children were tested on their knowledge of their chosen subject area at the beginning and end of project delivery.

In knowledge tests about **biodiversity**, children answering 2 or more questions (out of 3) correctly increased:



In knowledge tests about **climate change**, children answering 7 or more questions (out of 10) correctly increased:



In knowledge tests about **soil science**, children answering 7 or more questions (out of 10) correctly increased:



Intended outcomes

- Children have improved understanding about their project topic (climate change, biodiversity or soils).
- Children feel engaged and empowered to enact physical changes in their school grounds.
- Children relate understanding about project themes to individual experiences of culture, cultural heritage and identity.

Key findings

- There were measurable increases in children's knowledge of biodiversity, climate change and soils, as well as their sense of empowerment over improving the school grounds.
- Children were measurably more aware of how their local actions might contribute to wider environmental outcomes.
- My School, My Planet prompted children and school staff to make more of their local natural heritage by developing cultural maps and journeys.

How do we see this in our case studies?

- In a special school for children with Additional Support Needs, the trainer suggested that children had started with "zero knowledge" but that through digging and planting activities, alongside discussion of soil erosion and testing of soil shape and texture, their knowledge improved.
- In a Northern Ireland school, children's interest in mushrooms enabled several concepts to be linked, including learning about the lifecycle of fungi and their contribution to soils, soil types, and the differences in the role of photosynthesis for plants and fungi. This related to learning about cultural heritage as

children made connections between their families' cultural history and the local area. In the past the area's economy involved growing mushrooms.

- Children established their own plans and designs to develop their school grounds, working with the trainer to bring visible changes to life. All of which made them feel invested in the place's future.
- Children with an international heritage linked their learning about local biodiversity and migratory species to the countries their families had come from, finding out that birds they spotted during the project spent part of the year in Morocco and Somalia.

Engagement with climate change

Climate change was the least popular of the three project themes, only being chosen in 7 out of 49 schools. This challenges the perception that all children and young people are engaged with the climate change agenda.

However, My School, My Planet demonstrates that when children are explicitly engaged with practical steps that can be taken to mitigate climate change in school grounds, there is an immediate and measurable impact on children's knowledge about the causes and solutions to climate change. For example, in knowledge tests, when asking children to correctly identify impacts of climate change, the number correctly identifying "What happens in the UK affects climate change in other parts of the world" rose from 33% to 54%.

Furthermore, in interviews prior to the project, children's attitudes towards the environment were described as ranging from disinterested to "nihilistic", with one trainer reporting that children felt they had no agency in preventing environmental catastrophe. By the end of the project children in all case study schools were able to take ownership of their local environment and connect this with broader environmental issues, such as climate change.

Case Study



Ark Bentworth Primary Academy

is located in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

My School, My Planet helped the children in this school from diverse ethnic backgrounds link their learning about local biodiversity and migratory species to the countries their families had come from. Children found out that birds they spotted during the project spent part of the year in places such as Morocco and Somalia.

They also discussed how the biodiversity of their local area compared to the places their families had originated from. The trainer supported these discussions by bringing in a large map of the world, which the children annotated to share their heritage.

This personal connection with what they learned as part of the project sparked one child's interest, who told the trainer about a new species of mouse that had just been found in Somalia (where some of his family were from) for the first time in 50 years.



“What I saw between the first week and the last week was people building a pride in place, a pride of where their school was and what they were doing with it, but also a pride in the places their families come from. I had one boy say “Miss, Miss! Did you know there’s been a mouse just found in Somalia that hasn’t been seen for 50 years?” I don’t think he would have shared that as a thing to be proud of from Somalia without My School, My Planet.”

My School, My Planet trainer,
Ark Bentworth Primary Academy

Recommendations

The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) make the following recommendations for any future roll out of My School, My Planet:

Professional development of staff

- Provide further training and guidance for trainers related to children’s cultural identity and heritage.
- Expand training to include peer-to-peer support during the project, and regular opportunities to test ideas and concepts with peers ahead of delivery.
- Include “get to know you” sessions for trainers, school staff and children before delivery begins.

My School, My Planet curriculum

- Simplify project resources to a core set of activities, with a wider range of supplementary resources.
- Ensure trainers and teachers can work together to tailor content to children’s learning needs.
- Ensure that project resources use the same terminology as is used in school curricula in different key stages. Terminology should also match that used in the different four nations.
- Work with schools to identify project elements that might be deliverable by school staff and offer support in planning how they will continue their chosen elements of the project.

School engagement

- Extend the project to older year groups.
- Ensure teachers and support staff understand senior leaders’ expectations in terms of supporting project delivery.
- In secondary schools, ensure that there is a link member of staff assigned to support the project and provide liaison with the trainer.

Project evaluation

- Refine the portfolio of quantitative surveying measures, including the social wellbeing outcome and the nature connection surveys. To explore a more specific dimension of wellbeing, potentially around children’s relationships with peers.
- Build in survey pre-testing to ensure accessibility for all children, especially primary age children and those with additional needs.
- Consider alternative metrics for connectedness to nature that reflect children’s own terms.
- Plan additional resources for collecting qualitative data, ensuring that a comparable selection of artefacts can be gathered and analysed.
- Plan for a follow up survey after the project has been completed to assess whether impact has been sustained.

“We would definitely do it again in a heartbeat. It’d be nice to see the outcomes from older students, maybe some students who have become disengaged with the curriculum or maybe have a little bit of disrespect for the school environment. Try out a project like this on them to change their attitudes.”
—Senior Leader, School 3





Learning through Landscapes

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