



NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus June 2009 Survey

The Countryside and the National Curriculum Countryside Alliance Foundation

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Introduction

Four questions were submitted by the Countryside Alliance Foundation to the NFER's Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey in June 2009. The questions examined the following topics:

- the importance teachers place on pupils learning about the countryside within the National Curriculum
- the role of the countryside in cross-curricular learning within the National Curriculum in the future
- whether teachers currently receive adequate advice and resources to enable them to use outdoor educational trips to the countryside in cross-curricular learning
- the main barriers in taking pupils to the countryside to facilitate cross-curricular learning.

This report provides an analysis of the responses to each question alongside supporting information about the survey. Where appropriate, the results are presented by school phase (primary and secondary) and seniority (class teachers and senior leaders). This report forms one part of the output from the Omnibus Survey. The analysis is also presented and given in more detail on a set of interactive web-based tables produced separately (in Pulsar Web).

Context

There is growing evidence to suggest that the natural environment can make a positive contribution to people's social, emotional and physical development¹. Research has revealed that carrying out activities in natural open spaces can help to improve the mood and stress levels of young people, including those with severe behavioural problems². These experiences can also help motivate young people, reduce truancy levels and improve attainment, while also contributing towards the Every Child Matters outcomes. Therefore, it is evident that while theoretical knowledge is crucial to learning, formative learning outside of the classroom can also be both beneficial and rewarding.

¹ Morris, N. (2003). OPENspace: the research centre for inclusive access to outdoor environments. [online]. Available: <http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk/pdf/healthwellbeing.pdf> [23 July, 2009].

² Countryside Alliance (2009). Education. [online]. Available: <http://www.countryside-alliance.org.uk/our-campaigns/rural-manifesto/education> [23 July, 2009].

While there are obvious benefits from outside learning, it seems that children and young people have become increasingly disengaged from the countryside in recent years and subsequently lack knowledge and understanding about the natural world and what it has to offer. Statistics have shown, for example, that 62 per cent of children perceive that they spend more time playing indoors than anywhere else and that less than 10 per cent of children aged 7-11 spend time playing in woodlands or heaths³.

In November 2006, a manifesto for learning outside the classroom (LOtC) was launched with the vision that *'every young person should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and personal development, whatever their age, ability or circumstances'*⁴. Following on from this, the LOtC partnership developed an online resource to provide practical guidance, support, and continuing professional development (CPD) packages for professionals working with young people aged 0-19 to help implement and improve outdoor learning experiences.

Despite improved support, the provision of outdoor learning in schools is often affected by health and safety concerns. However, these activities take place on a daily basis, often without problems arising. Restricting outdoor activities could potentially limit children's and young people's ability to develop new skills and gain new experiences. Health and safety guidance and national accreditation through the LOtC Quality Badge scheme seeks to provide practitioners with the confidence to offer outdoor learning experiences as an integral part of curricular activities. At present, however, outdoor education seems to be a low priority in many schools and is not a core subject in the National Curriculum.

In this context it was useful, in this round of the Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey, to seek information about the importance that teachers place on pupils' learning about the countryside, the support teachers receive to implement such activities, and to consider the key barriers in taking pupils to the countryside to facilitate cross-curricular learning.

³ Countryside Alliance (2009). Education. [online]. Available: <http://www.countryside-alliance.org.uk/our-campaigns/rural-manifesto/education> [13 July, 2009].

⁴ Teacher Training Resource Bank (2006). A Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom. [online]. Available: [http://www.ttrb.ac.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?Keyword=learning outside the classroom&SearchOption=Phrase&SearchType=Keyword&RefineExpand=1&ContentId=12957](http://www.ttrb.ac.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?Keyword=learning%20outside%20the%20classroom&SearchOption=Phrase&SearchType=Keyword&RefineExpand=1&ContentId=12957) [13 July, 2009].

Analysis of findings

The sample

The survey was completed by a sample of over 1,400 teachers and was weighted to ensure representativeness. The sample included teachers from a wide range of school governance types and subject areas. Sample numbers were sufficient to allow for comparisons between the primary and secondary sectors. Detailed information about the sample is given in the supplementary section of this report.

Importance placed on outdoor learning

The responses from the first question in the Omnibus Survey indicated that the vast majority of respondents (97 per cent) felt that it was ‘very important’ or ‘quite important’ for pupils to learn about the countryside within the National Curriculum. However, the value placed on outdoor learning differed by sector: a greater proportion of primary respondents (57 per cent) than their secondary counterparts (46 per cent) felt that it was ‘very important’ for pupils to learn about the countryside (see Table 1). Responses broken down by senior leaders and classroom teachers were found to be largely similar.

Table 1.

How important do you consider it is for pupils to learn about the countryside within the National Curriculum?	All	Primary	Secondary
Very important	52%	57%	46%
Quite important	45%	42%	47%
Of little importance	3%	2%	6%
Of no importance	<1%	0%	<1%
Don't know	<1%	0%	1%
Local base (N)	1403	725	676

*Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
 Due to the primary, secondary and all teacher categories being weighted separately, the number of primary and secondary respondents may not sum to the number of teachers in total
 Source: NFER Omnibus Survey June 2009*

The role of the countryside in cross-curricular activity

The next question in the survey asked teachers to comment on whether or not the countryside could play a greater role in cross-curricular learning within the National Curriculum in the future. As Table 2 shows, 89 per cent of all respondents felt that the countryside could play a greater role in cross-curricular learning in the future. When analysed by school sector, proportionally more primary respondents than their secondary

counterparts expressed such a view (94 per cent compared with 83 per cent). It is also worth noting that proportionally more secondary respondents (11 per cent) than their primary counterparts (3 per cent) answered ‘don’t know’ to this question. Here again, there was little difference in the responses of classroom teachers and senior leaders.

Table 2.

Do you think the countryside could play a greater role in cross-curricular learning within the National Curriculum in the future?			
	All	Primary	Secondary
Yes	89%	94%	83%
No	4%	2%	6%
Don't know	7%	3%	11%
Local base (N)	1399	725	672

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100
Due to the primary, secondary and all teacher categories being weighted separately, the number of primary and secondary respondents may not sum to the number of teachers in total
Source: NFER Omnibus Survey June 2009

Advice and resources

As shown in Table 3 below, over half of all respondents (55 per cent) felt that teachers do not receive enough advice or resources to enable them to use outdoor educational trips to the countryside in cross-curricular learning. Just under a quarter of respondents (24 per cent), however, felt that they receive adequate advice but not enough resources; six per cent felt they receive both adequate resource and advice while a further six per cent felt they receive adequate resources but not enough advice. It seems that resources for enabling educational trips to the countryside are more lacking than advice about such trips.

Table 3.

Do you feel that teachers currently receive adequate advice and resources to enable them to use outdoor educational trips to the countryside in cross-curricular learning?	All	Primary	Secondary
Yes, they receive both adequate advice and resources	6%	8%	4%
They receive adequate advice, but not enough resources	24%	26%	22%
They receive adequate resources, but not enough advice	6%	6%	6%
No, they do not receive enough advice or resources	55%	55%	56%
Don't know	8%	4%	13%
Local base (N)	1402	722	678

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

Due to the primary, secondary and all teacher categories being weighted separately, the number of primary and secondary respondents may not sum to the number of teachers in total

Source: NFER Omnibus Survey June 2009

Responses by school sector were largely similar with the exception of the ‘don’t know’ category. Proportionally more secondary teachers (13 per cent) than their primary counterparts (four per cent) responded ‘don’t know’ to this question. This might suggest that secondary school respondents are less aware of, or have less access to, the advice and resources that are available to teachers.

Responses were also analysed by seniority of respondent. A greater proportion of senior leaders (38 per cent) than classroom teachers (22 per cent) felt that teachers currently receive adequate advice but not enough resources, while a higher proportion of classroom teachers (58 per cent) than senior leaders (41 per cent) reported that they do not receive enough advice or resources.

Barriers in taking pupils to the countryside

The final question in the survey asked respondents to identify the main barriers to taking pupils to the countryside to facilitate cross-curricular learning (Table 4). The three most frequently identified responses were as follows:

- concerns about health and safety (76 per cent)
- lack of funding (64 per cent)
- insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum (53 per cent).

Interestingly, two of the barriers least frequently mentioned by respondents were lack of support from senior management (12 per cent) and lack of support from the local authority (seven per cent). This suggests that there is sufficient managerial and administrative support available for teachers to undertake outdoor activities in the countryside if they could overcome other more dominant barriers.

When responses were analysed by sector, a number of differences emerged which included:

- insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum was identified by 69 per cent of secondary teachers compared with 38 per cent of their primary counterparts
- time required to fill in the necessary forms/administration was identified by 59 per cent of secondary respondents compared with 34 per cent of primary respondents
- difficulties in undertaking risk management was a barrier identified by 51 per cent of secondary respondents compared with 38 per cent of primary respondents
- the cost is too high was identified by 58 per cent of primary respondents compared with 39 per cent of their secondary counterparts.

These differences would suggest that time pressures are more of a concern for secondary teachers than their primary counterparts. While not one of the most frequently mentioned responses overall, it is also worth noting that a greater proportion of secondary teachers than primary teachers identified a lack of support from senior management as a main barrier (19 per cent compared with 6 per cent). This is perhaps not surprising given that secondary schools are generally much larger institutions which might make communication on this type of issue more challenging.

Table 4.

What are the main barriers in taking school pupils to the countryside to facilitate cross-curricular learning?	All	Primary	Secondary
Lack of teacher confidence	37%	38%	38%
Concerns about health and safety	76%	74%	79%
Lack of training	28%	26%	31%
Difficulties with undertaking risk management	43%	38%	51%
Lack of funding	64%	65%	63%
Fear of litigation in the unlikely event of an accident	49%	45%	55%
The time required to fill in the necessary forms/administration	46%	34%	59%
The cost is too high	49%	58%	39%
Lack of support from senior management	12%	6%	19%
Lack of support from the Local Authority	7%	6%	7%
Insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum	53%	38%	69%
Other	10%	9%	11%
Local base (N)	1403	726	676

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

Due to the primary, secondary and all teacher categories being weighted separately, the number of primary and secondary respondents may not sum to the number of teachers in total

Source: NFER Omnibus Survey June 2009

Some differences also emerged when responses were analysed by seniority. The most notable differences between senior leaders and classroom teachers were:

- the cost being too high was noted by 57 per cent of senior leaders compared with 47 per cent of classroom teachers
- insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum was identified by 56 per cent of classroom teachers compared with 39 per cent of senior leaders
- time to fill in necessary forms/administration was noted by 47 per cent of classroom teachers compared with 41 per cent of senior leaders.

A small number of teachers (but over 100 respondents) also provided a response to the additional open ended part of this question. The most frequently mentioned ‘other’ responses included cover issues and specific reference to the ‘rarely cover’ initiative

which limits the amount of cover teachers can do (15 per cent and 17 per cent respectively) as well as the cost of travel (mentioned by 10 per cent of respondents).

Conclusions and implications for the client

The findings from this series of questions have shown that the vast majority of teachers felt that it is important for pupils to learn about the countryside within the National Curriculum. Interestingly, however, when analysed by school sector, more primary teachers than their secondary counterparts felt that it was ‘very important’ for pupils to learn about the countryside; perhaps an indication that greater importance is placed on outdoor learning in primary schools. A more in-depth study focused on this particular issue would be required to examine these responses and differences more fully.

Just over half (55 per cent) of all respondents commented that teachers do not currently receive enough advice or resources to enable them to use outdoor educational trips to the countryside in cross-curricular learning. This finding suggests the need to better promote and raise awareness of the resources and practical advice that are available to teaching staff, and perhaps to provide *more* resources and advice. There was also a notable difference by seniority, with a greater proportion of classroom teachers reporting that they do not receive enough advice or resources. This would suggest that on the whole, senior leaders feel more confident, at least in theory, that their school is able to deliver outdoor activities, than their classroom colleagues. The implications of this could be set out in two ways: on the one hand, it may be that classroom teachers have a ‘better’ view of reality, regarding the practical difficulties of obtaining advice and resources; and on the other it may be that the advice and resources are there, especially for senior leaders, and some schools may therefore need to develop more effective ways of ensuring that information provided at a strategic level is cascaded down to others in the school.

It is encouraging that most respondents felt that the countryside could play a greater role in cross-curricular learning in the future; however at present, there are a number of barriers which are preventing teachers from implementing such activities. The most frequently reported barrier was having concerns about health and safety. This finding suggests the need for schools to provide formal training and support to teachers in order to improve practice and increase confidence to carry out outdoor educational visits to the countryside, perhaps through the LOtC badge scheme. Other frequently mentioned barriers included a lack of funding and insufficient time/flexibility in the curriculum; both of which could prevent teachers being able to obtain the training and support they require

in order to ensure that the countryside becomes a more integral part of cross-curricular learning. Further research might offer insight into the further support teachers feel they need in order to overcome these barriers.

Supporting information

How was the survey conducted?

This is data from the June 2009 survey. The survey was completed in June 2009 by a panel of 1,431 practising teachers from 911 schools in the maintained sector in England. The survey was conducted online and teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire between 19th June and 1st July. During the survey period all ‘open’ questions (those without a pre-identified set of responses) were coded by a team of experienced coders within the Foundation.

What was the composition of the panel?

The panel included teachers from the full range of roles in primary and secondary schools, from headteachers to newly qualified class teachers. Fifty-one per cent (726) of the respondents were teaching in primary schools and 49 per cent (705) were teaching in secondary schools.

How representative of schools nationally were the schools corresponding to the teachers panel?

There was an under-representation of schools in the highest quintile in terms of eligibility for free school meals in both the sample of primary schools and the sample of secondary schools. The sample of secondary schools also had an over-representation of schools with low eligibility for free school meals. To address this, weights were calculated using free schools meals factors to create a more balanced sample. Due to the differences between the populations of primary schools and secondary schools, different weights were created for primary schools, secondary schools and then for the whole sample overall. The weightings have been applied to all of the analyses referred to in this commentary and contained within the tables supplied in electronic format (via Pulsar Web)⁵.

Tables S.1, S. 2 and S.3 show the representation of the weighted achieved sample against the population. Table S.4 shows the representation of the weighted teacher sample by role in school.

⁵ *The sample was not weighted for missing free school meal data*

Table S.1 Representation of (weighted) primary schools compared to primary schools nationally

		National Population	NFER Sample
		%	%
Achievement Band (Overall performance by KS2 2007 data)	Lowest band	16	17
	2nd lowest band	17	18
	Middle band	18	19
	2nd highest band	20	21
	Highest band	21	24
	Missing	8	1
% eligible FSM (5 pt scale)	Lowest 20%	21	21
	2nd lowest 20%	21	21
	Middle 20%	20	20
	2nd highest 20%	19	20
	Highest 20%	18	18
	Missing	1	0
Primary school type	Infant/First	15	9
	Primary/Combined	76	75
	Junior	8	15
	Middle/other type	<1	<1
Region	North	31	23
	Midlands	32	28
	South	37	49
Local Authority type	London Borough	11	13
	Metropolitan Authorities	21	18
	English Unitary Authorities	18	20
	Counties	51	49
Number of schools		17044	587

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

Some information is not available for all schools and some schools included more than one respondent

Source: NFER Omnibus Survey June 2009

Table S.2 Representation of (weighted) secondary schools compared to secondary schools nationally

		National Population	NFER Sample
		%	%
Achievement Band (Overall performance by GCSE 2007 data)	Lowest band	19	13
	2nd lowest band	19	23
	Middle band	19	23
	2nd highest band	18	24
	Highest band	17	16
	Missing	9	<1
% eligible FSM (5 pt scale)	Lowest 20%	13	14
	2nd lowest 20%	24	25
	Middle 20%	25	26
	2nd highest 20%	21	21
	Highest 20%	14	14
	Missing	3	0
Secondary school type	Middle	7	<1
	Comprehensive to 16	37	27
	Comprehensive to 18	47	68
	Secondary Moderns	<1	<1
	Grammar	5	4
	Academies	4	0
Region	North	29	26
	Midlands	34	30
	South	37	45
Local Authority type	London Borough	13	13
	Metropolitan Authorities	21	23
	English Unitary Authorities	19	22
	Counties	47	42
Number of schools		3328	324

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100. Some information is not available for all schools and some schools included more than one respondent. Source: NFER Omnibus Survey June 2009

Table S.3 Representation of all schools (weighted) compared to all schools nationally

		National Population	NFER Sample
		%	%
Achievement Band (By KS2 2007 and GCSE 2007 data)	Lowest band	17	16
	2nd lowest band	18	19
	Middle band	18	21
	2nd highest band	20	22
	Highest band	20	22
	Missing	7	<1
% eligible FSM (5 pt scale)	Lowest 20%	20	20
	2nd lowest 20%	21	22
	Middle 20%	21	21
	2nd highest 20%	20	20
	Highest 20%	17	18
	Missing	1	0
Region	North	30	24
	Midlands	32	29
	South	37	48
Local Authority type	London Borough	11	13
	Metropolitan Authorities	21	19
	English Unitary Authorities	18	21
	Counties	50	47
Number of schools		20372	911

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

Some information is not available for all schools and some schools included more than one respondent

Source: NFER Omnibus Survey June 2009

Table S.4 Comparison of the achieved (weighted) sample with the national population by grade of teacher

Role	Primary schools		Secondary schools	
	population	weighted sample	population	weighted sample
	%	%	%	%
Headteachers	10	7	2	1
Deputy Headteachers	7	10	3	3
Assistant Headteachers	4	5	6	9
Class teachers and others	79	78	89	86

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100

Sources: NFER Omnibus Survey June 2009, DCSF: School Workforce in England (including pupil: teacher ratios and pupil: adult ratios), January 2009 (Provisional)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000844/index.shtml> (July 2009)

How accurately do the findings represent the national position?

Precision is a measure of the extent to which the results of different samples agree with each other. If we drew a different sample of teachers would we get the same results? The more data that is available the more precise the findings. For all schools and a 50 per cent response, the precision of that response is between 46.7 per cent and 53.3 per cent. For secondary schools the same precision is + and – 5.4 percentage points and for primary schools it is + and – 4 percentage points.

With the weightings applied to the data, we are confident that the omnibus sample is broadly representative of teachers nationally and provides a robust analysis of teachers' views.