

Belhaven Hill School takes learning outside the classroom

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With its safe parkland campus and proximity to the beach in Dunbar, outdoor education has always been part of Belhaven Hill's rich all-round ethos. Building on existing activities, such as Design and Technology, its Conservation Club and Gardening Club, it is a natural progression for Outdoor Education to become a more integral part of the school curriculum while still focusing on providing an excellent academic education with plenty of sport and extra-curricular activities.

"Outdoor Education for many people conjures up visions of outward bounds, lighting fires and bush craft. While these are part of teaching at Belhaven, our vision of Outdoor Education is more about promoting a rounded approach to teaching with learning outside the classroom playing a key role," says Innes MacAskill, Belhaven's headmaster.

"Last September we started taking younger day pupils from age 7 (Form 6) and, as studies have shown that learning levels improve through hands-on experience, we decided to introduce more Outdoor Education into the curriculum for our seven and eight year olds."

Innes MacAskill continues: "The 3 Rs and other stalwarts of a classical education remain our fundamental building blocks, and academic excellence is key. However, we aim to promote a practical application of these skills, encouraging children to see their value in everyday life – for example using numerical and measuring skills to measure out the school grounds, and

then translating these into a scale model of the school in Design and Technology.”

Belhaven is running an Inside Out Fun Morning on Saturday 15 March (10.15 am – 12.30 pm) for young boys and girls and their parents. Visitors will have lots of fun experiencing learning inside and outside the classroom, alongside Belhaven Hill pupils. To book, please call 01368 862785 or email secretary@belhavenhill.com <http://www.belhavenhill.com>

Peter Bailey, Belhaven’s recently appointed teacher for Outdoor Education, adds: “Taking a group of eight year olds outside to dig soil with their hands led to discussion about the types of soil available, and produced a rich array of adjectives to turn into poetry and prose for classroom work. In History, we’ve looked at the school buildings and related them to events in the school’s past, or simply asked ‘What have those trees seen in their life?’

“Given Belhaven’s beautiful grounds, nearby beaches, and ever changing climate, building an enquiring appreciation of the environment is a natural evolution for the school’s curriculum. Adding these elements into Belhaven’s strong educational foundations is an exciting journey.

“We’re planning a phenology project to record the changing seasons with observations and photographs of the same trees and plants taken every week to track the changes through time,” says Peter Bailey.

“Combined with a weather station, this will provide a powerful resource for Belhaven students to observe and record changing seasons in a ‘school life diary’.”

Peter Bailey concludes: “The Scottish Government is a leading light in all of this, as outdoor learning has a prominent position in their Curriculum for Excellence. Because of its independent status, Belhaven Hill has the experience, flexibility and confidence to take the best from both the

National Curriculum and Curriculum for Excellence by supporting the four core themes of helping each pupil become a 'successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor'."

The John Muir Trust in neighbouring Dunbar also encourages Outdoor Education and states: "We support the term 'learning for sustainability' to integrate thinking on sustainable development education, global citizenship and outdoor learning..."

Peter Bailey has a post graduate qualification in Outdoor Education, combined with a diverse career in the UK and abroad, both inside and out, ranging from farming, lecturing and mineral exploration, to natural resource development in international aid. Peter joined Belhaven last September and wants to draw on his experience and imagination to bring the environment to life, and apply it to classroom learning.

Submitted by [Christopher Lamotte](#)

