


Outdoor learning is a must says Green MSP

 *Outdoor learning should be at the heart of learning for life, says Green MSP Alison Johnstone.*

Within a few hundred metres of where I live, Craiglockhart Wood is alive with the sounds of children playing. That is most obviously the case at the weekends, when local families take advantage of the local nature reserve to get fresh air and exercise, all within the city's boundaries.

But it is not just at the weekends. During the week it has been really pleasing to see the woods enjoyed by hundreds of children from Craiglockhart Primary School, going through a forest schools programme, and local nurseries, Little Monkeys and Cornerstone.

I firmly believe that having grown up with the woods, those children will be the future custodians of the Craiglockhart hills and woods and all the plants and animals within them.

Prior to becoming Green MSP for Lothian in 2011, I worked for Robin Harper, Scotland's first Green MSP. In a long and colourful career Robin had been many things: musician and campaigner, but above all a teacher. Robin's particular passion was outdoor learning, a passion he had developed from the 1960s and teaching at the pioneering Braehead school in Buckhaven in Fife.

Much has changed for outdoor education since then – some good and some regrettable.

In Edinburgh, the city is lucky to have two fantastic outdoor centres, Lagganlia in the Cairngorms (of which I am a lifelong member) and Benmore in Argyll where thousands of children and young people go for residential visits.

At the last meeting of the city's Education Committee in March, there was a [report on outdoor education](#) which includes the account of a Craigentiny pupil with spina bifida and his conquest of tree climbing, canoeing and archery at Lagganlia. I defy anyone to read that report and not find something in the eye...

✘ But it so much more than the landmark trips. Outdoor learning is just learning really and perhaps the richest experiences are those which pop up in the most unexpected places and times. And, while much is done through our schools, a lot more is carried out by young people's organisations, like scouts, guides or fantastic local projects like Gorgie City Farm or Pilton Retreat in north Edinburgh.

So here is my plea. Let's put outdoor education and outdoor learning at the heart of Curriculum for Excellence where it should be. When budget savings are sought, let's not look at outdoor learning as a soft target. And let's make sure we open up the natural riches of Edinburgh for everyone to enjoy.

Alison Johnstone is Green MSP for Lothian. She is pictured above with Andy Wightman a fellow candidate in the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary Election.