

The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature

White Paper Defra – June 2011

Connecting through education – in and about the natural environment

4.14 As well as having important health benefits, access to the natural environment can also improve children's learning. We want to see every child in England given the chance to experience and learn about the natural environment. The Government's White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*,⁶⁴ will free teachers from unnecessary statutory duties creating more opportunities for different routes to learning, including learning outside the classroom. **Schools should be able to teach outdoors when they wish to do so. We will work with the Health and Safety Executive to remove unnecessary rules and other barriers to learning in the natural environment.**

4.15 We have created a Pupil Premium, intended to raise the attainment of children from low-income families. **This could be used to give fairer access to nature for pupils from deprived backgrounds, for example funding school trips to experience the natural environment.** It will be for schools to decide how best to use the Premium for the benefit of their pupils.

4.16 The Government's National Curriculum Review will examine how we can put a clearer focus on the essential knowledge all children should acquire at school, while leaving heads and teachers free to decide how to teach this most effectively. The study of science and geography ignites pupils' curiosity about the world around them. They discover how scientific ideas contribute to technological change and improve quality of life. They recognise how human activity and natural processes can lead to changes in the environment, and engage with scientific debates, addressing important issues such as climate change. Outdoor learning can support educational attainment across the curriculum.

4.17 We welcome the work already done by local schools and environmental organisations. In 2010, 1.2 million children participated in environmental education activities at outdoor learning sites managed by Natural England, the RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. We also support the many other activities run for schools, including the annual Big Schools' Birdwatch, in which around 100,000 children discover wildlife in their own school grounds.

4.18 Natural England's support for the Natural Connections initiative will match schools with a range of environmental charities that can provide sites to visit. The aim is to deliver a better co-ordinated local service to schools and teachers, to enable much greater numbers of schoolchildren to experience the benefits of learning in the natural environment. **Natural Connections will provide an online 'one-stop shop' and direct support and advice for teachers, children and parents interested in learning outdoors. Thousands of local volunteers will be recruited to help schools.**

4.19 Through our delivery partner Keep Britain Tidy, we also support Eco-Schools in England. More than 16,000 schools take part in drawing up action plans on themes such as biodiversity, healthy living and managing waste and litter. Eco-Schools have been at the forefront of the Government's programme to plant 1 million trees. We also endorse the new Sustainable Schools Alliance, led by the National Children's Bureau and Sustainability and Environmental Education, which was launched in March 2011. Its principal aim is to encourage every school in the country to put sustainability at the heart of its thinking.

4.20 Food is one of the essentials of life. We want young people to understand where their food comes from. We will continue to help schools, particularly those from deprived areas, organise educational visits to farms. These visits can improve children's understanding of food production and the effect that land management has on landscapes and the wealth of wildlife to be found there. More than 1,000 farmers in England are funded through stewardship schemes to provide educational visits, and between them they host around 100,000 schoolchildren per year. Away from school, public events such as 'Open

Farm Sunday' (which in 2010 attracted 184,000 visitors onto 420 farms) and initiatives such as 'Let Nature Feed Your Senses' (for people with poor access to the countryside, such as elderly people or children with physical or mental disabilities) provide an important opportunity for people to appreciate farming and the countryside. **The Government will continue to support Open Farm Sunday, and to fund educational visits by schoolchildren up to the age of 16 and provide farm visits for vulnerable groups of people**