

Goad, Laura, Prince, Heather ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6199-4892> ,
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Cumbria Curriculum

Summary Report on Place-based Learning in Cumbria



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Photos courtesy of CDEC and the Green PLACE project, 2021-2023

Place-based learning in Cumbria

A shared vision for education in Cumbria

Framing this scoping report is an ambition that every child has a world class holistic educational experience in their local setting, which enables them to contribute to society as resilient, confident, and tolerant global citizens.

DEFINITION for the purposes of this research:

Place-based learning about the environment and sustainability:

Opportunities provided for your pupils and students that engage them in learning about nature, their local environment and the wider Cumbrian landscape- green and blue spaces, cultural and land based heritage;

Opportunities provided where they learn about issues of sustainability, climate change, biodiversity, etc. Educational experiences you, your colleagues and external organisations provide for students- in and outside the classroom:

- That builds their appreciation for local and Cumbria-wide nature, geography and history
- That develops their skills, knowledge and understanding of local as well as global environmental and sustainability issues.



Key findings

- Place-based Learning is widely practised in Cumbrian schools and is valued for its impact on curriculum learning and children's social and emotional learning and wellbeing, but a number of barriers exist which either prevent its use, reduce its frequency or reduce the age range to which it is available.
- Across the county, there are a wide variety of organisations able to support place-based learning in schools and there is a good relationship between schools and providers.
- School approaches vary widely and are affected by the knowledge and commitment of the headteacher and teaching staff, the established ethos and approach of the school, school location, school size and the school's financial position.
- Much of the delivery of place-based education is by school staff, but external providers are widely used both on school sites and at off-site locations.
- A requirement for staff training to develop their knowledge and confidence was mentioned by many respondents (topics included the impact of Place-based learning on academic outcomes, the opportunities available in the school's local area, the type and availability of providers, risk assessment, and teaching approaches in the outdoors)
- Transport costs are a key barrier to off-site visits as these have increased and schools are reluctant to pass these on to parents.
- The support of the wider community surrounding the school is very important in facilitating place based learning
- A small minority of schools have fully embedded this approach to learning and do not experience barriers to delivering it.
- Schools and providers both mentioned how useful it would be to have an online resource hub where schools could easily search and find providers to support their place-based learning delivery.

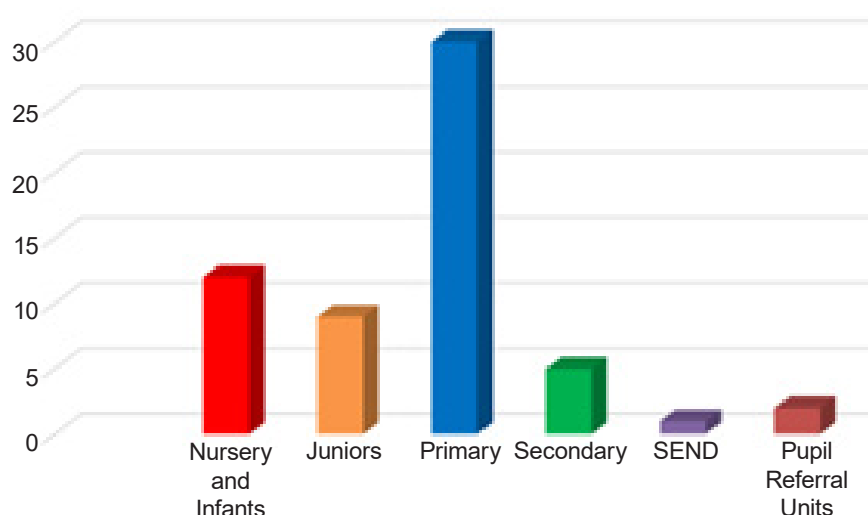
About the schools who contributed to the research

39 schools responded to the online survey which was open from July – October 2022, with the majority of responses in September.

In depth interviews were conducted with eleven schools by researchers (two infant/nursery schools, three junior schools and six primary schools). The majority of interviewees were headteachers.

32 of the 39 schools (82%) expressed that there was a need for CPD to support place-based learning in their school.

Schools by phase - survey and interview responses: 59 total

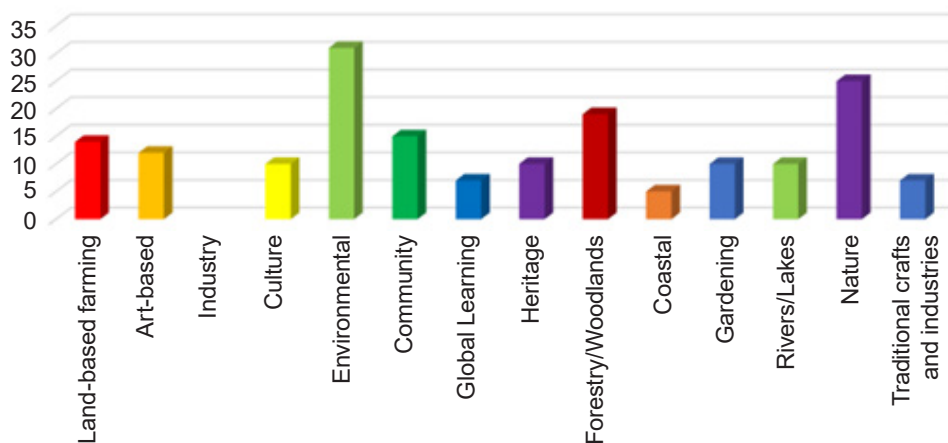


About the providers who contributed to the research:

47 providers of place based learning responded to the online survey which was open from July – October 2022, with the majority of responses in September and October.

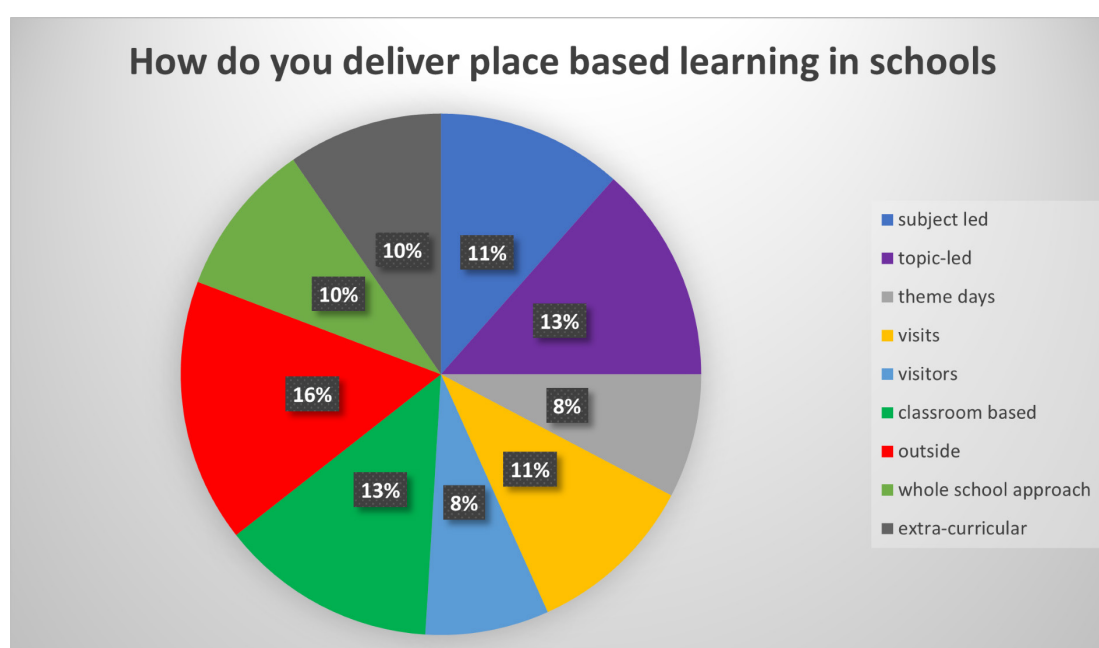
The sample included a wide range of providers and sectors- those that are specifically Cumbrian and some with a national footprint.

Place Based learning providers - by sector. Total responses: 47



How schools and providers deliver Place-Based Learning

- 37 of the schools said that they do some form of place-based learning
- 30 of the schools (77%) considered that place-based learning was embedded in the curriculum.
- Most schools use a variety of delivery methods with **visits, visitors and outdoor learning** the most common routes. Two thirds said that their place-based learning was **subject led**.
- Planned **visits and activities** with explicit links to the National Curriculum objectives, e.g. in geography, many of the schools used place-based learning for **social and emotional development** and as a stimulus for other learning in English and the arts.
- High value is placed on incidental learning which occurs when children's curiosity is stimulated by their experiences outside the classroom and they are encouraged to ask questions and explore beyond the national curriculum expectations for their age group.
- Providers: good provision from EYFS through to KS5; 9 have programmes suitable across all phases of formal education. Best served phases are Key Stages 1- 3.
- Responses to the question about how providers deliver place based learning, **topic-led** and **outside** were reflected most (77% and 82% of providers)
- Provider delivery ranged from on-site school delivery to visits to the provider's site.
- Building links to curriculum were evidenced from the interviews with providers.
- Providers were responsive to school needs, for example creating GCSE and A Level opportunities that deliver on core aspects of those curricula.
- Much of the focus discussed comprised links directly to geography and science curricula (flora and fauna, geology, water cycles, non-indigenous plants and fish, introduction to maps and navigation, etc).
- Other curriculum areas covered included history- linking in the romans, mining and tourism; literature and culture, through Beatrice Potter, Wordsworth and Schwitters and for younger pupils, using Michael Rosen's 'We're going on a bear hunt' for literacy and drama.
- Schools also have the opportunity to engage in **projects** with providers, where there is bespoke and sustained support over a period of time.



Facilitating factors of place based learning

- The availability and suitability of the school grounds,
- The presence of staff with enthusiasm and skills, and supportive school leadership. Ensuring there are advocates on the school staff team and allowing the school to decide on the focus of the support they will receive results in greater outcomes.
- Parental support, the availability of external providers and support from the community and local experts.
- The value placed on national and local initiatives and competitions which have both promoted and enabled place-based learning opportunities.
- The location of schools (e.g. rural/urban/coastal) was significant in relation to the variety of easily accessible place-based learning opportunities
- The availability of easy and inexpensive transport options e.g. a school minibus with staff drivers.
- School grounds were highly valued resources
- The local community is often a significant facilitator
- The expertise of the providers and their own sites/ centres
- Providing whole school training opportunities
- More than 50% of schools used external providers for community, nature, woodland, river/lake and environmental based learning.
- Most schools value the impact of using external providers, either in the school context or in leading off site activities.
- Schools valued long term relationships with providers

Barriers to place-based learning

- The cost of providers and of transport to get to sites are both significant barriers however.
- Curriculum pressure and school finance, with other significant factors being staff training, knowledge and confidence, staffing levels, resources, and cost to students.
- Diverse cultural experiences are lacking in Cumbria and this is especially true for isolated rural schools.
- Several schools felt that staff lacked confidence to teach and lead groups in unfamiliar outdoor situations.
- Curriculum pressures and funding for place-based learning were most frequently mentioned (86 and 82%) by providers. Other factors that featured highly were [school] staffing and staff confidence/ enthusiasm.
- Better access to, awareness of funding (for schools and providers). An emerging theme was the cost and access to transport
- More curriculum flexibility- either within schools and how individual schools deliver their curriculum or a strategic change to the National Curriculum
- Improving awareness of the offers of providers- either through a network, events that facilitate connections or an online resource hub that schools can access easily
- School staff- training to develop school buy-in/enthusiasm and to recognise the value of a place-based approach to delivering the curriculum.

Opportunities for Place Based Learning in Cumbria

- Developing links with the Land and Nature Skills Service (LANSS) so 'green skills' opportunities, knowledge bases, economy and careers are connected from EYFS to post 16. This will also support what schools and education professionals need to support the delivery of the curriculum and to support young people to be responsible, respectful, active global citizens.
- National Nature Park Project, led by the Natural History Museum offers a great opportunity for schools and providers. This new partnership led by the Museum will work with the education sector to help map, manage and enhance all the land across the education estate, creating one, vast, nature park.
- Developing and supporting a network of providers and schools to further enhance and build on each school's unique curriculum.

Recommendations from the findings of the research

- Training focused on providing teachers and senior leaders with the knowledge and confidence to start where they are, both developmentally and geographically.
- The provision of information for staff to know what there is in their local area that could contribute to their curriculum.
- Training should include the dissemination of information to enthuse and enable all staff with knowledge, skills and confidence, including an evidence summary for the impact of place-based, outdoor and nature-based learning in key areas
- A database with range of provision types and providers and their associated impacts
- A strategy for enabling schools to recruit volunteer support to meet the necessary ratios for off site visits.
- Affordable transport solutions.
- Provider training in curriculum needs of schools.
- A network or forum to allow and encourage collaboration, coaching and mentoring in place-based (PBL) and nature-based learning for school staff.
- Opportunities for school linking to be developed to support diversity but also place-based learning.
- Use of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals as a context for place-based learning and how it relates to the wider world.
- Communication with town and parish councils to raise the profile of community engagement with their local schools.
- Encouraging and facilitating engagement with the National Nature Park project.
- A mapping project for affordances in school grounds and local area within walking distance.



