

A continental approach to learning outside the classroom

Geoff Cooper, head of Low Bank Ground, opens the doors to European teachers through creative and inspiring learning outside the classroom

Ten senior educators including headteachers, teacher trainers and university lecturers from across Europe made a five-day study visit to Low Bank Ground, Wigan Council's Outdoor Education Centre in the Lake District this October. The theme was 'Creative and Inspiring Learning Outside the Classroom' and delegates came from Belgium, Spain, Italy, Austria, Poland, Latvia, Romania, the Czech Republic and Turkey.



The study visit was organised and led by Geoff Cooper, head of Low Bank Ground, who is an enthusiast of all kinds of outdoor learning, ranging from activities in the school grounds and local woods to adventurous activities further afield. Geoff pointed out: "There are great opportunities in the outdoors for developing personal and social skills, learning about the environment and sustainability and being creative. For young people who don't do well at school, the

outdoors can provide a new lease of life and unlock talents such as leadership and teamwork. Outdoor learning is a great motivator and young people gain a real sense of achievement which improves their learning back at school."

During their stay the group discussed the value of outdoor learning, compared experiences in their own countries, met teachers and outdoor leaders and saw examples of good practice. They visited Brantwood, the historic home of John Ruskin the artist and social reformer to experience educational activities based around the house and gardens. At Grizedale Forest they discussed schools programmes related to art, field studies and practical conservation. They also took part in a new project organised by Cumbria Development Education Centre on how the outdoors can be used to develop global awareness and more sustainable lifestyles.

One member of the group, Carmen Poblador, a teacher-trainer from Spain commented "this has been a wonderful week; we've learnt from each other and seen at first hand by talking to children at Low Bank Ground how outdoor learning can inspire them. Britain has such a wealth of good practice in this field."

This was the first Study Visit on this theme in Britain and was funded by the European Union as part of their Lifelong Learning Programme.

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