

Lindsay Newton, Head of Development at Dudley Children's Services, writes about the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and its work on the Learning Outside the Classroom National Advisory Group

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) is the national leadership Association in England for statutory directors of children's services and other children's services professionals in leadership roles. Our members specialise in considering, developing, commissioning, leading and managing children's services in all the diverse ways in which they are provided to children, young people, families and communities. ADCS works closely with ministers, government officials, the community and voluntary sectors, local-government organisations and other key local and national agencies on the implementation and implications of The Children Act 2004 and the Change for Children programme, the children's workforce, local authority and school inspections.

The Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto is supported by all Directors of Children's Services and the ADCS. The Association shares the government's desire to encourage the provision of more high-quality educational opportunities for all children and young people outside the classroom and is keen to work nationally, regionally and locally to achieve this outcome.

Over the last 18 months the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has been working with a wide range of stakeholder groups, including the ADCS, to bring together the best advice, training and support to ensure that children, parents, schools, teachers and governors feel more confident and competent to undertake this work safely and successfully.

I have been the ADCS representative on the National Advisory Group (NAG). The NAG has been advising the DCSF and working with PricewaterhouseCoopers and CfBT Education Trust to develop the new web-based 'Out and About' guidance for schools and the new national quality-assurance badge scheme for all LOtC settings, providers and venues.

Good LOtC must be about raising achievement through an organised and powerful approach to learning in which direct experience is at the heart of the learning. When properly integrated into schools and children's services, it can help significantly in achieving better outcomes for all children and young people. However, for many years schools and teachers have expressed their concerns about organising school trips and adventurous activities. The new 'Out and About' guidance, due to be rolled out later this summer, will set out the practical measures that can be taken to make sure that more children and young people experience high-quality offsite activities more often.

The 'Out and About' guidance will also include a total review of the 1997 Health and Safety for Pupils on Educational Visits (HASPEV) guidance.

If we are to realise the vision set out in the Manifesto, now endorsed by over 960 organisations nationally, that 'every young person should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and personal development, whatever their age, ability or circumstances', we need all our Directors of Children's Services to champion learning outside the classroom through their Children's Trusts and in their local authorities.

If your director of children's services can answer 'yes' to most of the questions below, your authority is beginning to realise the opportunities and challenges that are set out in the Manifesto.

- Do our children and young people feel safe and competent in the outside world and can they manage risk confidently?
- Does our Children's Trust realise the potential of LOtC in targeting some of the key priorities for children and young people in our Children and Young People's Plan?
- Are we making the most of the LOtC opportunities provided by the voluntary, community and Third Sector organisations?
- Are we supporting and encouraging the local authority officer responsible for LOtC?
- Are we supporting the Educational Visits Co-ordinators (EVC) in our schools?
- Do our schools provide a range of high-quality learning experiences that help our young people develop their thinking, life skills, and personalised learning?

Many local authorities have been using the power of Learning Outside the Classroom for many years and have a proud record of helping their children and young people build their emotional resilience, develop personal and social skills, promote health and wellbeing and reduce anti-social behaviour that puts them and others at risk.

Schools in my own authority of Dudley have seen a year-on-year increase in LOtC offsite activities over the four years with over 25,000 offsite experiences been successfully undertaken.

Are the children and young people in your authority getting their share?