

Proposed Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill

Connect is a long-standing independent parents' organisation and the only Scottish charity which is dedicated to supporting parental engagement in education. We provide membership services to Parent Councils and PTAs, as well as offering advice and information to individual parents/carers about any aspect of the education of their child or the wider education system.

We support education professionals in developing their skills and understanding around effective partnership working with families and the wider community through online professional learning via the Connect Family Engagement Academy. Our evidence-based approaches reflect both the recognised significant role of families in the learning of their children and young people, and the stated policies and legislation which pertain in Scotland.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed Members Bill on a statutory obligation to provide outdoor residential education experiences for young people. Parents have told us how important this experience is to their young people's confidence, team-working skills and personal development - that experience needs to be delivered in affordable, inclusive ways that work for young people and their families.

We conducted a survey from 13 to 30 June 2022 to inform Connect's response to the consultation. This received 322 responses from 27 local authority areas. In summary:

- This was a big response for a very quick survey and tight turnaround at the end of the school year – with responses from across the country and across child ages.
- This is clearly something parents feel very strongly about – with most (98%) in support of all children having this opportunity, and many commenting on the loss for those children who didn't get to go because of COVID.
- Most respondents (81%) agreed that local authorities should be legally required to offer school-aged children residential outdoor education.
- Parents were split almost 50/50 on an age range being specified in law.
- There are significant barriers for some young people in taking part at present (cost, disabilities not catered for, inclusion) which must be addressed.
- It is vital any legislation does not put any additional cost pressures on families. Even for families who don't qualify for financial support this is a large cost outlay, for the trip as well as for suitable clothing and other requirements, which is multiplied for families with more than one child. There is also a concern that education funding could be diverted from other services.
- Parents said that it was a matter of equality and inclusion for every young person to have these opportunities.

Parents on the benefits of residential outdoor education

When asked if they want their child to experience residential outdoor education provided through their school, **96%** of respondents said yes, **2%** said no, and **2%** didn't know.

Asked if they were in favour of a residential outdoor education experience being provided through schools for all children/young people, **98%** of respondents said yes, **1%** said no, and **1%** said don't know.

Parent comments:

'It allows pupils to experience activities they wouldn't otherwise be able to and challenge themselves to try new things. It also teaches other skills of being away from home and making bed, clearing away dishes and on getting along with others as room sharing.'

'It's a great experience for them. It helps provide them with independent before going to high school.'

'It helps to build relationships and positively impact on emotional wellbeing. This means pupils are then best placed to attain academically.'

'My son loved the experience and came back a different boy. I think it benefits children greatly and sometimes it's the only opportunity for an underprivileged child to experience a new location.'

'I think it's an important part of learning and growth. My child missed out on this in primary due to covid and I'd love him to experience it.'

However, a few comments did highlight some concerns:

'I can do this myself whereas I'd like them to improve literacy/numeracy in school.'

'He isn't ready for it now but I think it is good for kids. However having had bad experiences when I was younger I am nervous about it.'

Barriers to residential outdoor education experiences

Our survey asked what parents see as the major barriers to children/young people being able to experience residential outdoor education provided through their schools, with the ability to select more than one answer.

- **70%** of respondents said cost
- **42%** said availability
- **40%** said staffing (eg not enough school staff (or staff not available) to accompany young people)
- **38%** said lack of suitable centres
- **14%** said failure to ensure inclusion for those with disabilities
- **7%** said issues with timing (eg termtime)
- **3%** said impact on young people's school-based learning

Respondents were also able to select other and provide a comment explaining this. 14% selected this option and provided comments which we grouped under the following themes:

- Expanding on cost barriers
- Felt it wasn't valued by the school
- Expanding on lack of facilities
- Issues around inclusion (eg additional support needs, culture, bullying)

Proposed legislation

When asked if they think local authorities/schools should be required to provide residential outdoor education by law, **81%** of respondents said yes, **11%** said no, and **8%** said don't know.

When asked if they think the Bill should set an age range for the residential outdoor education experience, **47%** said yes, it should define the age range, **45%** said no, the age range should be open, and **8%** said don't know.

Parent comments:

Commenting on the age range:

'I'm just unsure as to how many young children (under 10) would cope from being away from home?'

'I think upper primary P6/P7 but I think another opportunity in S3 would be appropriate as some children don't feel confident at the younger age.'

'I think for residential the age should be age 10 and up however all ages for outdoor learning within our own community.'

Comments in support of the proposed legislation:

'I think this bill becoming law would put Scotland on the map as pioneering outdoor learning for all and it would enrich the lives of young Scots in countless ways such as improved self-esteem, better mental health and appreciation of nature to name a few.'

'School life and other issues takeover, making these things less priority and left behind. Therefore to make it a necessary requirement is essential. Please do it!'

Comments with concerns about the proposed legislation:

'As much as I think a residential trip is great I don't think it should be law. These trips aren't cheap and not all families can afford to send their kids.'

'I think it's a fantastic opportunity for young people however I think that individual councils maybe still need to be able to make the decision themselves.'

'It should not be compulsory and should involve a holistic approach to the objective. It is subjective. I, from experience would not permit my children to participate unless I was satisfied with provision, law or not. I adapt this view from experience. Participation should be offered to all but not mandatory.'

Resulting challenges to local authorities providing residential outdoor education

When asked what challenges they see for local authorities being required to provide residential outdoor education by law, **69%** of respondents said funding could be redirected from other services, **66%** said not enough outdoor centres to meet the increase in demand, **48%** said not enough trained staff, and **15%** said other factors and explained in comments.

Comments on cost – to parents and education funding:

'They are good for the kids. But the expense is a lot especially if you have multiple kids. Our kid's trip was £250. We could go away as a family for a weekend for the same cost.'

'I think cost is definitely a consideration. There are not infinite central funds. Consideration needs to be given to prioritise any funding to those who need it most to ensure equity across all children to enjoy these experiences.'

'Our school offers this in p7, and it is really an important part of the transition to high school, but the cost is a big factor, every school should have access to a separate hardship fund. Every child should have access to the same experiences regardless of cost.'

'I work full time and I'm a single parent, and was delighted my child was able to attend residential in P7. However it required 10 months of payments with no support.'

Comments on impact on school staff:

'As a teacher, as well as a parent, I find it shocking that staff are expected to go on residential, which is extremely hard work and takes them away from their families, but is unpaid.'

'Staff already have so many pressures put on them. If this was to run, someone needs to have this as their designated remit; not in addition to duties they already do.'

'Our children's whole cluster gave just decided not to offer these trips anymore as they feel it demands too much from staff (without asking parents if they would help support or staff).'

Comments on lack of facilities – with many referencing the closure of Kilbowie Outdoor Centre, North Lanarkshire:

'Our school opted this year for 3 day trips to outdoor activities. The kids liked it but they did not gain experience away from home and more time would have been spent travelling. Our residential camp went bust during covid but others could have been used and were not offered. To gain confidence, independence and trust a residential experience is ideal.'

'If we had more activity centres locally the younger children could take part in day trips to the centres to allow everyone from a young age access to activities like sailing, kayaking, paddle boarding and so on. These type of activities or learning are not available locally. Or if they are in some authorities, they are very expensive and set ridiculously high age limits so younger children cannot take part. Would love to see Scotland invest in this type of learning for children.'

'North Lanarkshire Council voted to close and demolish Kilbowie which was the residential centre used by our schools. No suitable alternative has been offered and instead some children are bused for the day to Strathclyde Park which is not appropriate at all, the water quality is very concerning and most importantly it is not a residential experience.'

'My kids were lucky enough to experience and Outward bound type trip to North Lanarkshire's venue at Kilbowie near Oban during Primary 7. It was one of the highlights of their school years so far. Now they are in secondary I can think of many ways trips away from the school setting in class groups can enhance both their academic, personal and social development. They are lucky that I can afford to support them attending groups like the Scouts and sports teams but some of their class mates had never experienced any of the activities carried out on these trip or spent time away from home.'

Comments on inclusion:

'A disproportionate amount of BAME children at my daughter's school do not attend residential outdoor education. Unsure if this is cultural or financial.'

'Can be a way for those who are subject to bullying to be a bigger target. If they can't attend or don't attend they become a target. If they do attend, at night they become a target for bullying when the adults are in other areas.'

'My oldest child has been on residential activities in p7 my youngest will be offered this opportunity next term but may require a parent to attend or not be able to go as he has additional support needs.'

'Not all children are able or want to do this due to disabilities.'

'Some pupils will find it difficult to access experiences suitable for their needs. It should not become an absolute requirement but reasonable adjustments or reasonable alternatives should be offered. For example, day trips to provide suitable stretch / experience for those unable to attend larger scale residential experiences.'

Connect

22 July 2022

Appendix: Survey Statistics:

The survey ran from 13 to 30 June 2022 and received **322 responses** from **27 local authority areas**

Age/stage of children of respondents (they could select multiple options if they had more than one child)

- **40%** said child was in P3 or below
- **16%** said P4
- **17%** said P5
- **20%** said P6
- **21%** said P7
- **9%** said S1
- **12%** said S2
- **14%** said S3
- **10%** said S4
- **8%** said S5
- **7%** said S6

Do you want your child to experience residential outdoor education provided through their school?

- **96%** of respondents said yes
- **2%** said no
- **2%** didn't know

Has your child experienced residential outdoor education provided through their school?

- **43%** of respondents said yes
- **57%** said no

If you answered Yes, what school year was your child in when they got this opportunity?

- **7%** of respondents said child was in P3 or below
- **3%** in P4
- **6%** in P5
- **19%** in P6
- **78%** in P7
- **5%** in S1
- **2%** in S2
- **2%** in S3
- **1%** in S4
- **1%** in S5
- **1%** in S6

If you answered No, why was this?

- **44%** of respondents said only certain year groups are offered outdoor education and child is not in that year group
- **29%** said it was not offered by the school
- **1%** could not afford the cost

- **27%** said other, reasons given:
 - COVID
 - Additional Support Needs not met
 - Local facilities closed down

What do you see as the major barriers to children/young people being able to experience residential outdoor education provided through their schools? (you can select more than one)

- **70%** of respondents said Cost
- **42%** said Availability
- **40%** said Staffing (eg not enough school staff (or staff not available) to accompany young people)
- **38%** said Lack of suitable centres
- **14%** said Failure to ensure inclusion for those with disabilities
- **7%** said Issues with timing (eg termtime)
- **3%** said Impact on young people's school-based learning
- **14%** said Other reason. Comment themes:
 - Expanding on cost barriers
 - Not valued by the school
 - Lack of facilities
 - Need for inclusion

Are you in favour of a residential outdoor education experience being provided through schools for all children/young people?

- **98%** of respondents said yes
- **1%** said no
- **1%** said don't know

Do you think local authorities/schools should be required to provide residential outdoor education by law?

- **81%** of respondents said yes
- **11%** said no
- **8%** said don't know

Do you think the Bill should set an age range for the residential outdoor education experience?

- **47%** said Yes, it should define the age range
- **45%** said No, the age range should be open
- **8%** said don't know

What challenges do you see for local authorities being required to provide residential outdoor education by law?

- **69%** said Funding could be redirected from other services
- **66%** said Not enough outdoor centres to meet the increase in demand
- **48%** said Not enough trained staff
- **15%** said Other factors. Comment themes:
 - Cost – to families and education funds
 - Impact on school staff

- Lack of facilities
- May impact work already happening
- Parent, school and local authority attitudes
- Inclusion