

Supporting young people to experience nature

We believe that every child should experience a National Park first hand.

We know that contact with nature improves children's ability to concentrate and their self-discipline. And yet children in the UK have less contact with nature now than at any time in the past.

Research shows that playing in a natural environment improves young people's social, mental and physical development. We believe that learning in the spectacular landscapes of a National Park can add even more inspiration to an educational experience.

Through our iconic landscapes, wildlife and heritage we are working with National Parks across the country and local learning partners to provide inspirational learning experiences that help young people gain the knowledge they need to prepare for adulthood.

The South Downs National Park is on the doorstep for more than half a million children and young people. Together we can inspire a lifelong commitment to enjoying, understanding and caring for the natural environment and support urban and under-represented groups to benefit from all that the National Parks have to offer.

What we do

Our South Downs is our approach to engaging schools in hands-on, real life, local learning in the South Downs National Park. There are over 846 schools within 5km of the National Park boundary so an innovative approach to engaging with this audience is essential.

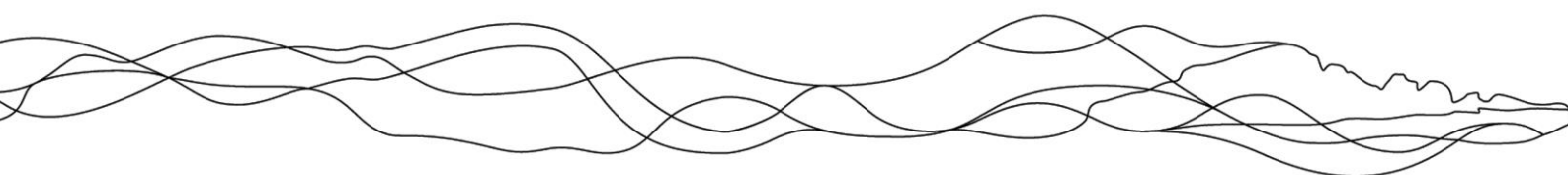
This is achieved through:

- establishing a recognised outdoor learning 'brand' for the SDNP;
- cascading information, knowledge and resources;
- creating networks of providers and focusing on partnership delivery; and
- promoting the South Downs National Park Learning Zone, an online outdoor learning hub.

The Our South Downs (OSD) model adopted by the SDNPA in its Learning work is based on a partnership approach where information, training and resources are shared, cascaded and disseminated widely.

Measuring Success: Facts & Figures (by October 2016)

- 73,900 children engaged through this work
- 59% of schools inside the National Park boundary are now actively engaged with the SDNP. Within 5km of the boundary: 40% and within 10km: 16%.
- Engaged with 88 schools from the wider area including London and international schools.
- 1,667 teachers engaged
- 40% of schools within 5km of the SDNP are actively engaged
- 2,500 students participated in the Our South Downs School art exhibition
- 7 schools across the Meon Valley are engaged in a project about their local Saxon history
- Over 140 delegates at the annual teachers conference
- Nearly 1,000 teachers and 250 learning providers are signed up to the termly newsletters
- Over 45 outdoor learning providers attend annual network meetings
- Travel Grant enabled 8,358 students from 123 groups from our more deprived communities to visit outdoor learning providers in the National Park
- Over 100 live sites on the interactive outdoor learning map



Key initiatives

South Downs Curriculum

Ensuring school engagement is a critical element of our approach. We have worked to dovetail the local learning focus of Our South Downs with school assessment requirements, to create the South Downs Curriculum. This takes the statutory framework of the National Curriculum and includes links and tags to learning opportunities, resources, schemes of work and activities within the South Downs National Park. This approach covers all subject areas across the curriculum and provides local, real-life learning to bring it to life and develop students' understanding of what makes the SDNP special.

Web-resources

To support the model developed through OSD a bespoke web-platform was created to host learning resources about the National Park. This has two components:

- **Learning Zone:** Hosted on the main National Park website the Learning Zone is a portal for accessing all learning materials and resources about the South Downs National Park. It is an interactive site with links and widgets to bring it alive. Content comes from the SDNPA, outdoor learning providers and schools.
- **Interactive Learning Map:** This resource provides a direct link for Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) providers operating within the SDNP to connect with potential audiences. Users are able to filter visit options according to their group and topic requirements and can select options with specific accessibility and facilities.

The annual Our South Downs teachers' conference

This event, held around Easter each year, is the focal point for our outdoor learning engagement with schools and is a combination of key-note speakers, hands-on workshop sessions and a market-place showcasing outdoor learning providers in the National Park. Over 120 people attend each year including teachers, student teachers and outdoor learning providers.

Annual Provider network meetings

These are the mechanisms for providing ongoing CPD and support to Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) providers across the National Park. They provide a fantastic platform for networking and shared training, specifically ensuring that providers within the National Park are in line with national initiatives and current thinking in this area. The network meetings have been held each autumn for the last three years with over 45 providers regularly attending each year.

The School Travel Grant Scheme

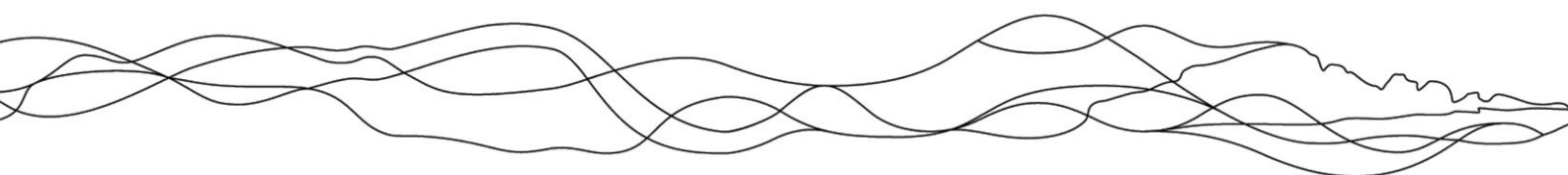
This scheme targets schools from the 20 per cent most deprived urban communities around the National Park and aims to reduce the main barrier to outdoor learning – the cost of transport to venues. The [Travel Grant](#) enables these schools to have subsidised coach travel to visit outdoor learning providers on the Learning Map. The £10k grant is always oversubscribed.

The John Muir Award in the South Downs National Park

A collaboration between the SDNPA and the John Muir Trust. The Award encourages participants to discover, explore, conserve and share a wild place.

SDNP Geotour

The first in a UK National Park and the first place in England. This high-tech orienteering challenge consists of a collection of 30 caches across the South Downs that takes people to exciting places that they might not otherwise have found. By using local accommodation providers, cafes and other businesses, travelling sustainably, or taking part in conservation activities, participants can pick up bonus points. A very effective mechanism for sharing key messages and information about sites with a new and informal learning audience.



Thematic Project work

To supplement the Our South Downs approach several specific projects have been developed to support key theme areas. Examples of these projects include:

University of the Third Age (U3A) celebrates the South Downs

An 18-month programme of activity engaging members of 45 U3As across Sussex to learn about and be inspired by the SDNP.

South Downs Alphabet (Literacy)

Intergenerational project bringing together school children and older generation (through U3A) based on the literary work, A Sussex Alphabet, written by Eleanor Farjeon. It will inspire young people about the special qualities of the SDNP and encourage them to submit their own poems about the 21st century National Park to be published in a book, entitled a South Downs Alphabet.

Your Travel, Your Future (Tourism and sustainable travel)

Funded through the LSTF, this project is creating bespoke travel plans and learning packages linking schools from the surrounding urban settlements to the outdoor learning potential in the SDNP. It aims to engage secondary school students in visiting education providers in the SDNP using train travel, promoting long-term behaviour change alongside exam and curriculum required coursework.

Our South Downs Schools Art Exhibition (Art)

This is the second year of this highly successful project working with the Towner Gallery, Eastbourne. This year the exhibition was held in two galleries, Towner and Worthing Art Gallery and Museum. Over 2000 young people participated annually.

Lessons of the Landscape (Farming)

Developed in conjunction with Plumpton College Children's Rural Education centre, this project specifically aimed at reconnecting schools with their local farms. Targeted eight schools in East Sussex the project provided resources, pre-visit sessions and follow up work to leave a lasting legacy in the school.

