

South Downs National Park Authority

Survey of schools' usage of outside space for learning in the academic year 2016/17

Final Report

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Author

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1. Background and introduction

In May 2017, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) commissioned Information by Design (lbyD) to undertake a telephone survey of schools. This was to build on the baseline data collected in February 2014 by Tourism South East (TSE) Research.

Prior to starting the survey, lbyD sent a letter to the Head Teacher at 705 schools in the catchment area (schools were located either within the South Downs National Park (SDNP) or in the 10km buffer area around the National Park). It is likely that this greatly helped lbyD achieve the target sample of **213 interviews**, as school decision makers are notoriously difficult to get hold of. Telephone interviews were conducted in June and July 2017 and the advance written notice of the telephone survey meant schools were expecting a call. This is likely to have impacted positively on lbyD's success in achieving the required number of interviews to be in line with the base size achieved in the 2014 survey.

The purpose of the telephone survey was to ascertain the proportion of schools within the catchment area that are using the SDNP for learning outside the classroom in the academic year 2016/17. The results of the survey will feed into the education team's engagement work with schools to further encourage learning outside the classroom. This information will also be used to report on PMP indicator #20: *'Percentage of schools using the National Park for learning outside the classroom experiences at least once a year'*.

This report details the results from the survey and draws comparisons with the previous survey where relevant. Also provided are some key conclusions and recommendations for action.

Appended to this report are a copy of the final questionnaire and a full list of the free text comments for each question.



2. Key findings and recommendations

- 2017 saw an **increase** of 11% in the proportion of schools using the South Downs National Park (SDNP) for learning outside the classroom (LOC) compared to 2014 (69% in 2017; 58% in 2014)
- Almost a quarter of respondents (24%) thought that a site being within a National Park had a '**great deal**' or '**a lot**' of influence on their decision when planning a school trip
- Almost six in ten respondents (56%) were **satisfied** with the activities available in the South Downs National Park
- In the main, respondents felt that learning outside the classroom was good for children's **physical and mental health** and it **improved their personal, social and emotional development** (96%)
- Over three quarters of respondents (77%) felt that learning outside of the classroom **improved behaviour**
- A further 75% felt that learning outside of the classroom **raised attainment**
- Around two in ten respondents (22%) had heard of the South Downs National Park Learning Zone online resource for teachers
 - Of these, 26% had **downloaded a teaching resource** to support a school trip or site visit.

Key recommendation:

Consider how to raise the profile of the learning zone as there is a lack of awareness of what to do in the National Park, but a keen interest in finding out more.

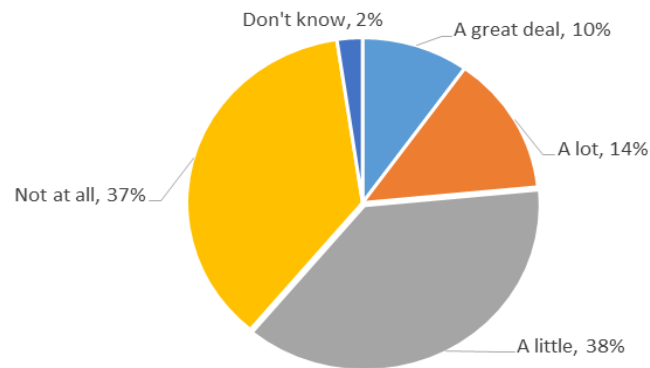


3. Awareness of the South Downs National Park and influence of National Park status on schools' decision making

Very positively, the vast majority of surveyed schools (95%) had heard about the South Downs National Park prior to being contacted by Information by Design.

For nearly three-quarters of responding schools (24%), a site being within a National Park had '**a great deal**' or '**a lot**' of influence on their decision when planning a school trip (10% and 14% respectively).

Extent to which site located in National Park affects schools' decision making



Base: 213

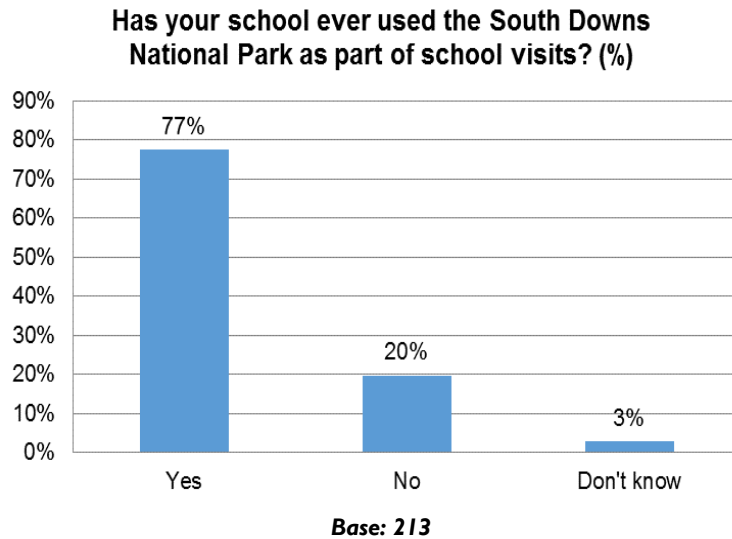
Recommendation:

With further promotion of the Learning Zone and the variety of activities on offer in the National Park, it is likely that, in the next iteration of the survey in 2020, we will see an increase in the proportion of schools stating that a site's location within a National Park has a great deal or a lot of influence on decision making.



4. Use of the South Downs National Park

Encouragingly, over three quarters of schools (77%) surveyed had ever used the South Downs National Park as part of schools visits.



Almost seven in ten schools (69%) **had already visited or were planning to visit** the South Downs National Park as part of school visits during the current academic year. This is an excellent increase of 11% when compared to the 2014 survey.

Six in ten schools (62%) were planning to visit the SDNP as part of a school visit *next* academic year.



5. Places visited or planning to visit in the South Downs National Park

Sixty-five percent (65%) of schools **had already visited** one or more sites in the South Downs National Park as part of school visits during the 2016/17 academic year. The table below shows the ten most visited sites.

Site name	% of schools
Seven Sisters Country Park	17%
Weald & Downland Open Air Museum	14%
Butser Ancient Farm	13%
Queen Elizabeth Country Park	10%
Amberley Museum and Heritage Centre	8%
Stanmer Park	7%
Pulborough Brooks RSPB Nature Reserve	7%
Woods Mill Nature Reserve	7%
Devils Dyke	6%
Ditchling Beacon	5%
Base	139

Four in ten schools (41%) **were planning to visit** the South Downs National Park as part of schools visits during the current academic year, with a further 62% planning to visit next academic year. The top 10 sites are listed below:

Site name	% of schools
Seven Sisters Country Park	17%
Butser Ancient Farm	12%
Weald & Downland Open Air Museum	12%
Queen Elizabeth Country Park	7%
Woods Mill Nature Reserve	7%
Devil's Dyke	6%
Stanmer Park	6%
Amberley Museum and Heritage Centre	5%
Pulborough Brooks RSPB Nature Reserve	5%
Drusilla's Zoo Park	5%
Base	138



6. Number of visits made or planned to the South Downs National Park

In the 2016/17 academic year, the number of visits **made or planned per school** ranged from between one and ninety-six. The mean number of visits made or planned was 8.32 and the median was 3. This was in line with the 2014 survey findings.

This academic year, how many visits to the South Downs National Park have taken place/are taking place each term?	No. of visits
Minimum	1
Maximum	96
Median	8.32
Mean	3

Four in ten schools (41%) made/will make one or two visits to the SDNP. One quarter of schools made 3, 4 or 5 visits; and for the remaining third of schools there was a spread which extend as far as 96 visits. Over four in ten visits (43%) took place in the **summer term** – although this is likely to be a guestimate as many schools struggled to provide this level of breakdown.

The table below shows the total number of visits made or planned to the South Downs National Park for the 2016/17 academic year by year group:

This academic year, how many visits to the South Downs National Park have taken place/are taking place each term?	No. of visits	% of all visits
Reception	63	5%
Year 1	102	9%
Year 2	93	8%
Year 3	115	10%
Year 4	111	10%
Year 5	118	10%
Year 6	143	12%
Year 7	39	3%
Year 8	72	6%
Year 9	59	5%



Year 10	76	7%
Year 11	65	6%
Year 12	87	7%
Year 13	22	2%

At primary school level, year 6 made/planned the most visits (143) and in secondary school year 10 made/planned the most visits (76).

Recommendation:

Whilst it is useful to see how many visits to the SDNP schools have made or are planning to make, there is little benefit in breaking this down by term as many schools struggled to provide information at this level of detail.

7. Reasons not visited nor planning to visit the South Downs

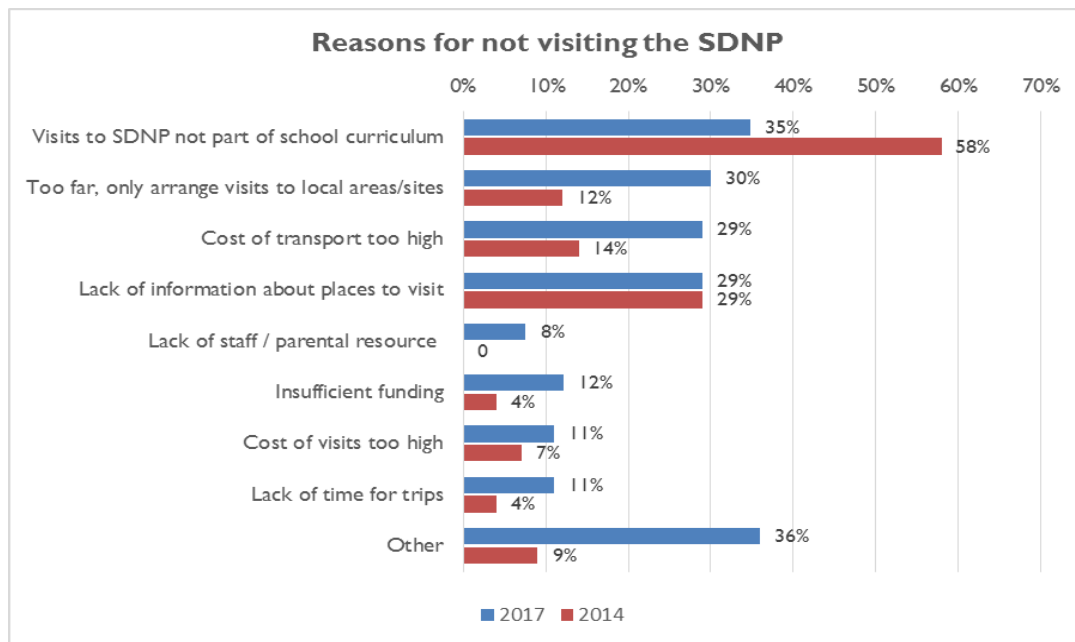
The chart overleaf reveals that three in ten schools (31%) had not visited nor were they planning to visit the South Downs National Park in the 2016/17 academic year. Over a third of these respondents (35%) stated that **visits to the South Downs National Park are not part of the school curriculum** – note that this is however a reduction of 23% when compared to the 2014 survey (58% in 2014).

The following reasons given shed a light on the impact of school funding cuts over recent years:

- The **South Downs is too far, only arrange visits to local areas/sites** (30%) – *this was just 12% in 2014*
- **The cost of transport is too high** (29%) – *just 14% in 2014*

It is interesting to note that 29% of schools in both the 2017 and 2014 surveys stated that they **lacked information about places to visit**.





Base: 2017 (66); 2014 (85)

Over a third of schools that had not visited and were not planning to visit the South Downs National Park in the 2016/17 academic year (36%) gave **other** reasons as to why. These are coded by theme and include:

- Been/planning to go elsewhere (8 respondents)
- Unsure whether have visited/plan to visit the South Downs National Park (3)
- Do not take many trips (2)
- Lack of accessibility for young people with disabilities (2)

“Standard trips that fit with the curriculum, they work so no need to change.”

“We are based in 1 acre of parkland, at the edge of a park, with 110 children aged 2-5 they are outside exploring in a safe environment every single day. Our school has elements of forest school about it too. Added to which many of our children attend only 3 hours a day, or on certain days.”

“We are fortunate to have extensive woodland on our grounds. We tend to visit historic sites that are Brighton based and outside the park.”



Recommendations:

- Promote the Learning Zone more widely to increase schools' awareness of places to visit in the SDNP
- Further promote the Travel Grant to those schools most in need and that cite transport costs as the reason they do not access the SDNP – investigate whether a larger proportion of those schools are in West Sussex than Hampshire or East Sussex, considering the significant cuts West Sussex schools have faced and are still facing.

8. Other spaces schools use for learning outside the classroom

Schools were asked how often they used *other* outside spaces for learning outside the classroom opportunities in the academic year 2016/17.

The table overleaf shows that **school grounds** were the most popular outside space, with 95% of those surveyed stating their school utilised this space between 2 and 300 times. Almost two thirds of schools (63%) used school grounds for learning outside the classroom 100 or more times.

Both the mean and median number of times schools grounds were used for learning outside the classroom was 117.



Type of outside space	%	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median
School grounds	95%	2	300	117	117
Local parks / beaches / woods / green spaces	91%	1	190	24	9
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	35%	1	60	1	0
Other National Park/s	27%	1	60	1	0
Other *	47%	1	80	3	0

*Other places schools utilised for learning outside the classroom opportunities included:

- **London**, including London Zoo (26 schools)
- Brighton (16)
- Fishbourne Roman Palace (12)
- Portsmouth Historic Dockyard (12).

Note that many respondents struggled to provide an accurate figure, making comments such as:

“Frequently use local parks/beaches/wood/green spaces but don't know number of times. Use AONBs when meets the needs of curriculum but don't know how many times.”

“How often schools grounds use depends on weather, don't know number of times.”

“Occasionally use local parks/beaches/wood/green spaces but don't know number of times.”

“Often schools grounds, but don't know number of times.”

“Use local parks/beaches/woods/green spaces, other national parks, AONBs and other places but don't know number of times.”

“Use AONBs regularly and other places rarely but don't know number of times.”

Recommendation:

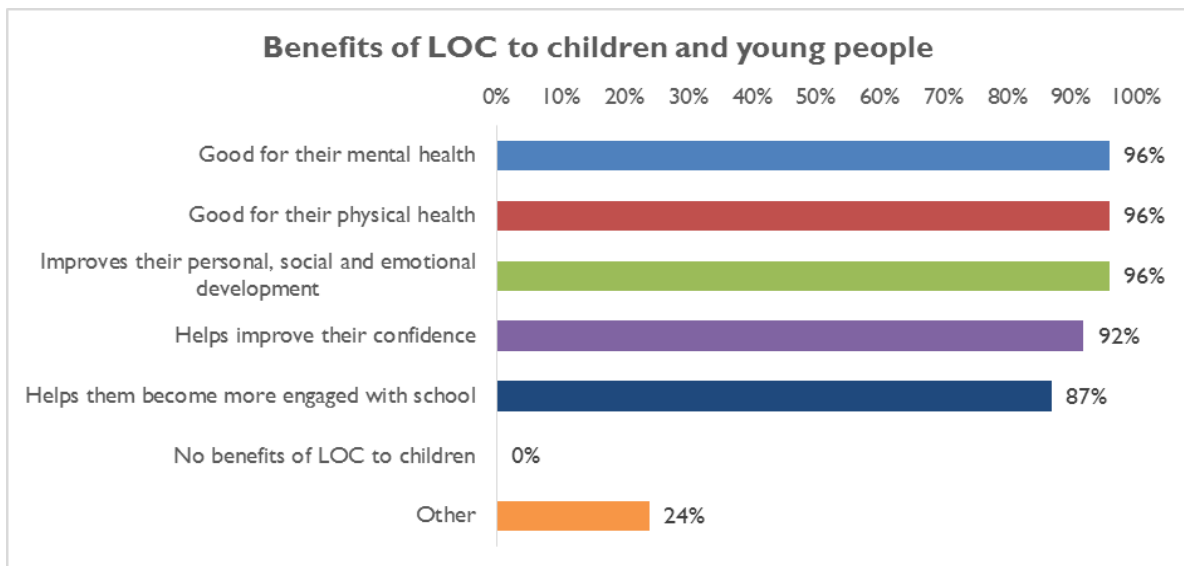
In future, just ask **what** outside spaces schools are using but do not ask the number of times they have used them as this aspect of the question proved very difficult for schools to answer with any accuracy.



9. Benefits of learning outside the classroom for children and young people

It is clear that schools see huge benefits for children and young people of learning outside the classroom, with the vast majority stating that it was **good for their mental and physical health**, and it **improved their personal, social and emotional development** (96% all).

A further 92% of responding schools felt that learning outside the classroom helped **improve children and young peoples' confidence**, whilst 87% stated that it **helped them become more engaged with school**.



Base: 213



Nearly a quarter of responding schools (24%) felt that there were also Other benefits of learning outside the classroom for children and young people. These reasons were coded by thematic area and included:

- **Helps them become more connected with nature** (27 schools)

“Makes them more likely to enjoy this type of experience outside school either with family or in the future.”

“Meaningful context. Respect for environment. Awe and wonder. Passion for the beauty. Multi-sensory - feel the rain, cold, etc.”

- **Brings learning to life** (12)

“Bringing learning to life, motivational, relationship building between staff and students.”

“When they've been on a trip and have something concrete to write about in learning. As it is a deprived area it is very important. First experience of going to a farm or London. First experience of travel.”

- **Improves independence/provides life skills** (8)

“Multiple disabilities students - challenging, boosts their confidence in taking risks - other students may take this for granted.”

- **Offers a break from the classroom** (7)

“Classroom not best for everyone - different individuals flourish in different environments.”

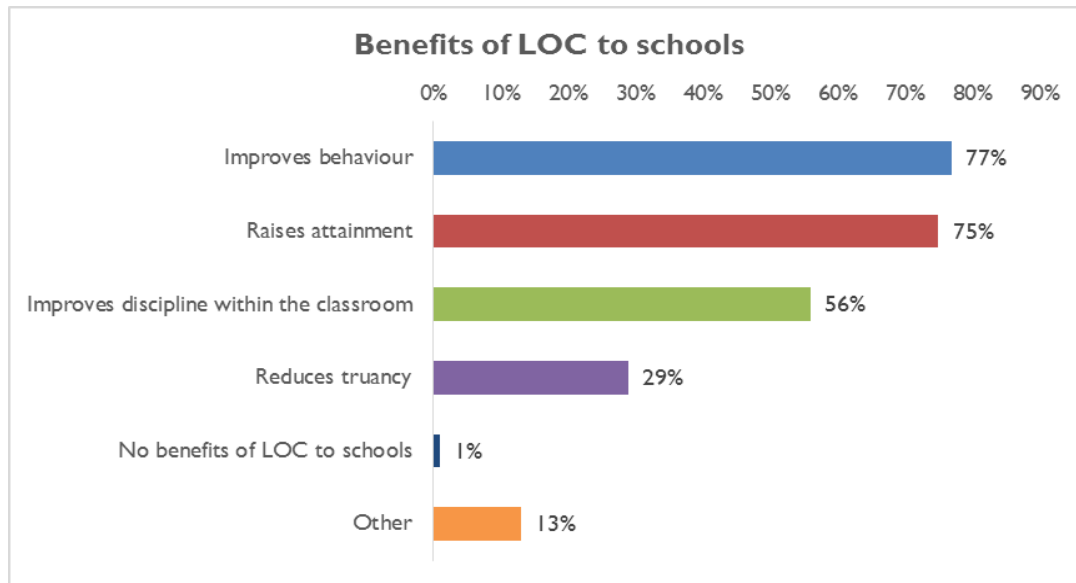
- **Helps improve relationships/team work (between pupils and each other/staff/parents)** (6)

“Builds good relationships - pupils have autism.”



10. Benefits of learning outside the classroom to schools

There are clearly also significant benefits to schools of learning outside the classroom, with over three-quarters stating that it **improves behaviour** (77%) – see chart below. A further 75% felt that learning outside the classroom **raises attainment** (75%).



Base: 213

Thirteen percent (13%) of schools felt that there were also Other benefits for schools when children and young people learn outside the classroom. These reasons were coded by thematic area and included:

- **Children become more engaged with learning** (11 schools)

“Engages children who find it difficult to learn in a formal context.”

- **Good publicity for the school** (4)

“Puts us out there, get compliments when we are out on a trip.”



- **Good for teachers' wellbeing (3)**

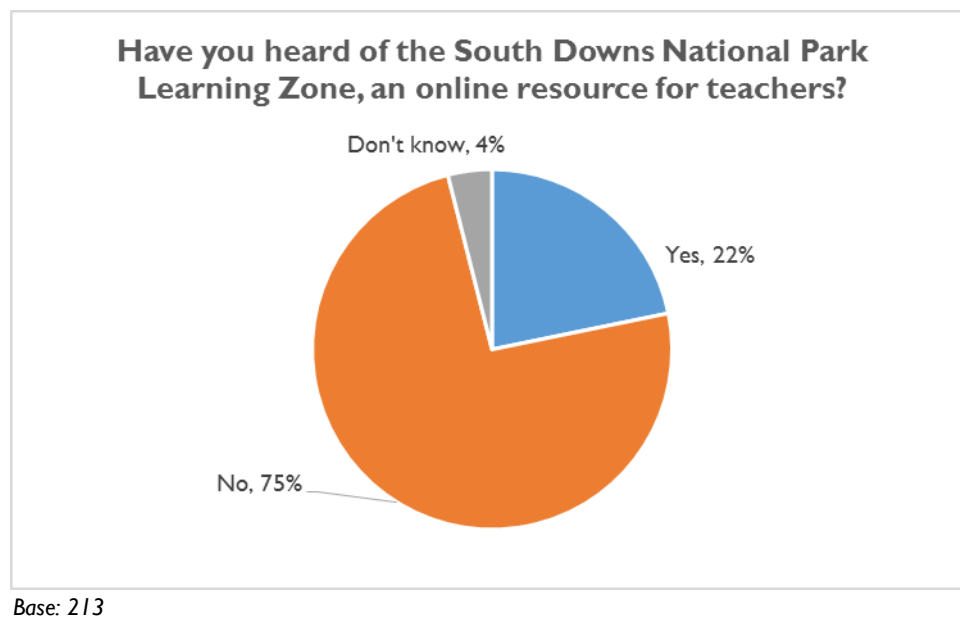
“Staff wellbeing, motivation for staff, advertising school and recruitment.”

- **Helps improve relationships (3)**

“It improves relationships between children and adults and children and parents and teachers and parents, teachers and children.”

II. Awareness and usage of the Learning Zone

One in five schools (22%) had heard of the South Downs National Park **Learning Zone** online resource for teachers.

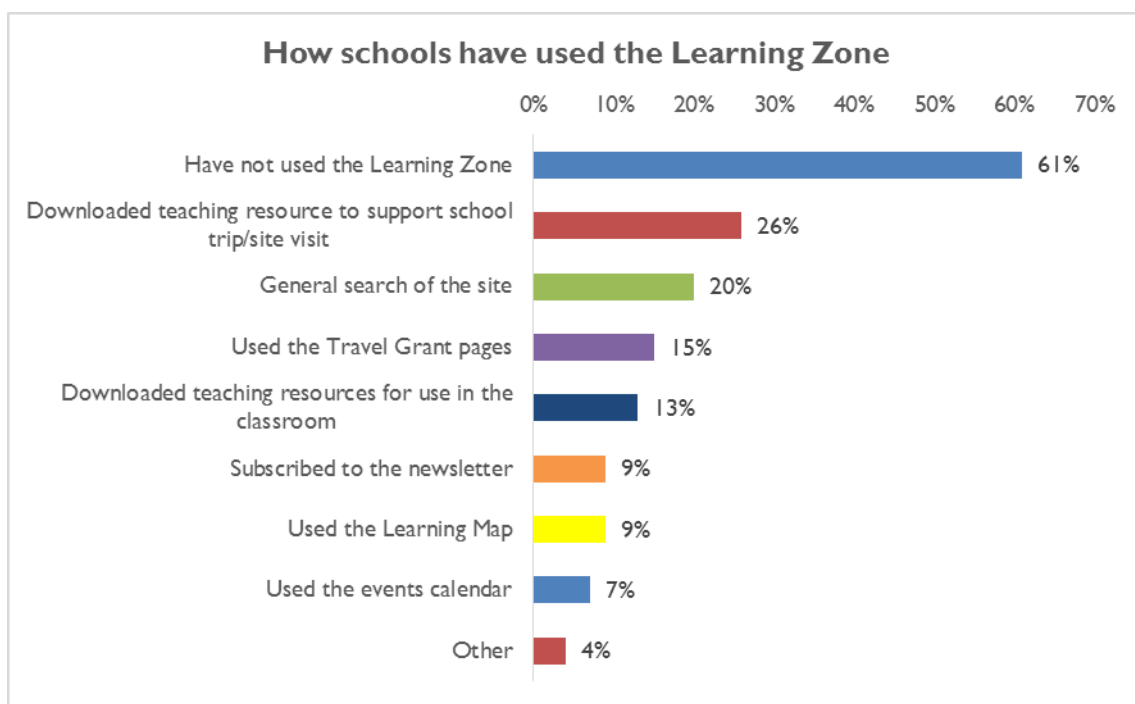


The chart overleaf illustrates that just over three-fifths of schools (61%) who were aware of the Learning Zone **had not used it**.



Where schools had used the Learning Zone, 26% **had downloaded a teaching resource to support a school trip or site visit**.

It is interesting to note that 15% had used the Travel Grant pages. Bearing in mind previous comments about the cost of travel being a barrier to utilising the SDNP, it would be useful to raise the profile of these pages with schools to increase awareness and potentially take up (if they are deemed eligible).



Base: 46

Recommendations:

- Raise the profile of the Learning Zone with schools to increase general awareness – particularly the Travel Grant pages, and the teaching resources for use in the classroom
- Where schools are aware of the Learning Zone, undertake a fact finding exercise to establish any barriers to accessing the content – for example searchability, clarity of headings etc

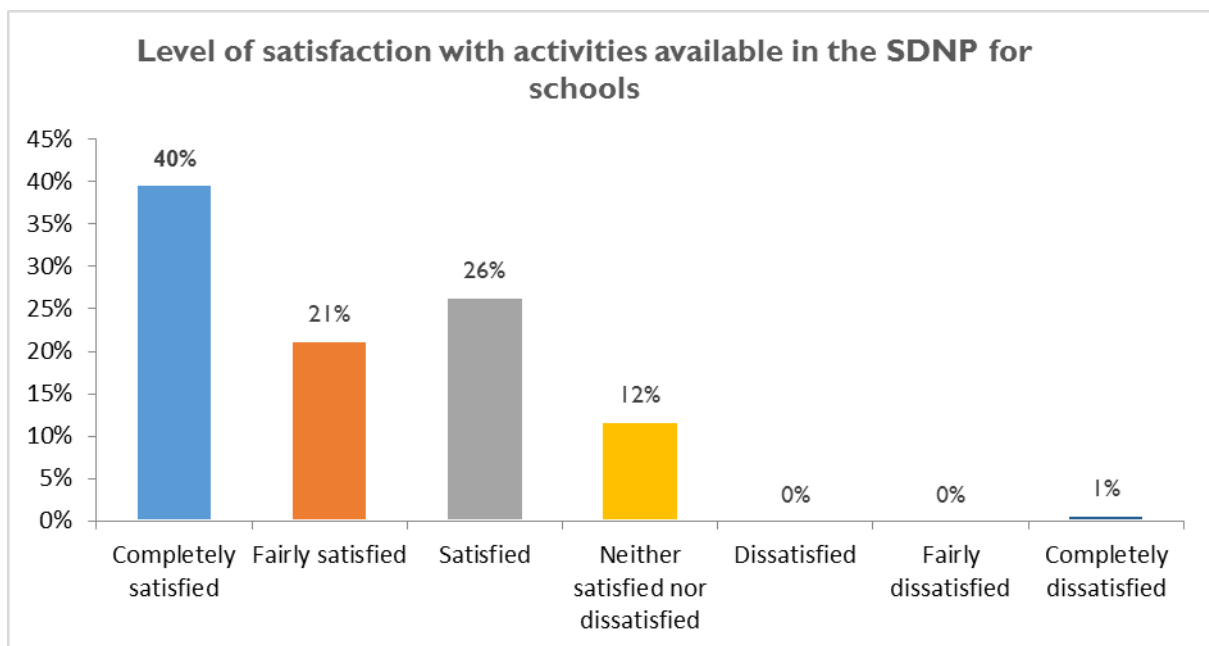


- In the next survey, ask a follow up question of schools who are using the Learning Zone, whether they would like or expect to see any other information on the Learning Zone
- Also consider asking a follow up question of those who had heard of the Learning Zone but who are not using it, as to why that is. It might help highlight some issues around searchability, relevance, clarity of content, simplicity of headings etc.

12. Satisfaction with activities in the South Downs National Park

When 'don't knows' are removed ((36% of schools), we find that almost 9 in 10 schools (88%) were either **completely satisfied**, **fairly satisfied** or **satisfied** with the activities available in the South Downs National Park.

It is heartening to see that no schools were dissatisfied.



Base: 136 (with 'don't knows' removed)



When asked to expand on their reasons as to why they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the activities available in the SDNP, 124 respondents provided some useful additional information. This was analysed and grouped into key themes, the most common of which are listed in bold below, with some quotes to support them.

- **Good range of activities and facilities** (75 respondents)

“Because it is always really well organised, know what's going to happen, people at the venues are always lovely. As we've done venues for so long it's predictable outcome and know benefits for children. Tried and tested and value for money at venues.”

“Good facilities, staff, rooms available for work education.”

“Some of the local activities offered, for example by local farms, the watercress farms, are very appropriate and well thought out. The children have very much enjoyed taking part in these opportunities.”

“The area is huge and you can probably find a site that you could use to meet any intended outcome within the national park.”

“We are fortunate to have this area of outstanding beauty so close to our school and will always use the facilities if it links with the topic work.”

- **Unaware of what is available** (30 respondents)

“Not enough information going straight to schools.”

“Not sure what activities are available, needs more advertising.”

“Would like more information about the South Downs, looking at new areas.”

- **Difficult to access due to funding cuts** (6 respondents)

“The cost of travel is a problem, coaches etc. They've had a lovely trip to Butser, it's beautiful. It's on the doorstep, but coaches to get there are expensive, not in budget to subsidise.”



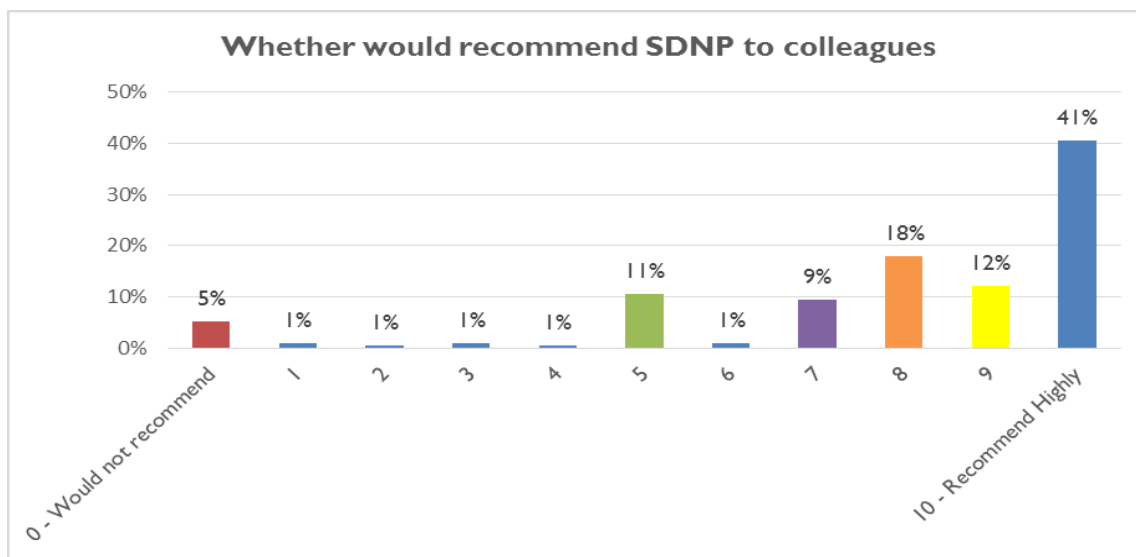
“The main issue for us taking more students out is cost... we tend to try and do most of our trips within walking distance - hiring coaches is such an expensive method of transport that it limits our opportunities to take students out into the Downs.”

Recommendation:

As previously mentioned, it is important to raise more awareness with schools as to the range of activities and facilities on offer in the National Park. This will likely yield a much lower return of ‘don’t knows’ in the next iteration of the survey.

13. Whether would recommend the South Downs National Park to colleagues

Over half of the schools surveyed would **highly recommend** the South Downs National Park to a colleague (53% scoring 9 or 10).



Base: 190 (with ‘don’t knows’ removed)



When asked to expand on their reasons as to why they would or would not recommend the South Downs National Park to a colleague, 154 respondents provided some useful additional information. This was analysed and grouped into key themes, the most common of which are listed in bold below, with some quotes to support them.

- **Beautiful area** (36 respondents)

“Beautiful place and there are many educational benefits.”

“Because it's brilliant! Just wish there was more money for these trips and could get more than one grant a year.”

- **Good variety of things to do/places to go** (28 respondents)

“Good facilities, staff, rooms available for work education. Really good resources.”

“I know there is lots of information and help available through South Downs National Park.”

- **Good for children to learn outside** (18 respondents)

“It's convenient area of natural beauty. Teaches kids about nature and wildlife. Beautiful spaces.”

“Outdoor learning is so important. The South Downs National Park is on our doorstep and can inspire children in ways which the classroom simply cannot.”

- **Unaware of what is on offer** (17 respondents)

“If I get some information about SDNP then I might, but have no details on what's available for children; activities etc. Cannot answer either way, not able to recommend.”

“... many places are unknown, or the perimeters of the national park are not known by staff to make a judgement.”

Recommendation:

Promote the Learning Zone more widely to raise awareness of the range of resources available to schools.

