

# **Learning beyond the classroom: links and recommendations for policy makers**



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## **The State of The Nation 2022**

**A series of evidence-based reports examining the impact and importance of learning beyond the classroom in modern Britain**

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An annual research project from Children's University Trust

Written by Liam Nolan and Cordelia Howard with data analysis by Sukie Duhra

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**This report is one of a series of evidence-based reports examining the impact of what goes on beyond the classroom on the lives of children and young people.**

Based on extensive data collated from a bespoke digital platform, Children's University Online, the aim of the reports is to inform and improve provision by providing educators, policy makers and stakeholders of all kinds with a broad set of insights about the current state of learning beyond the classroom in contemporary Britain.

Our 2022 reports are informed by data from:

- 50,000 children
- 12,000 activities
- 310,000 hours of recorded participation.

To download the rest of our reports, visit:

[childrensuniversity.co.uk/stateofthenation](https://childrensuniversity.co.uk/stateofthenation)

### Children's University: Our reach



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### The role that learning beyond the classroom plays in skills development



#### The State of The Nation 2022

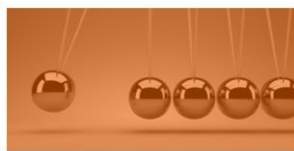
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### The impact of learning beyond the classroom



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### Learning beyond the classroom: Provision and Participation



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# Learning beyond the classroom: links and recommendations for policy makers



**Learning beyond the classroom matters. It is not a nice-to-have. It is a fundamental part of a well-rounded education. These reports clearly restate this.**

The significance of learning beyond the classroom for all children was apparent long before the pandemic, yet historically, and despite all the evidence, it has been allowed to fall between the cracks that lie between government departments, particularly the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The widening gaps between the opportunities for the haves and have-nots have been allowed to fester. The effect of the pandemic on learning loss and the need for educational catch up is clear. Similarly, the extent to which Covid-19 has aggravated inequalities in provision, participation, and impact has been further laid bare. Despite this, learning beyond the classroom is still overlooked in terms of joined up government planning.

There remains a lack of policy focus on genuinely supporting those children and young people who face barriers to learning in this way. In 2022, if we were to ask ourselves whether children from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to access and participate in the kinds of learning and experiences that happen outside of the classroom and the national curriculum, the answer would still be a resounding “No”.

In June 2021, The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) commissioned YouGov to survey parents of pupils in primary and secondary schools in England. According to the survey’s results, one in five (19.6%) parents in England reported that their primary or secondary school children do no enrichment activities in an average week. Parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds were also significantly more likely than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds to respond that their child does no enrichment activities. These results led to the CSJ calling for a new school enrichment guarantee<sup>1</sup> including an extended school day and mandatory enrichment provision.

Regardless of the calls from education experts and well-respected think tanks working to influence policy so that everyone can reach their potential and flourish, and despite there being consensus about the power of learning beyond the classroom to change young peoples’ lives, it never seems quite important enough to result in genuinely impactful, joined-up, and long-term change.

## Footnotes:

1. [https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CSJ-A\\_Level\\_Playing\\_Field.pdf](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CSJ-A_Level_Playing_Field.pdf)

# Learning beyond the classroom: links and recommendations for policy makers



Recently, we have welcomed the National Youth Guarantee that “By 2025, every young person will have access to regular out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer” and the funding that accompanies it (although most of this focuses primarily on the 14+ age group and we know learning beyond the classroom needs embedding from a much earlier age).

We have welcomed the Levelling Up agenda and the ‘Missions’ focused on educational attainment, wellbeing, and pride of place and community (where we know learning beyond the classroom has a roll to play).

We have welcomed the inclusion of enrichment and extra-curricular activities in the remit of the DfE’s Pupil Well-being and Mental Health Team, with their supporting role to schools wanting to offer a broad range of enrichment and their focus on evidencing its benefits.

We have welcomed the Holiday and Food Activities Programmes that have taken place and engaged some of the most disadvantaged children during school holidays.

But these four different policy initiatives and their investment come from three separate government departments with learning beyond the classroom falling into each but receiving the laser like focus that is needed of none. If we are to genuinely address inequities in participation and regional disparities in provision, this needs to change.

Part of the problem of course is that there is no legal obligation on schools, from the DfE or Ofsted, to provide enrichment and extra-curricular activities. Yet, the DfE’s own Essential Life Skills (ELS) programme<sup>1</sup> – a £21.75 million project which ran between 2018-2019 in the DfE’s 12 Opportunity Areas, and aimed to improve access to extra-curricular activities (including sports, arts, debating and information technology) for pupils aged 5-18 showed:

- confidence, resilience, team working/building relationships and social and emotional skills were the most common outcomes experienced by young people;
- the regular structure of ELS provision encouraged young people to be more organised and committed – skills that families reported were lacking before; and
- schools reported positive changes in pupil behaviour, attendance, and aspirations that they believed would be sustained.

## Footnotes:

1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/94256/8/ELS\\_what\\_works\\_paper.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94256/8/ELS_what_works_paper.pdf)

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In 2019, Ofsted included ‘personal development’ in its inspection framework meaning that schools are now expected to give pupils the chance to develop and discover their interests and talents. The new framework also places an emphasis on character (for example, resilience, confidence, and independence). In its 2020 annual report, Ofsted said that one of the notable features of schools that had not improved was that “pupils did not take up extra-curricular activities,”<sup>1</sup> which suggests that Ofsted’s new emphasis on personal development is starting to manifest itself in inspection results.

This is a welcome step forward, but it still isn’t addressing a long-standing lack of engagement with learning beyond the classroom or gaps in participation between the less advantaged and their more advantaged peers.

So, what can we do now to try to inspire change?

The Covid years hit schools hard. By Summer term 2022, while most schools had reinstated some curriculum enrichment activities at lunchtime and/or after school, in some schools, clubs tended to focus on catching up with academic work rather than on pupils’ broader personal development. Some schools had prioritised funding for helping pupils to catch up in academic subjects, which reduced the enrichment activities they could offer. In some schools, fewer pupils were taking part in enrichment activities compared with before the pandemic.

In this environment, many schools had found it a challenge to provide enrichment activities and clubs due to Covid-related staff absence, as well as increased workload caused by staff delivering tutoring and catch-up sessions. Some leaders told the DfE about the rising cost-of-living for families, which may prevent pupils’ uptake of enrichment activities, both for the Summer term and in the future, as well as schools’ ability to subsidise such activities.<sup>2</sup>

Now schools are facing an unprecedented funding crisis. Real-terms funding for schools is in decline, energy costs are spiralling, there is no funding to cover essential pay increases for teachers and support staff. Schools are taking on significant additional financial burdens to support children and families living in increasing poverty. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) has reported that nine out of ten schools in England will be in deficit next year.<sup>3</sup> With this backdrop, it will become increasingly difficult for schools to support additional activities or for calls from the Times Education Commission and the CSJ to extend the school day to include mandatory enrichment to be implemented.

## Footnotes:

1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/939834/Ofsted\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2019-2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939834/Ofsted_Annual_Report_2019-2020.pdf) p.17
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-recovery-in-schools-summer-2022/education-recovery-in-schools-summer-2022>
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/oct/22/exclusive-90-of-uk-schools-will-go-bust-next-year-heads-warn>

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Now is the time for existing external frameworks which support schools to encourage all children to access learning beyond the classroom, to be helped to step into the breach and to scale up what they already do to reach as many children as possible and to begin to close the gaps.

Now is the time to be ambitious in the use of community wide networks to support all students, especially the most disadvantaged, through enrichment activities.

**Now is the time for government departments to use data and evidence, such as provided in these State of the Nation Reports, to inform policy and practice.**



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## We recommend:

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1. The creation of an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on learning beyond the classroom
2. Cross-department government policy to:
  - create more place-based partnerships between schools and external learning providers. (This could be done under a framework of quality assurance and reporting, using a digital platform which promotes and records provision and participation at a local level, such as Children's University Online)
  - target and prioritise learning beyond the classroom partnerships specifically in Levelling Up Education Investment Areas where we know their impact will be greatest
  - encourage existing successful place-based partnerships to expand into neighbouring places – using the tried and tested rather than reinventing the wheel (such as the development of South Yorkshire Children's University)
3. A government grant scheme subsidising free and low-cost learning beyond the classroom activities for young people accessing youth services, youth organisations in areas of deprivation, and in alternate education provision
4. The extension of the National Youth Guarantee and its funding to incorporate more activity from a younger age, reaching more community and voluntary groups and providers
5. Support for learning beyond the classroom activities to be used to help education stage transitions, with CPD training on learning beyond the classroom made available to teachers and support staff in schools
6. The DfE's Pupil Well-being and Mental Health Team to use the UK-wide dataset and evidence-base provided by Children's University to inform its policies on enrichment and extra-curricular activity
7. The DfE's Pupil Well-being and Mental Health Team follows the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) lead and promotes the Children's University framework as a proven enrichment and extra-curricular activity 'handbook' to schools



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## We recommend:

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8. The existing Children's University Online platform (which is currently being extended to individual users as well as users in schools) to be used as a central digital platform to give government an understanding of the breadth and quality of available learning options in various parts of the country, and which in turn could inform policy decisions
9. The wide sharing of these State of the Nation Reports across the DfE and DCMS, as well as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)
10. Children's University to continue working with non-governmental organisations and associations (Skills Builder, Fair Education Alliance (FEA), Foundation for Education Development (FED) and others) to ensure our insights and data is able to support their wider work linked to learning beyond the classroom.

