

**Purpose and Quality of Education Parliamentary inquiry 2016**

**Forest School Association Submission;**

This submission is being submitted by Jon Cree, Chair of the Forest School Association (FSA), on behalf of the FSA. The submission has had the input from the membership of the association.

The FSA is the professional association representing Forest School practitioners throughout the UK. Forest School is a growing education movement, there are now many schools and non-formal education groups, throughout England, which run Forest School, the numbers are in the thousands.

We feel that real world learning and learning beyond the classroom is becoming ever more important and therefore welcome the chance to respond to this inquiry into the purpose and quality of education in this century.

***What the purpose of education for children of all ages in England should be?***

Education should be a combination of supporting individual's learning and development, helping each individual identify their own needs, motivations, skills and aspirations and working with these, developing their full potential and well-being.

Education should be encouraging a love and understanding of learning, exciting the imagination and helping learners grow in a real world context. Learning should be extending individual’s capacities intellectually, physically, practically, socially and emotionally - resourcing healthy, positive well balanced lives. There should also be opportunities to encourage learners to imagine and contribute to new 'possible' sustainable worlds.

A key purpose of education should be equipping children with the capacity to deal with uncertainty and change in a personal, social, environmental and global context. To this end children need to be educated to think for themselves and equipped with the skills and knowledge required for living in the 21st century. Education should be enabling children to take ownership of their own learning in dialogue and partnership with their educators and other significant people in their lives. In order to contribute positively as global citizens it is vital that children are equipped with the skills to communicate positively with others form positive relationships.

Education should be fostering a sense of self and purpose in life and giving learners the life skills to be both autonomous individuals and who can thrive and learn from relationships – be these with their peers, family, teachers, the wider and natural world.

Education should be encouraging respect for other peoples and the environment, as well as ourselves. This should mean encouraging consideration of own values and respecting other's values, valuing diversity and similarity in cultures throughout the world. There should be development of an understanding of how humanity is connected globally and the importance of sustainable relationships with the natural world. Children should be equipped with the capacity to regulate their own behaviors and communicate positively in order to show this respect and develop relationships.

Places of learning should embody culture and values, and celebrate and live this. They should be seen as a community and an integral part of the wider community, not just something that prepares learners for 'living outside the school'. Learning should be seen as something that doesn't just happen in school. There should be lots of opportunity for regularly getting beyond the school boundaries and learning outside the classroom.

Education should be developing in children a sense of place and 'community' and how their community interrelates to the natural and wider world. Within the predominantly urban context of many children’s lives it is vital that education provides learning and development opportunities in the natural environment to ensure optimal health, wellbeing and development as evidenced by many recent studies. These understandings should make the bridge to how children can become active citizens and make positive contributions to society with regards to both decision making and actively getting involved – this should be at a personal, school, societal and environmental level.

***What measures should be used to evaluate the quality of education against this purpose***

This is a hard question as many of these above purposes are tricky to measure. Well-being, dispositions for learning and displaying a growth mindset, how involved children are in their learning and the school community, engagement with the real world, achieving their own full potential, are all key areas to evaluate and would be good starting points. Capacity to problem solve, work with others, learning to learn, creativity (all measures espoused by the CBI) would also be worth looking at.

***How well the current education system performs against these measures***

We suggest the concentration on numeracy and literacy measurement and the narrow gauge of 5 GCSE's above C along with the concentration on academic 'A' levels, are narrow measures of learning and development. We therefore feel that the current education system does not necessarily perform well against these measures, particularly with regard to well-being. Recent studies have demonstrated that the UK is well behind many other countries when it comes to children's and young people's well-being (see UNICEF, 2007). As there has not been extensive evaluation against the above measures this is a hard question to answer.

From international research and the experience of Forest School educators within the FSA across the UK, there is compelling evidence of the benefits and vital role of outdoor learning experiences in education to optimise learning, health, wellbeing and development of learners.

The FSA welcomes any further opportunities to contribute to this inquiry.

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