

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty (AONB)

River and Wetlands

Education Programme 2019 - 2020

Evaluation

February 2020
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Introduction

The Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Education Programme 2019-2020 engaged primary schools across the AONB between May 2019 and February 2020. The education programme worked collaboratively with teachers and pupils to create a national curriculum linked programme of study to support schools to extend their environmental education.

The purpose of the evaluation is to measure the success of the project at delivering high quality education sessions, fulfilling the aims of the project as set out below.

The aim of the education programme was to:

- Enable pupils at schools associated with the Blackdown Hills AONB to learn about rivers and catchments through a range of interactive sessions
- Develop pupils' connection with and responsibility for the river
- Increase pupils understanding of the local natural environment.
- Build on the work of the Culm Community Crayfish project to raise awareness of the plight of the white clawed crayfish.



Evaluation Methodology

To evaluate the success of this project, feedback from teachers and pupils was collected through questionnaires, observations and informal conversations. Formal feedback was collected from teachers whilst assessments about engaging Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils relied more heavily on observation and conversation with the pupils.

Evaluation data was collected by Catherine Farnell who was responsible for delivering the education programme.



Summary of Outputs

- Over 300 pupils, 20 teachers and teaching assistants participated in the Blackdown Hills AONB education programme.
- The schools that took part were: Culmstock Primary School, Churchstanton Primary School, Upottery Primary School, Awliscombe C of E Primary School, All Saints C of E Primary School, Stockland Primary School, Membury Primary School, Broadhembury C of E Primary School.
- 13 interactive education sessions were delivered.
- Pupils participated in interactive in-school workshops and hands-on outdoor learning in their school or at a local river.



Interactive Workshops in Schools

A range of different interactive activities were delivered in the schools. The pupils were given the opportunity to explore the rivers, wetlands and associated wildlife of the Blackdown Hills AONB through images, maps, games and art activities. All the activities were adapted to suit the age and needs of the children, and the curriculum foci of the class at the time.

Key stage 2 children also investigated the issues and problems associated with rivers in the Blackdown Hills and how these could be addressed using nature-based solutions.



Outdoor education

Whenever possible, learning about rivers and wetlands took place outdoors, either in the school grounds or at a local water course that the children could walk to. Outside, the pupils engaged in a range of activities including river dipping, habitat hunts and creating nature inspired river pictures.

Key Quotes

Below is a representative sample of some of the feedback we received from the schools.

“A really fantastic, engaging session – thank you Cat! The children were interested from the very start and loved the practical pond dipping activity. We all found out lots about the importance of our local rivers. Thank you!” – Teacher, All Saints C of E Primary School

“Very good adapting of activities to changeable weather!” – Teacher, Awliscombe C of E Primary School

“Fantastic resources. Really engaging. The children thoroughly enjoyed it. It was really adaptable which was great with the wet weather.” – Teacher, Upottery Primary School

“Lovely session, really enjoyed by the children. They particularly enjoyed exploring outside.” – Teacher, Stockland

“Thank you very much for coming out and spending time with the children. They are always engaged with visitors and the topic was very interesting for them. The activities were age appropriate and always good to get out in our garden.” – Teacher

“Cat is great with the children and was able to engage a very lively bunch of 33 Year 2 and 3 children, 22 of them boys!! They were very excited about the work in the stream and we carried it on today... Her enthusiasm is infectious and the children were thrilled at the prospect of carrying on with the activity that she started with them.” – Teacher, Stockland Primary School

The Impact of the Connecting the Culm Education Programme

What worked well

Pupils were enthusiastic to learn about rivers and wetlands!

The pupils at all schools were very enthusiastic about the topic of rivers and wetlands and enjoyed talking about their experiences of visiting rivers in the Blackdown Hills AONB. They were keen to learn more about the wildlife and were interested in learning about

ways local rivers could be improved. The pupils showed significant interest in keeping rivers 'healthy' and often referred to the problem of plastic getting in the rivers and seas.

Interactive activities led to a high level of engagement

Teachers commented on the high level of pupil engagement in the activities and the ability for all members of the class to participate. By having a range of hands-on adaptable activities, the sessions were interesting and memorable for the children. A significant amount of time was spent creating the resources, but the good quality resources ensured the in-school sessions had a high impact.

Visits from the Blackdown Hills AONB representatives have increased pupils' interest in the local environment.

Teachers commented that having regular visits by people representing the Blackdown Hills AONB to their schools had made the children more aware of the importance of their local environment and that they live and go to school in a special place.

Continuing the work of the Culm Community Crayfish (CCC) project

Revisiting schools that had taken part in the Culm Community Crayfish project ensured that the work undertaken by the CCC project to raise awareness of the issues surrounding the white-clawed crayfish was extended. Pupils who had taken part in the project, remembered the issues clearly and were able to actively take part in discussion about the crayfish in the River Culm.

Lesson Learned

Wet weather activities

Unfortunately, there was heavy rain on several of the primary school visits. As a result, it was not possible to undertake all the planned activities. We quickly learnt that we had to have adaptable activities that could take place inside if necessary!

Time and resources needed for river dipping activities

The river dipping activities were very engaging for the children and really enhanced the pupils' connection with their local river. The organisation and time it took to organise these events, and the number of adults required to undertake the activities for the whole class was significant. When planning similar future activities, more time needs to be allotted for this process.

Conclusion

The Blackdown Hills AONB education programme for 2019 – 2020 was successful in engaging schools in the River and Wetland sessions. As a result, over 300 pupils learnt about the rivers in the Blackdown Hills and developed their connection and responsibility for their local river.

The sessions also successfully helped to increase pupils understanding of the local natural environment and inspired teachers to develop their use of the natural environment as a teaching resource.

This education programme has built on the success of previous years and as a result the schools have become more aware of the work of the Blackdown Hills AONB and pupils are more aware of the unique and special place in which they go to school.

