



Blairvadach Outdoor Education Services **IMPACT REPORT 2023/24**



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The young people had the time of their lives, learning new things and pushing past their comfort zones, fears and levels of anxiety. They saw that their own limiting beliefs had been holding them back, and felt safe and secure with their fellow peers, Instructor and myself watching them kayaking, jumping into rock pools and tree climbing. I wish this opportunity could be more widely available for the young people of Glasgow.



MCR PATHWAYS COORDINATOR, JULY 2023

Our year at a glance

13,100+

**LEARNING
DAYS**

(one person = one day)

2,513

young people
experienced
a residential

1,155

experienced a
JOHN MUIR AWARD
at Pinkston Basin

157

schools and units
SUPPORTED

1,856

DUKE OF
EDINBURGH'S
AWARD (DofE)
enrolments

1,672

young people on
EXPEDITION

6,178

total DofE
**OUTDOOR
DAYS**

26,949

hours of voluntary
community work as
part of DofE

841

DofE
**AWARDS
ACHIEVED**



The personal development the children and young people have worked on over the weekend was extremely beneficial. The opportunity given to them has opened them to learning valuable life skills and taught them to appreciate the outdoors.



PRIMARY PRINCIPAL TEACHER, JUNE 2023





Neil Wightwick

Head, Blairvadach
Outdoor Education
Services

Welcome

For 50 years, Blairvadach has been helping young people make memories through outdoor adventures, while developing the social and emotional skills that lay the foundations for positive behaviours and attitudes.

Within Glasgow City Council, we recognise the positive impact that wider achievement experiences can have on our young people, enabling them to flourish throughout their education journey and beyond. We strive for inclusion at every stage, regardless of their background or economic circumstances.

In September 2024, we will celebrate our 50th anniversary. While Blairvadach's physical service has evolved substantially over the last five decades, our core mission – to provide young people with opportunities to believe they are capable of more than they thought possible – remains unchanged.

The outdoor experiences we directly deliver and support provide young people from all backgrounds with physical and emotional challenges which develop their understanding, curiosity and compassion, thereby helping to build all four the capacities for the Curriculum for Excellence.

The Council's annual budgeting process is always a difficult time for the Blairvadach team: our service is not statutory, therefore cuts are always an option. Our service consistently receives significant praise and support from



all sides of the city administration, and this year we felt encouraged by the fact that a three-year budget was agreed for the first time.

A three-year budget obviously delivers some additional service securities, but more importantly will – to some degree – reduce the cycle of uncertainty for staff. This will allow us to focus on quality and delivering maximum impact for Glasgow's citizens.

This report showcases the breadth and depth of the work achieved through 2023/24 and demonstrates how we continue to improve the lives of Glasgow's young people. We have measured and evaluated our impact through staff and pupil feedback, online surveys and internal monitoring.

I hope you enjoy reading our report, and would love to hear from you with any questions, suggestions or offers of support.

Fifty years of Blairvadach



OUR PAST

- 1974:** The Right Honourable Lord Provost Sir William Gray opens Blairvadach Sailing and Outdoor Centre on Thursday 5 September
- 1996:** Blairvadach becomes a Glasgow City Council resource with the abolition of Strathclyde Regional Council
- 2015:** Permanent city-centre base for Education Services established at Pinkston Watersports
- 2021:** Therapeutic outdoor education programme established in partnership with Glasgow Virtual School and Glasgow Psychological Services
- 1974 to present:** Blairvadach's residential facility evolves to offer a range of land- and water-based activities on courses varying from single days to seven-day residential experiences.



WHAT WE DO NOW

- Blairvadach is considered a leading provider of curriculum-based adventurous outdoor education
- Preparation to deliver the new Glasgow's Urban Adventure Award at Pinkston Basin ([read more](#))
- Our therapeutic outdoor education programme provides positive experiences for care experienced young people who struggle to engage with school ([read more](#))
- We support schools through outdoor learning training, resources and special projects. We have mapped every school for orienteering and provide a wide range of free outdoor learning resources via our website
- Our team of DofE coaches supports school leaders and coordinators to deliver the award through training, advice, administration and direct delivery ([read more](#))
- Residential programmes facilitate personal and social growth for individuals, support the transition from primary to secondary school, and in later years deliver supported study and skills acquisition experiences ([read more](#)).



OUR FUTURE DIRECTION

- Further integration of Blairvadach experiences into the school journey
- Establish another city-centre outdoor learning base as a resource for the support and delivery of outdoor learning
- We plan to be a Learning for Sustainability Centre of Excellence
- We hope to see outdoor learning considered an entitlement for all learners, not just enrichment
- Conduct further research into the known positive impacts of outdoor learning on social, economic and academic outcomes
- Further partnerships to realise the benefits of outdoor learning as part of a young person's education journey, but also utilise our first-class facilities to support adventure sports athletes
- Will Blairvadach be a place of digital detox, or will we integrate digital learning and outdoor learning?



All Learners All Achieving

Blairvadach's services respond to the five grand challenges identified in All Learners All Achieving by providing:



Wellbeing and Learning

- Positive role models who share opportunities and help create lifelong memories
- Pupil-led programmes where choice leads to engagement and achievement
- Fully immersive experiential learning experiences that bring learning to life
- Learning relevant to local communities, thereby nurturing responsible global citizens.

Networked Learning Organisation

- A culture of collaboration within the team, where they can work and learn together
- A networked, self-improving learning system with collective agency
- Learning pathways from beginner to performance athlete through partnerships with National Governing Bodies.

Achievement and Progress

- Alternative national accreditations to recognise achievement
- Alternative learning environments to support appropriate pathways and outcomes for all
- Support for a range of wider achievement programmes that build confident learners able to reach their potential
- Improved life chances for every child in the city by removing financial barriers to wider achievement programmes.

Connected Learning

- Proven learning experiences that are interest-driven and directly influenced by the pupil voice
- Peer-supported and academically orientated experiences
- Connections to the spheres of home, school, community and real-world learning
- Engaging activities that promote lifelong learning.

Engagement, Participation and Inclusion

- A service committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 29
- A service that tailors provision to meet the needs of its young people
- Opportunities to listen to the pupil voice and celebrate learners' successes
- Authentic experiences in an extraordinary environment that translate back to the ordinary.

Residential experiences

Residential visits to Blairvadach link to many different areas of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and aspects of the four capacities, as children experience a new place, develop relationships and challenge themselves.

Away from home, young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their belongings, equipment and each other. They make decisions about their food, manage risk, and learn to live and work together. All this builds a deeper connection with peers and school staff.

As a result of these unforgettable experiences in new environments – and completing tasks they thought were beyond them while learning from mistakes – they return home and back to school with a sense of pride and a new awareness of their own abilities. Embedded into the experiences for children and teachers are topics such as climate change, sustainable development, global citizenship, biodiversity and pollution.

The curricular gains during residential experiences are broad. All courses deliver CfE experiences and outcomes in:

- Literacy and English
- Literacy and Gaelic
- Health and Wellbeing
- Religious and Moral Education
- Modern Languages
- Mathematics
- Technologies
- Expressive Arts



For me, the aim of the trip was to broaden the pupils' horizons and give them a valuable, engaging learning experience beyond the classroom that challenges them, helps them develop their confidence, self-esteem, self-awareness, fitness and movement skills, and communication skills. The trip exceeded these expectations.

PRIMARY HEAD TEACHER, MAY 2023



Occurrence of experiences and outcomes (E&Os) in each curriculum area covered at Blairvadach

The bigger the word, the more E&Os in that curriculum area are covered during an outdoor education residential experience at Blairvadach.

TechnologiesExpressive Arts

Literacy and Gaelic

Health and Wellbeing

MathematicsGaelic (learners)Sciences

Social StudiesModern Languages

Literacy and English



Blairvadach residential continues to be a once in a lifetime experience for our children. All aspects of the week were outstanding. My only regret is that many of our children will not get the chance to experience this, as it is only available once every three years or so. This creates a real inconstancy of what we as a school can deliver for our young people from year to year.

PRIMARY HEAD TEACHER, FEBRUARY 2024



WHAT TEACHERS SAID
ABOUT BLAIRVADACH
RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCES

This extract from our schools feedback demonstrates the success of the residential experience in widening horizons and building life skills. The full teacher feedback report can be found on our website [here](#).

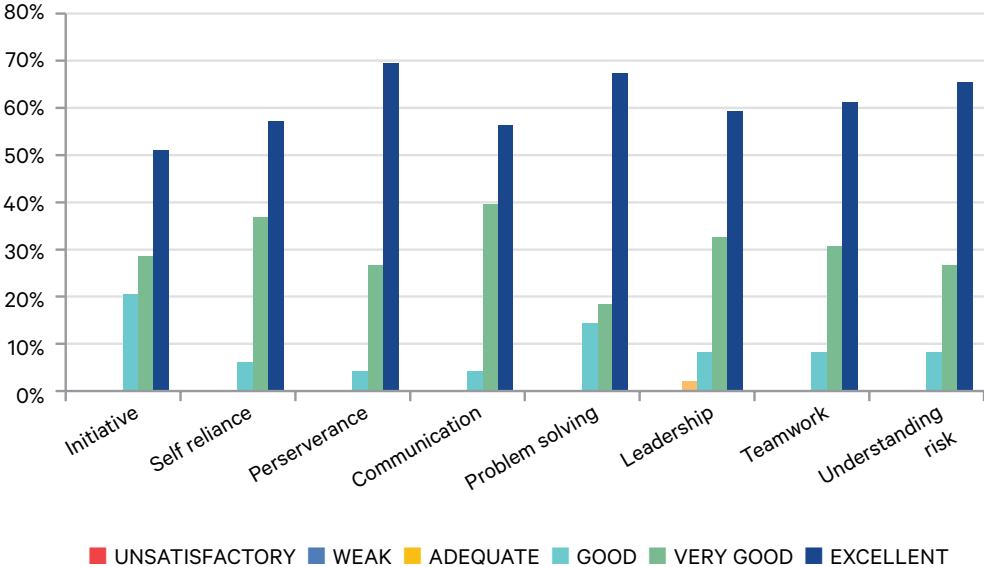
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The learners became more independent and confident from their stay. The instructors expected the best from them with empathy and reassurance.

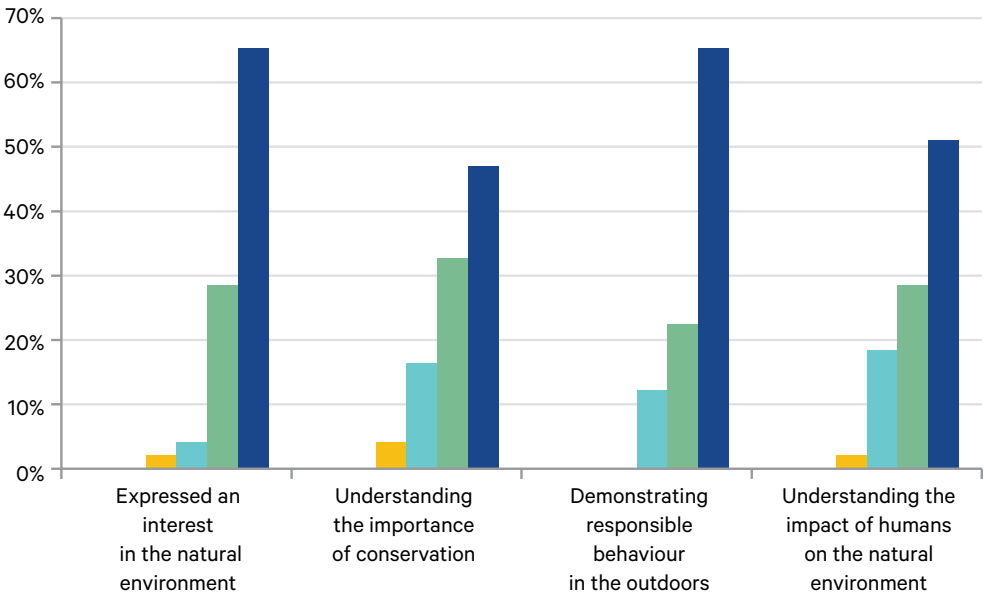
MCR PATHWAYS
COORDINATOR,
JULY 2023

”

Teachers’ ratings of how well Blairvadach residentials developed and extended certain personal qualities and life skills



Teachers’ ratings of how well Blairvadach residentials promote aspects of environmental awareness among learners

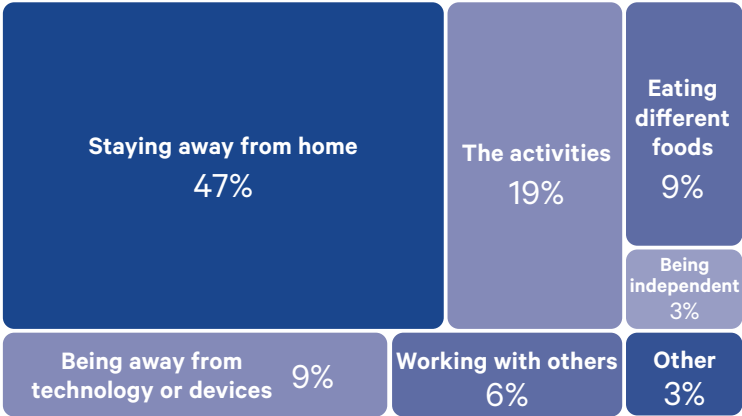


WHAT PUPILS SAID ABOUT BLAIRVADACH RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCES

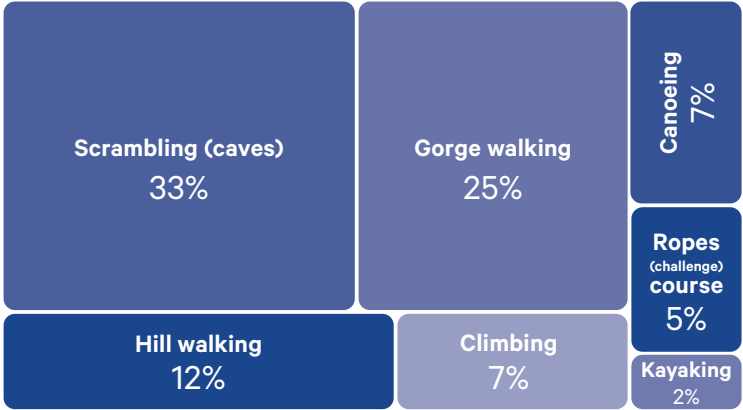
Which skills have you improved on the most from being at Blairvadach?



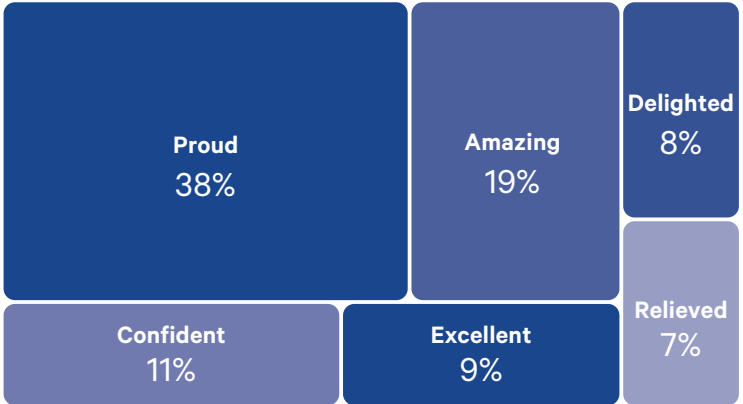
What was the most challenging thing for you during the residential?



What was your most adventurous activity?



How did you feel after completing this activity?



Duke of Edinburgh's Award

Every mainstream secondary school in Glasgow offers a Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) programme. The DofE Glasgow team, which is part of Blairvadach Services, builds capacity for the award across the city through leader training, direct schools support and delivering initiatives to drive the award forward.



I really enjoyed doing the Sports Leader Award. It helped me improve my communication skills, encouraged me to take more responsibility and increased my confidence and independence. It also helped us on our expedition by being more organised with our kit and working together better as a team, especially at times that we found challenging.

AIDEN, SILVER DOFE PARTICIPANT



After all their hard work throughout the year, it was wonderful to see how well they worked together to complete their expedition.

MR MACDIARMID, HILLPARK SECONDARY



DofE IN GLASGOW THE YEAR 2023/24 IN NUMBERS



1,856
TOTAL ENROLMENTS,
OF WHICH...

46.4%
from SIMD 1-3 14
compared to
8% nationally

8.4%
with ASN compared to
6.3% nationally

28%
from ethnic minorities
compared to
16.4% nationally

**Glasgow is leading the
way nationally when it
comes to inclusion**



1,672
YOUNG PEOPLE TOOK PART
IN A DofE EXPEDITION

6,178
TOTAL OUTDOOR DAYS

3,967
expedition days

2,211
additional outdoor days



841
AWARDS ACHIEVED,
OF WHICH...

48.5%
were from
SIMD 1-3



26,949
HOURS OF VOLUNTARY
COMMUNITY SERVICE
contributed by DofE
participants, equating
to...

£142,291
OF LOCAL ECONOMIC
BENEFIT

DUAL ACCREDITATION

"All pupils completing their volunteering section award (or full award) have been put forward for a 10-hour Saltire award. In addition, a small number of pupils have worked towards the Princesses Trust Achieve award alongside a physical sectional award."

SIMON HADFIELD, DofE COORDINATOR, DRUMCHAPEL HIGH SCHOOL

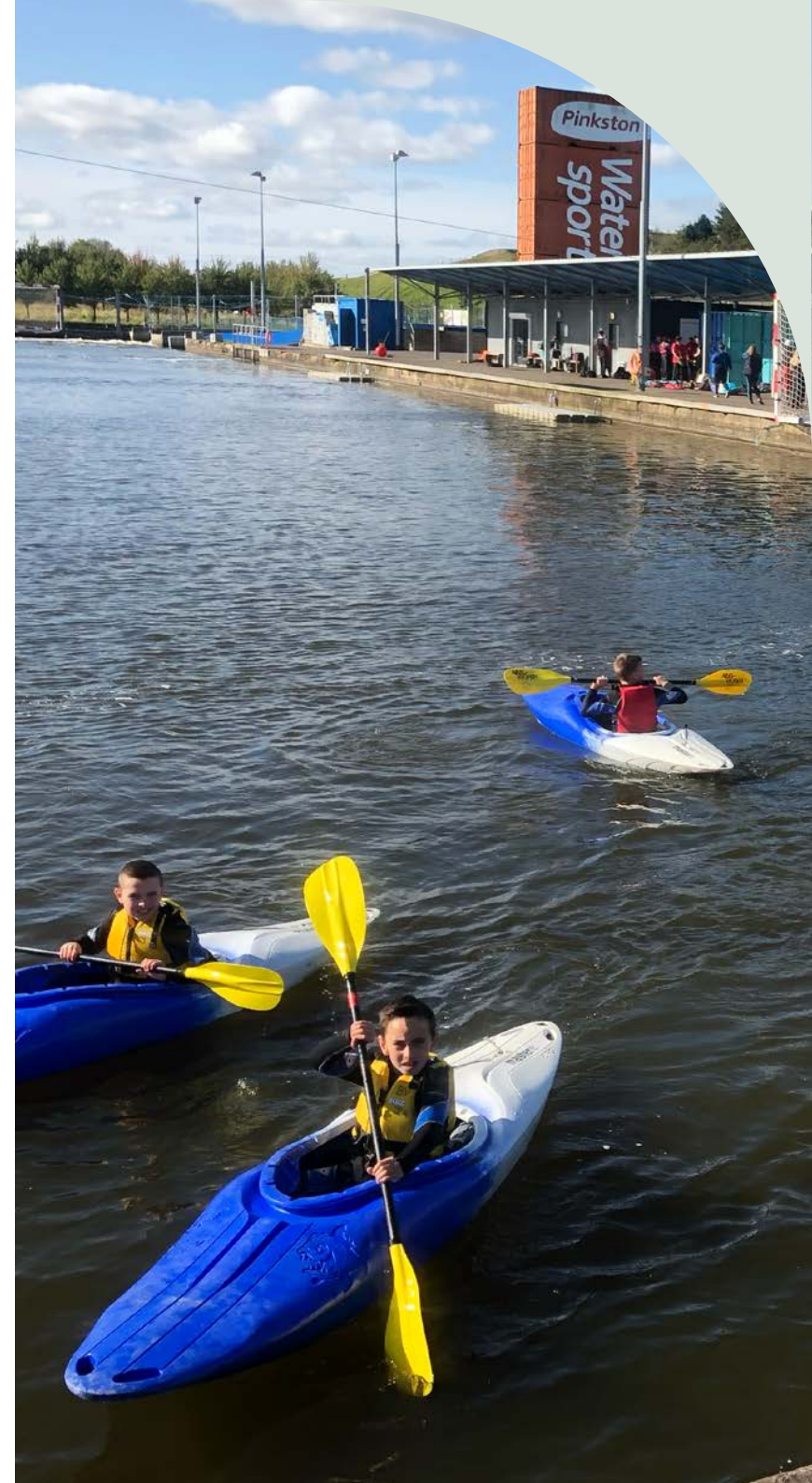
Blairvadach at Pinkston Basin

The Blairvadach hub at the Pinkston Basin offers access to our high-quality outdoor education service in the city centre.

The facility focuses on delivering our urban John Muir Award and national proficiency awards in kayaking and canoeing. In addition, we have been preparing to deliver the new **GLASGOW'S Urban Adventure Award (GUAA)**, which will be available following successful pilots.

This award has been created to encourage the people of Glasgow to make the most of the city's outdoor spaces by engaging in outdoor learning and adventurous activities. They will shape their own experiences through three wild pathways: Wild Self (creative and personal skills), Wild Others (team building and leadership) and Wild Environment (environment and conservation).

Participants will engage in each of the pathways throughout the award, but will choose a focus which tailors it to their interests. GUAA incorporates both an inclusive approach in line with **All Learners all Achieving** and values the "engagement and celebration of the voice of children and young people, enabling contributions and ideas to be heard and considered to support the development of a meaningful curriculum" as per the Glasgow Educational Strategy 22-27.



WHAT TEACHERS SAID ABOUT BLAIRVADACH AT PINKSTON BASIN

This extract from our schools feedback demonstrates the success of the programme in widening horizons and delivering broad general education experiences. The full feedback survey can be found on our website [here](#).

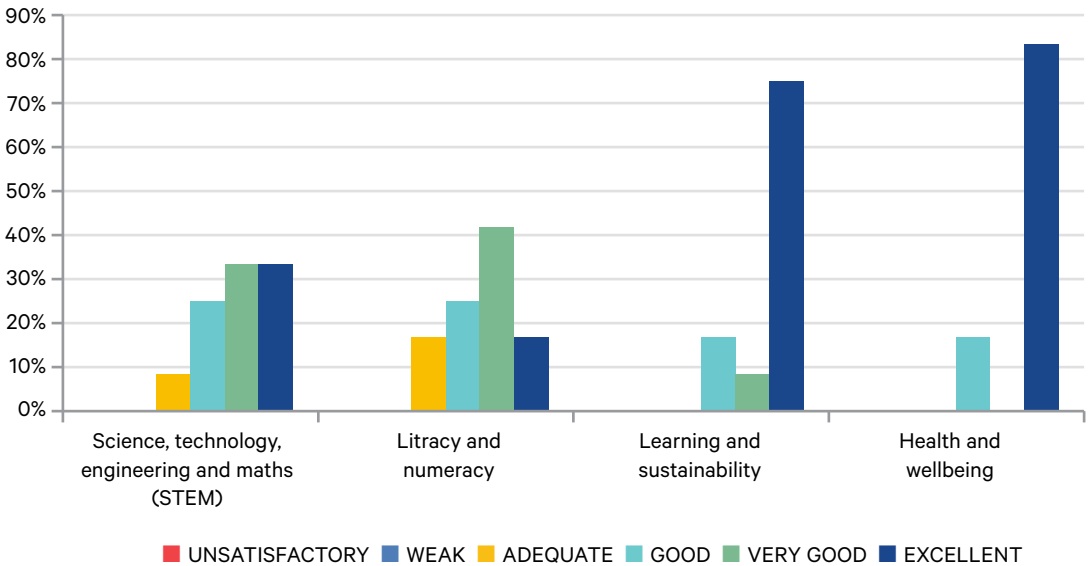


Our experience at Pinkston Basin has been fantastic for my class. It has been wonderful to see the progress in each individual pupil, and the development of their resilience and confidence. The instructors had excellent behaviour management skills and really embedded the important key learning throughout each session.

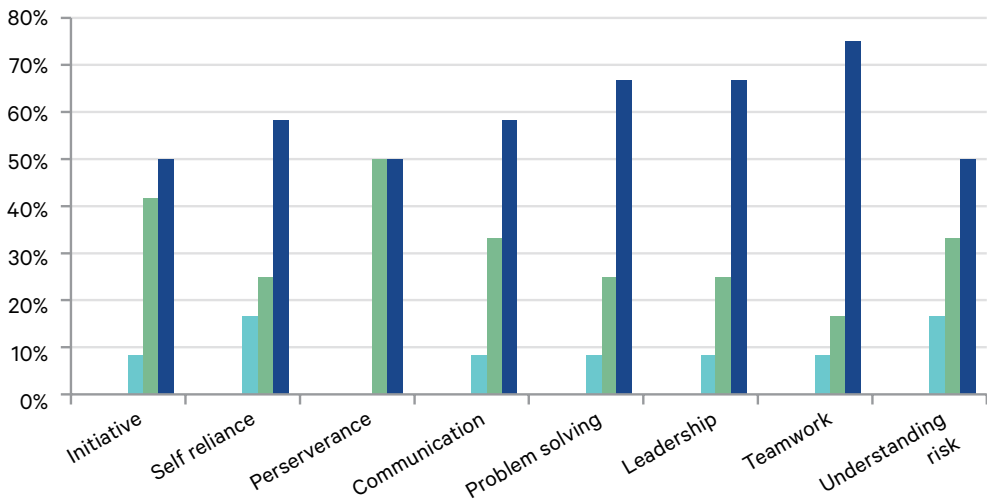
PRIMARY CLASS TEACHER, 2024



Teachers' ratings of how well the course promotes learning in key CfE areas



Teachers' ratings of how well the course developed and extended certain personal qualities and life skills



Therapeutic outdoor education



In 2021, we partnered with Glasgow Virtual School to provide care experienced learners with one-to-one or small group therapeutic outdoor education sessions. Today, this high-impact programme consistently provides positive experiences for young people with an otherwise chaotic and challenging life.

The programme is aimed at care experienced young people who have difficulty maintaining their school placement. For some who do not attend school, this is the only or one of few educational programmes they participate in each week, usually with excellent attendance.

Our support increases learners' self-esteem, confidence and mental wellbeing, and helps re-engage them with a positive learning environment. As a result of taking part, pupils develop greater resilience, self-efficacy and social and emotional skills, which have been seen to transfer to improved educational outcomes. In addition to these personal and social benefits, the programme helps them build positive relationships and social support networks.

Therapeutic outdoor education experiences can be transformative, nurturing overall development and positive future citizens. In addition, participants' achievements are formally recognised through national outdoor activities accreditations and awards.

24
YOUNG PEOPLE



204
CONTACT DAYS

77%

ENGAGED WITH AND CONTINUED
THE PROGRAMME. MOST
REQUESTED FURTHER SESSIONS.



100%
OF ATTENDEES ACHIEVED
A UNIT OR COURSE:

- 9 Go Mountain Bike
- 8 National Navigation Awards
- 7 Paddle Start
- 4 National Indoor Climbing Award
- 3 John Muir Awards

SCHOOLS SAID



Pupil M is doing so well, we are very proud of him."

"Pupil L has not really engaged with many other supports. Blairvadach was a success."

PARENTS AND CARERS SAID

"The Blairvadach instructor was so good with C. They formed a real bond and C found him really supportive and encouraging. He learned a lot about nature too which was outwith the programme criteria. He has been a great male role model for C."

"The Blairvadach instructor has been a great support for K. She is a very determined girl and he has been able to push her to beyond her own perceived capabilities through his coaching style."



Learning for Sustainability

We don't just teach many aspects of Learning for Sustainability (LfS) – Blairvadach is fully immersive. We aim to equip learners with the knowledge, skills and values needed to contribute to a sustainable future.

Our instructors bring to life environmental, social, economic and cultural awareness; global citizenship; interconnectedness of nature and humans, as well as future-orientated thinking. This is not only better for our environment, but also creates authentic learning experiences that empower learners to make better life choices. Recent achievements with learners include:

- **208** bags of litter removed from the canal by young people undertaking their John Muir Award (JMA)
- Weekly monitoring of the canal water quality at Pinkston Basin by young people as part of JMA
- Path conservation and rewilding of urban areas with native flora as part of JMA
- **26,949** hours of voluntary community work as part of DofE – equivalent to £142,291 of community investment.

In addition to impact delivered with learners as part of Learning for Sustainability, we continue to make operational improvements behind the scenes to reduce our environmental impact as an organisation. These include:

- **220,500** sandwich wraps and **16,000** plastic bags saved from landfill every year by switching to reusable lunch boxes
- **18,000** sauce wrappers saved from landfill by using reusable bottles
- Collaborating with the local community to set up a sustainable litter picking hub
- Recycling bins placed all around the centres
- Sending away our damaged waterproofs for repair, rather than replacing them. We know that some of our jackets are 25 years old and still being used!
- Monitoring our vehicle carbon footprint. We also measure carbon emissions for each journey and make balanced decisions about the emissions impact of learning locations. Unfortunately, progress is less than satisfactory: during the first quarter of 2024, we emitted 3.5% more CO₂ into the atmosphere than the same period in 2023.



Listening to the pupil voice

To ensure our services remain relevant to our pupils, their schools and communities, we ask them for their opinions and aspirations for outdoor learning in our city. This year, we had the privilege of collaborating with Glasgow's Pupil Forum.

Over two days in September 2023, we engaged with 267 pupils from 98 primary schools and 90 pupils from 24 secondaries. We asked them about various aspects of outdoor learning provision across our city.

We spoke to
350+
pupils, both primary
and secondary
100%
of them wanted more
outdoor learning
and residential
experiences

Secondary pupils told us that, for them, the most important advantage of outdoor learning is the chance to learn in a different environment offering fresh air, sunlight and engagement with nature. They considered this an all-round better learning experience, as it was less stressful, stuffy and uncomfortable.

The majority of pupils stated that they would like to undertake much more physical activity outdoors. At primary level, the aspiration was for this to be closely linked with fun, social and circular-based experiences. Secondary pupils expressed a desire for adventurous outdoor activities, residential trips and learning about their environment. They felt these opportunities were lacking in their secondary education journey.

However, both primary and secondary pupils highlighted environmental issues and having the right clothing as major challenges. To mitigate the impact of these challenges on participants, we provide them with appropriate waterproof clothing, hats, gloves and footwear for all activities. Equivalent provision is not available in every Glasgow City Council school.

Overall, every single pupil wanted to experience more outdoor learning, and wished to see investment prioritised so that subsidised services could continue to deliver equitable, inclusive outdoor learning experiences.

View the full report [here](#)

Collaborations and partnerships

Blairvadach Services also supports young people to become effective contributors and responsible citizens by offering extended opportunities, including work experience and advice about careers in the outdoor education sector.



40

days of support and development for **Modern Apprenticeships**

28

secondary school **work experience** days hosted

59

young adults on Duke of Edinburgh **Gold** **residential** over 295 days

4

schools **career days** attended to showcase **careers in outdoor education**

426
individual
activity
days

20
days of
coaching for
young athletes
over the
winter

RYA SCOTLAND PERFORMANCE PARTNERSHIP

Blairvadach Outdoor Education Residential Centre is a flagship facility for Glasgow City Council and outdoor education development nationally. To complement our personal and social development programmes, we partner with RYA Scotland to provide a home base for its youth Performance Sailing programme.

RYA
SCOTLAND

Conclusion

The well-documented mental health decline in young people, coupled with the ongoing cost of living crisis, present a turbulent operating environment. These challenges also make the positive experiences provided by Blairvadach more vital than ever.

We are heartened that our services have remained agile and responsive to changes in the social, economic and political environment. All credit goes to the Blairvadach community, who underpin every move we make. The overwhelming level of positivity expressed by teachers, parents, support works, pupils and wider stakeholders is testament to the passion and commitment to the service.

As we learn more about the mental health challenges our young people face in an increasingly uncertain and fractious world, we believe that Blairvadach's services are needed now more than ever. We will continue our ethos of child-centred provision which we believe underpins the significant achievements our young people experience.

However, there is always more to do. Our aspiration for the coming years is to increase the integration of our programmes with classrooms, working more closely with schools to ensure that outdoor learning and residential outdoor experiences are woven into the learning journey.

To further this ambition, we set out Glasgow Education Services' view, entitled **Outdoor Learning Purpose and Progression**, and are providing resources and support

for schools to build their outdoor experiences. We also aspire to create a centre of excellence where we can bring together the city centre-based wider achievement and outdoor education teams to support and resource experiences for all schools in Glasgow.

Part of this will be embedding the new Glasgow's Urban Adventure Award into the schools curriculum, further increasing nationally recognised attainment for young people, as well as aligning our delivery models with Glasgow's pedagogy.

Our support for city-wide outdoor provision by dedicated instructors, teachers and support workers means more opportunities for every young person to participate in outdoor education. The City of Glasgow continues to benefit from a skilled, knowledgeable and motivated workforce who take pride in their service and continue to deliver sector leading outdoor education programmes and DofE support.

Blairvadach would like to thank all the staff and young people who have made this report possible and who continue to support our services.





The children felt safe and this allowed them to try new things. They were encouraged by centre and school staff to have a go and to push themselves and have returned home with a great sense of pride at all they have achieved.”



PRIMARY HEAD TEACHER, MAY 2023



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