

6 Studies out of the classroom

Environmental areas

Environmental areas offer opportunities for children to study aspects of the environment at first hand. They may also be involved in maintaining the school environmental area, which may or may not contain a pond. Careful planning and management can enable a school to create various types of environment (marsh, rocks, etc.), allowing children to investigate and to follow seasonal changes, which are impossible during a single off-site visit.

Supervision outdoors is different to that in the classroom and children must be effectively supervised even for short activities within the school grounds. Follow national/local guidance and your school's policy for organising and running off-site visits.

Environmental visits present excellent opportunities to teach children about common hazards such as uneven ground, trips and slips, hazardous litter, animal faeces, brambles and similar plants. Be particularly alert to the dangers of children falling into ponds or wandering out of sight. More-detailed advice on the use of ponds can be found in the *Safety code* in this Section and on their creation at <http://www.ase.org.uk/resources/health-and-safety-resources/health-and-safety-primary-science/>. Cuts on exposed skin present a risk of tetanus from soil but the risk is low because most children receive tetanus vaccination as part of the UK NHS childhood immunisation programme. Weil's disease is a similar risk from ponds (and surrounding vegetation) polluted by animal urine, although it is rare in the UK. Nevertheless, make sure that cuts and abrasions are covered by waterproof plasters before pond-dipping. Check whether there is a risk of Lyme disease (from ticks) in your area (see Section 20, *Bibliography*, for NHS Direct).

In all environmental studies, every consideration should be given to avoid damaging the environment and disturbing the balance of animal and plant populations. The removal of fossils, minerals or rocks should only be done after due consideration and with permission. The removal of plant

material without the landowner's permission may also be an offence. For a number of protected species of plants, collecting the whole or parts (e.g. the flower) of those plants is illegal. If the planned activity involves children turning over rocks or logs to see what is underneath, ensure they are replaced carefully in their original position.

See also the discussion on *Gardening* later in this section.

Visits away from school

These may include visits to:

- a forest school, local wood, the seashore, etc., for environmental studies;
- national parks;
- quarries or other industrial sites;
- factories;
- museums, including open-air museums;
- farms, whether working or designed specifically for visits; and
- zoos or animal sanctuaries where children may be able to get very close to animals.

Visits to more-distant sites pose particular problems not always encountered when using local environmental areas. A prior visit by the teacher is recommended and may be required by local rules. Centres that have their own staff leading activities will have their own risk assessments, which can be helpful for staff preparing for a visit.

Such visits need careful planning and should always be organised in accordance with your school's policy regarding parental permission, supervision, transport, safety, first aid, insurance, and – for some areas – competent and qualified specialist leaders.

Children and adults may need to wear particular protective clothing and footwear. Check their on-site availability, and especially that they will be of the appropriate size. Otherwise, they may have to be provided prior to the visit.

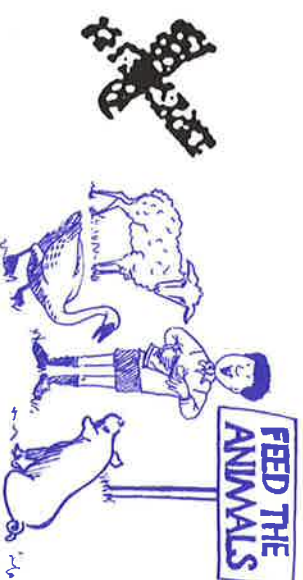
Some children may need access to medicines while participating in outdoor studies. The administration of

medicines, whether prescription or non-prescription, needs to follow the same safety principles that apply in school. It is important to follow your school guidance. The governments in the UK have produced booklets that give sound guidance (see Section 20, *Bibliography*).

Schools will probably have an educational visits coordinator. Further information is available from government departments, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and articles in *Primary Science* (see Section 20, *Bibliography*).

Farm visits

Farm visits offer great educational opportunities. The main hazards are likely to be posed by the unwitting transfer of microorganisms to the visitors. This can be controlled by effective hygiene, which, in the main, means frequent and careful hand-washing during the visit and before any eating and drinking (or thumb-sucking, etc.). Certain strains of *E. coli* have caused problems in recent years but the risks from these can be managed through good hygiene. Children must be sufficiently supervised to ensure that they maintain this hygiene.



Forest schools

Forest school types of outdoor activities often include campfires and tree climbing. Before undertaking such activities, consult trained practitioners for risk assessments.

SAFETY CODE for studies out of the classroom

In addition to the points mentioned below, the Safety codes for animals, plants and microorganisms also apply.

- Children (and adults) must wash their hands thoroughly whenever they have handled or examined animals, plants, soil, pond water, etc. When working outdoors, if soap and water are not available, ensure that children's hands are cleaned with wipes or gels before eating or drinking anything. Otherwise, discourage eating the sweets and other snacks that children carry with them.



- Cover cuts and abrasions with waterproof dressings. Take a supply with you.
- Be prepared for stings from wasps, bees, jellyfish, nettles, etc. In some cases, these may need first aid treatment.
- Children who have medical conditions may need access to their medication while off-site. Follow your school's guidance on the administration of medicines.
- Consider the clothing needs according to season. Ensure children's exposed skin is protected from sunlight with long sleeves and/or sunscreen, and that hats are worn. Children often become absorbed in their work, shedding hats or coats and failing to notice the effects of the Sun, or even cold.
- Ensure adequate footwear if there is the danger of slipping on wet grass, rocks and seaweed, etc.
- Check for the presence of hazards such as broken glass, cat/dog fouling, irritant or poisonous plants, wasp nests, etc.
- Only allow children to climb rocks and trees within their capabilities and with supervision.
- Clearly define the area within which the children should remain.
- If working on the seashore, take proper account of the local tide patterns.
- Children should wear eye protection when chipping rocks.

- Pooters should have separate mouthpiece tubes which can be disinfected (e.g. in Milton sterilising fluid or tablets, made up according to the manufacturer's instructions for babies' bottles) before and after being put in the mouth.

For farm visits



- Ensure children wash their hands frequently, and certainly before eating, drinking, thumb-sucking, etc.
- Warn children to be very careful with barbed wire, electric fences or any fences which may be contaminated by animals.
- Women who are, or might be, pregnant should avoid farm visits during lambing time. This should be covered by a pregnancy risk assessment.

- Cover cuts and abrasions with waterproof plasters before pond-dipping.

To avoid looking at the Sun

- Teach children that they should never look at the Sun directly or through a lens or coloured glass.
- Eclipses, or sunspots, may be safely viewed by projection. Even during an eclipse, the direct light from the Sun can permanently damage the eye.
- Be especially careful when looking through binoculars or telescopes not to look at the Sun accidentally.
- Do not leave lenses, magnifying glasses, bottles of water or broken glass in positions where they may focus sunlight and cause a fire.
- When using a microscope that does not have a built-in light source, do not direct the mirror towards the Sun. This could reflect the light through the microscope and into the user's eye.

- Do not allow unrestricted access to ponds or allow young children to work unaccompanied.
- Teach older children how to work around a pond unaccompanied by an adult and without endangering themselves or others. Do not, however, allow this unless you can be reasonably certain of their sensible behaviour. In any event, the teacher should always be near enough to respond in an emergency.
- Avoid pond-dipping where access is steep or otherwise difficult.
- Avoid open water (i.e. unfenced water) which could be deep and dangerous.
- See Section 20, *Bibliography*, for more detailed advice about ponds.

