



Kaimes School trips to Holyrood Park

Why make the visits?

Over a three-month period, a group of six pupils, aged 11–12 years, with Autism Spectrum Disorders, from Kaimes¹ School, took part in a ten-week initiative involving a weekly visit to Holyrood Park, Edinburgh. The initiative was part of a cross-curricular environmental project to teach the pupils about the geological make-up, history, wildlife and conservation in the park.



The weekly visits comprised of a mixture of outdoor activities led by the Park Ranger Service in the mornings, followed by indoor afternoon sessions using the pupils' experiences and materials gathered earlier in the day. These were used to produce drawings, storyboards, role play and recordings, which were then pieced together to form the basis of a short animated film 'Rock Up – the Great Adventures of Arthur's Seat'.²

How did they plan the visits?

Teachers worked with the Park Ranger Service and others (Dynamic Earth, John Muir Trust, animators, artists and a small production company, who co-ordinated the project and raised funds) to explore the learning potential, and to identify possible problems and how these could be addressed. The health and safety-related issues they considered, included:

- the needs and behaviours of the pupils. The pupils' safety around others while in the Park, their sustained engagement in the activities, their capacity to interact and work with others;
- the terrain (which included Arthur's Seat, the 250+ m hill overlooking Edinburgh), timing, weather conditions, impact on outdoor activities, suitable attire etc;
- non-school staff and their unfamiliarity in dealing with autistic children;
- transport arrangements; and
- understanding of the risks by the pupils.

1 Kaimes School is a special school for children of primary and secondary school age. Most of its pupils have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

2 www.hoda.org.uk/hoda/previous.html

How did they manage the risks?

Supervision

There was a high staff:pupil ratio to address the needs and behaviours of this group and the potential impact for their safety.

Planning:

- risk assessments, compiled by the Park Ranger Service and Dynamic Earth, were used;
- park rangers kept children stimulated and engaged by ensuring outdoor activities took place in all weather conditions, whenever possible. They adjusted sessions according to seasonal changes, weather conditions, and pupils' capabilities, as necessary; and
- indoor venues were available for use as and when required.

Travel

Transport was provided to take the pupils to and from the school by a third sector organisation.

Communication/basics

Prior to the visits, non-school staff received a specific briefing about dealing with the group. Teachers briefed the pupils on the risks and how to keep safe. Pupils wore suitable clothing and had a change of garments as a back up.

What was the result?

Pupils learned to cope successfully with new situations, new people, a variety of teaching styles and the challenges of learning outdoors for extended periods – a huge achievement for autistic children, who are more comfortable with set routines and minimal change.

Pupils showed they were able to work as part of a team – another success as autistic children can work well individually but not so well in group situations.



Teachers worked in partnership with a variety of stakeholders and agencies to successfully deliver a cross-curricular project culminating in a short film.

Radio Scotland interviewed the pupils. Pupils also received John Muir awards.

The school provided an effective and innovative approach to learning – managing a range of risks in a sensible manner.

Jessie Newton, class teacher said:

'All children should have the opportunity to have an experience like this. There are of course health and safety risks, but if assessed sensibly they can make the way clear for children to experience real cross-curricular learning.'