

Learning Without Walls Campaign Survey Results

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA) is the leading organisation in developing and delivering outdoor education programmes to schools and nurseries across Northern Ireland.

NIFSA wanted to gauge opinion regarding teachers concerns on returning to school following the closure of premises in March 2020 due to Coronavirus.

Another key element of the survey was to ascertain whether there was an opportunity to bring in more outdoor play and learning to schools and nurseries due to the fact that Coronavirus does not appear to have the same adverse health issues on children aged 15 and under and studies show that children do not appear to be spreaders of the virus.

Finally, if survey results showed that there was an appetite to deliver more outdoor sessions, what support could NIFSA provide to enable schools and nurseries to do this.

Executive Summary

The survey was sent out on 4 June 2020 to an audience of just over 1,000 registered users on the NIFSA database. 171 replies were received by the 18th June 2020.

The main respondents were Primary Schools with just under 100 replying. There was however an excellent range of organisations responding to the survey – special needs schools, Secondary Schools, pre-schools, after-schools, nurseries etc.

The answer as to whether organisations saw this as an opportunity to deliver more outdoor learning was a resounding “Yes”. Nearly 99% of completed survey results replied positively to this.

The two main concerns pertaining to organisations returning later in the year related to “How to establish and keep social distancing measures in place” and “Safety of pupils and staff when returning”. These can be summed up as “Adapting to Covid19”.

On-line training and webinars were seen as a welcome and positive move forward on how NIFSA could help organisations spend more time outside. A variety of training videos were proposed with “Adapting to Covid19”, “A typical outdoor session” and “Risk Assessment development”.

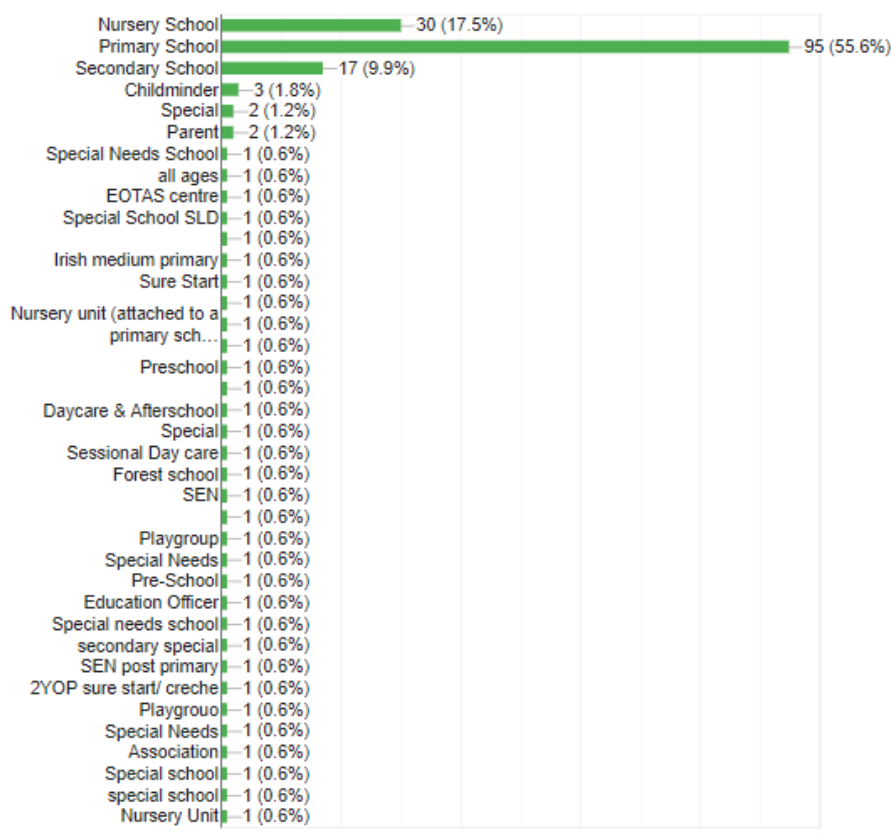
90% of organisations saw the proposal to develop a National Outdoor Learning Centre as something that would be positive and help in the overall development and delivery of outdoor play and learning in nurseries and schools across Northern Ireland.

NIFSA is a registered charity and does not receive any core funding from local or central Government. Less than 50% said they would be prepared to pay for an annual membership of £100. The question may have been phrased badly in that it should have read “Would your school/nursery be prepared to pay £100 annual membership”. Some people had taken the question to mean they personally pay the annual membership. The problem is still there as to how could NIFSA generate an income to help develop and deliver outdoor play and learning across nurseries and schools in Northern Ireland.

Question 1:

What type of childcare/educational establishment are you?

171 responses



Question 2:

What are your main reservations about starting again in September 2020?

95% were concerned about social distancing and how to maintain it

Other considerations:

Concerns about social distancing and how this will be managed in a school setting and in particular with the younger children. The mental and emotional state of children upon returning to school. Expectations on staff and how to manage a combination of online learning and face to face teaching.

Young children being expected to socially distance, the mental impact that all of this has had on our children, a whole new classroom layout/setting, being able to nurture children in the 'new' environment, the impact on children's social/emotional development.

How to deliver an appropriate curriculum that is fun, age appropriate and exciting when we are being asked to take away sand, water, dough, small intricate toys (construction toys) etc.

New arrangements for teaching e.g. a split day with morning and afternoon session or two-day week and what am I teaching for - catching up on previous curriculum or starting new curriculum.

That the health needs of staff and pupils will be fully appreciated and the government will support schools with any additional financial burdens as a result of Covid19 guidelines

Ensuring teaching and learning standards remain high, children's emotional wellbeing is prioritised and engaging parents for home learning.

The uncertainty, especially regarding how new procedures and practices will need to be implemented and guidance surrounding them

Parents perception on children being taken out of the setting to participate in activities off the premises

Ensuring the good quality education and safety in the school while supporting SEN and vulnerable pupils.

Too many don't "..... not allowed..... gov. Not thinking of welcoming, positive.... environment

Safety of staff and children, real uncertainty about what school will look like.

Health concerns, transmission, cleaning resources between groups

That learning through play will be stripped away or hindered.

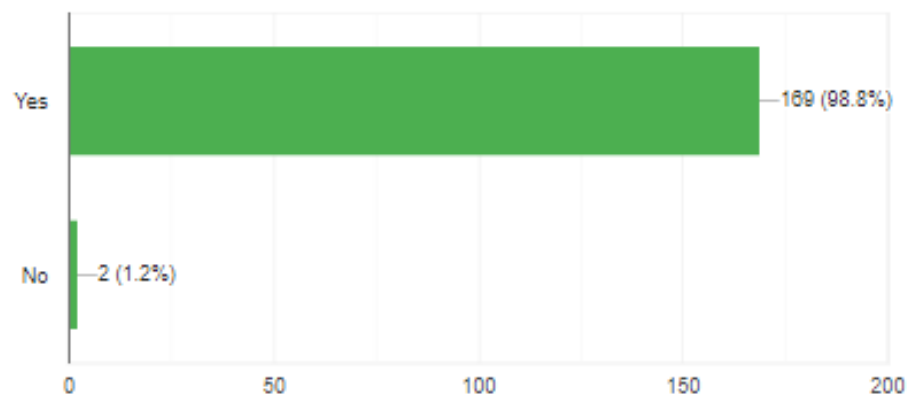
Lack of guidance from department of education

Lack of physical space

Question 3:

Would you be in favour of spending more time teaching outside?

171 responses



Question 4:

Please tell us the reasons behind your answer?

We know that the outdoors Provides rich experiences for learning but not enough time and money is put into it. Science says the virus can't be spread as easily outside so maybe we could

let children have a little bit of normality. Also, we know that nature and outdoors is great for health and well-being.

As a Foundation Stage teacher trained in England, where the EYFS recommends constant free-flow access to quality outdoor provision as a fundamental of children's entitlement, I know first-hand the value of outdoor learning. We have been fortunate to have been allowed to implement the outdoor classroom at our Foundation Stage setting in Rathcoole PS, and would love to see this extended to all children as part of their education on a permanent basis going forward.

As a Forest school leader I have seen first-hand the benefits of outdoor learning.

more open space, children are more active and enjoy outdoors

Good for mental health, children love learning outdoors and being active, less risk of spreading covid-19

Having heard in the news that the chances of catching Covid19 is reduced in outdoor setting as a centre we will be doing as much outside as we possibly can. Just before the pandemic we bought a large outdoor 'classroom' and some trim trails, swings etc. we would be able to utilise this and keep social distancing measures for maybe 6 pupils in that area. In spring summer terms, we usually take our learning outside more so come September we will hopefully be able to do majority of our work outside, we are currently working on risk assessments to allow this to happen.

Help the transition back into school, redevelop social skills in an informal setting, provide space for movement and learning

Mental health, physical well-being, space & enriched learning

It's a better environment for learning any subject, provides opportunities for team building and mindfulness.

Children enjoy spending time outdoors, they are more focused and concentration is better

We already place great importance on outdoor learning, however we will be doing even more come September as its simply the safest place for us to be

Supporting well-being, supporting nurture, supporting need for social distancing, reclaiming children's relationship with their environment

Teaching outdoors enhances the learning experience for children with a stimulating environment to thrive and grow

It enhances the curriculum.

You can see a difference in the children's behaviour almost immediately, you can see their curiosity and exploration spark. They love nature and natural play just develops with ease outside.

I have seen first-hand the benefits and positive impact of doing Forest School lessons and learning outdoors for our children. In particular, those with SEN as that is the target group I teach. Personally, I also enjoy the challenge to creating lessons that can be conducted outdoors and learning ways to use the World Around Us to reinforce our teaching.

During the last 11-week period we have remained mostly outside and our provision has been greatly enhanced as a result

Children need to have the opportunity for free and open-ended play outdoors where they can take risks and build resilience.

I love being outdoors and think it improves my own mental health as well as my children's'. I love the opportunities for gross motor skills development, social and esteem development and finding new and surprising learning intentions. I also think it teaches us all to appreciate our natural resources so much more.

It's a safer environment. Our children's engagement is stimulated to a greater degree. Our children may have spent a lot of time in their house or garden, isolating so it would be good to explore outside areas instead of going back to a small classroom setting. Behaviours can be present to a more intense degree in an enclosed space such as a classroom. Greater interaction is then required from staff. Difficult with social distancing guidelines.

Question 5

What would need put in place to help you deliver more outdoor learning? Please tick the items you envisage are stopping you from doing this.



Other concerns:

Outdoor toilet facilities

Support of parents

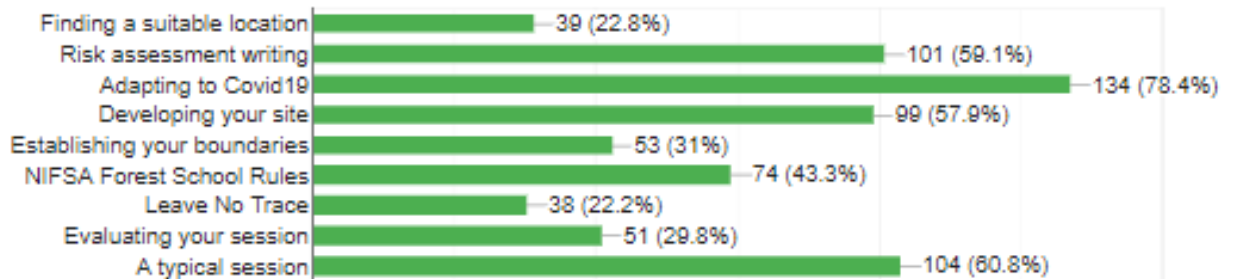
Additional funding

Administration support

Equipment such as moveable seating

Question 6:

With the uncertainty of being able to meet, NIFSA are proposing developing training videos to help educational settings develop their outdoor learning. Tick the boxes you feel would be most valuable and add others that you feel are missing.



Other concerns:

Handwashing and toilet facilities

Funding

Establishing a programme for Early Years

Short, medium and long-term planning so that sessions cover the curriculum while also promote progression and differentiation.

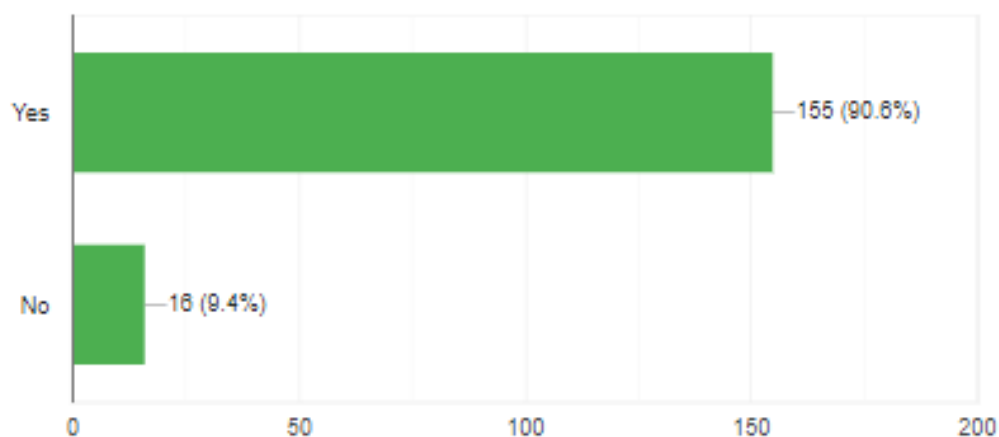
Class management and differentiating for ability groups within the class and how to ensure high quality teaching and learning

Parental engagement with outdoor learning

Bringing the 'whole school' on board

Question 7:

Is there a need to develop a National Outdoor Learning Centre for Northern Ireland to support teacher and practitioner development?



Reasons for or against:

I believe that now more than ever there is a need for children of all ages to have safe access to the outdoor environment, schools are ideally placed to provide this. However whilst there seems to be a will amongst teachers to provide this as ever in Education there is a lack of funding and time to provide it. A National Outdoor Learning Centre would be a fantastic way to provide the training required to facilitate a move to more outdoor learning.

Outdoor Education is the proven way forward and we should all be focussing on this as a priority

Absolutely!! This is the perfect time, due to Covid-19 to promote outdoor learning not only for school aged children but for our babies, toddlers and preschool aged children. The regulatory bodies need to see for themselves how children thrive being outdoors, and to work with nurseries and schools to allow this to happen, not just one session a week, but every day! There is a certain magic that happens when our children are in our forest, they lose their fears, anxieties, they have so much fun and are learning and engaging so much more than in a classroom.

Our Education System currently has children sitting behind desks far too often...especially in key stage 2

If something like this was to happen then it's important that it was headed up by teachers with the forest school acting as secondary to them

Too many children do not experience the outdoors. Develops confidence, resilience, life skills and an appreciation of the benefits of being outdoors. Children learn through discovery and step out of their comfort zone in an outdoor situation. Huge benefits to mental health.

The bottom line is that we don't really know how to provide an effective outdoor learning environment. We may know that it's beneficially but need to go much deeper than that.

It's important people see outdoor learning for what it is. It's more than children running around a playground.

I think a lot of teachers are very unsure of how they should let children behave when they are outside of the classroom. It is important that we have clear guidelines set in place and give teachers training in an area which is very unfamiliar to most of them.

I believe there are greater educational needs presenting among the children of Northern Ireland and the finance involved in this sort of set up could be better spent by schools who are struggling to supply basic materials to classes and maintain a sufficient staff.

We are so far behind other countries who encourage learning outdoors

I think NIFSA are doing a great job. I think it's better putting more resources into one place/organisation

We've been told to take learning outdoors but it's so vast that we don't know where to start.

Question 8:

What other support could NIFSA provide?

Visiting school for advice

Funding help

Potentially a outdoor learning library - hire out some resources so schools could try them before investing.

More regarding risky play and highlight to parents the importance and learning opportunities outdoor setting can provide for their children, rather than outside time being seen as 'break time'

Example lesson plans with curriculum links

Twice annual meetings

Thinking 'outside the box' of how school have been run up till now.

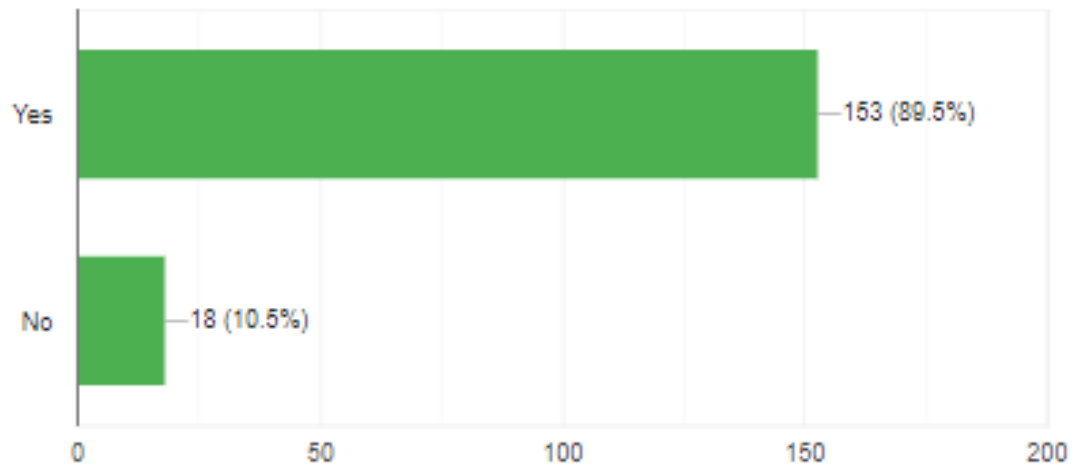
I know that you have a Facebook page but it may be beneficial to have other social media. I have tried to signpost parents to your Facebook page but many ahve said that they do not use Facebook anymore. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your staff for the wonderful website, we have been encouraging outdoor learning through our Google Classroom activities and will continue to do so. Your resources on your site and Facebook are much appreciated.

If we could 'buy in' to weekly Forest School sessions- obviously at a cost to schools, we could download activities with Brian and our whole school community would have an opportunity to improve their outdoor skills. Schools could be asked to submit photos of what they had done and each week some lucky children could win prizes. This would be a great way to keep schools engaged and let us all share the Forest School experience- whilst socially distancing!

Zoom meetings for forest school leads in schools to get us all motivated again to inspire!

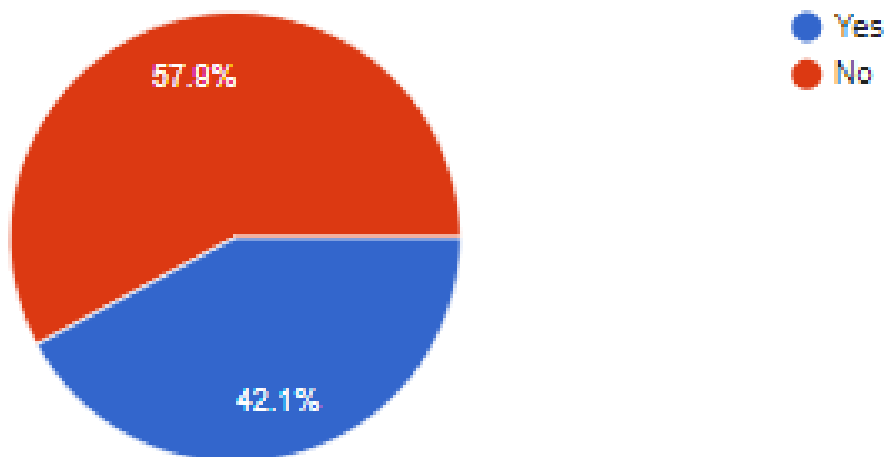
Question 9:

Delivering outdoor learning does involve additional resources and effort to develop and maintain your site. Would the establishment of a "Friends of Forest School" group be useful for your setting? This would comprise teachers, parents, pupils and any other interested persons to help. Activities might include regular litter lifts, fund raising events etc.

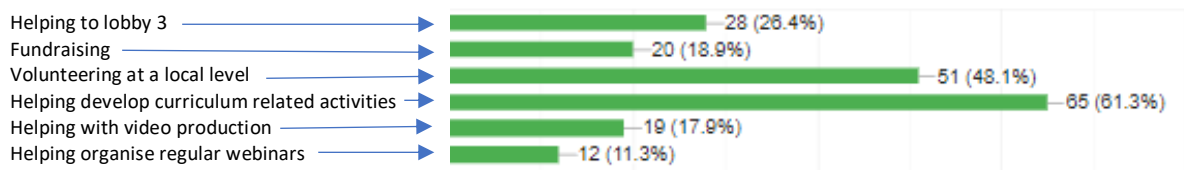


Could you help us?

Would you be willing to support NIFSA help deliver all these services and much more for an annual £100 subscription?



Would you be willing to help NIFSA in another way?



Other ways to help:

Showcase what is happening in school

57 individuals left their contact details and are willing to help in some way.