

2026 SCHOOLS OUTDOOR LEARNING CONFERENCE

CONFIDENCE | INSPIRATION | COMMUNITY

Grasmere P4C Credit - Jonathan Smith Grasmere School

An inspiring day of workshops, keynotes and networking for Early Years providers, Primary schools and SEND/Alternative provision settings.

Learn from and connect with expert outdoor learning providers and other schools.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 18TH 2026

9 AM TO 4 PM

UNIVERSITY OF CUMBRIA, BOWERHAM ROAD, LANCASTER, LA1 3JD

Book [here](#)

For any conference queries please contact: jennifer.ager@cumbria.ac.uk



Building on Success: Thank you for joining us for the 2026 Outdoor Learning Conference

We extend a very warm welcome to everyone at the 2026 Outdoor Learning Conference for Schools. We hope you have an inspiring and productive day, gaining insights and strategies to enhance outdoor learning within your educational settings.

Following the overwhelming success of our first conference, we are excited to return – bigger, better, and even more relevant to the real-world challenges and opportunities faced by schools today.

This year, our conference brings together educators, leaders, outdoor providers and changemakers from across the sector to explore three dynamic themes:

- Inclusion and Access – Creating environments where every learner belongs and thrives
- Teaching and Learning – Fresh strategies that inspire, engage, and support progress
- Environment and Sustainability – Embedding climate responsibility into daily practice

Across these themes, there is a rich mix of interactive workshops, expert-led sessions and practical takeaways you can use immediately in your setting.

Whether you are looking to innovate your teaching, gain practical skills, or embed outdoor learning, sustainability and inclusion across your school, this is a conference designed with you in mind.

Thank you for your support and we hope you have a fabulous day!
Jen, Dave & Gina

2026 Outdoor Learning Conference

Organisers



Jen Ager is a Senior Lecturer in Education and the Campus Lead for the PGCE program at The University of Cumbria in Carlisle. With nearly two decades of experience in primary education, Jen has worked as a class teacher across various age groups and as an Assistant Headteacher. She holds a Master's in Outdoor and Experiential Learning and is a Level 3 Forest School Practitioner.

Jen's expertise extends to publishing works on outdoor learning in primary schools and delivering INSET training and conference presentations on integrating this approach into the school curriculum. Her research focuses on enhancing teacher confidence, knowledge, and skills to effectively incorporate outdoor learning as a pedagogical approach. She advocates for networking, collaboration, and action research as vital strategies for achieving these goals.



Dave Harvey runs his own consultancy, research and training business, Dave Harvey Outdoor Learning. Having initially qualified as a secondary school teacher of outdoor education and design technology he developed his career working in and then managing outdoor education centres. Dave worked with the Institute for Outdoor Learning to develop a teacher training course aimed at building confidence to take learning into the outdoor environment which subsequently evolved into the Level 3 course 'Taking the Curriculum Outdoors' which he now delivers to schools with colleagues at High Points.

Dave recently completed his PhD in outdoor learning. He is a Learning through Landscapes accredited provider, a regular contributor to the IOL's Horizons journal, and delivers workshops and webinars for both the IOL and the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom.



Gina Parker (Mullarkey) - Little Chatters. Gina's journey in Outdoor Learning began nearly 30 years ago working as a 'Teacher Naturalist' at a Country Park. Gina's work now focuses on supporting schools in their Outdoor Learning journeys through conferences, INSET training, curriculum materials, as an advisor to schools and of course through practical sessions with pupils. Gina was previously a primary teacher and her work now focuses on supporting Primary, SEND and AP settings.

As an accredited trainer for Learning through Landscapes, Dialogue Works, Thoughtful, High Points and Futureproof Cumbria, Gina brings a diverse range of opportunities to further outdoor learning. One of the elements of her work that Gina is most proud of is the establishment and co-ordination of an Outdoor Learning Network for Primary, SEND and AP schools from across Cumbria, Lancashire and Yorkshire, who meet on a termly basis. . www.littlechatters.co.uk

Programme

| Time | Description | Location |
|---------------|---|-------------------------|
| 08:45 | Arrival/Registration | Sentamu Building Foyer |
| 09:15 - 10:15 | Celebrating Success in Outdoor Learning Gina Parker Mullarkey, Emma Littlewood, Sandy Lockett, Mia Ambrose | Sentamu Lecture Theatre |
| 10:15 - 11:15 | Workshop 1 | |
| 11:15 - 11:45 | Tea/Coffee break and opportunity to visit the Conference Market Place | Sentamu Building Foyer |
| 11:45 - 12:45 | Workshop 2 | |
| 12:45 - 13:45 | Lunch and opportunity to visit the Conference Market Place | Sentamu Building Foyer |
| 13:45 - 14:45 | Workshop 3 | |
| 14:45 - 15:00 | Tea/Coffee | Sentamu Building Foyer |
| 15:00 - 15:30 | Whose stories shape the outdoors? Mohammed Dhalech | Sentamu Lecture Theatre |
| 15:30 - 16:00 | Maintaining the Momentum Jen Ager and Dave Harvey Close and Raffle Gina Parker Mullarkey | Sentamu Lecture Theatre |

Keynotes

Celebrating Success in Outdoor Learning

Sandy Lockett, Great Wood Primary School, Morecambe
Curriculum before the Outdoors

Sandy is a key stage one teacher at Great Wood Primary School in Morecambe. After returning to teaching in 2020, after time working for the National Trust, he has been driven to provide as many opportunities for children to build their connectivity with the natural world around them.

Mia Ambrose - West Cumbria Rivers Trust
Greener Grounds

Mia is a Learning & Engagement Officer with a background in outdoor education that has grown into a strong focus on environmental education. She works to engage hundreds of children each year with nature, both in their own school grounds and across their local freshwater landscapes.

Emma Littlewood, Grayrigg CE School
'Inspiring, wobbling and building stone walls'

Emma has 20 years experience working with children of all ages including being an adventure play worker, youth worker, nursery practitioner and now currently a primary school teacher, where she runs weekly forest school sessions. She originally started with a degree in play work before going on to do a PGCE. She has always loved being outdoors and thinks spending time outside is a vital part of children's education.

Keynote

Whose Stories Shape the Outdoors? Inclusion, Identity and Belonging in Learning Beyond the Classroom

The outdoors is full of stories – but not all are told.

Through this presentation, Mohammed explores how educators can uncover overlooked histories and create outdoor learning that's inclusive, reflective and connected. Through research and real examples, he shows how small actions can help every child feel represented, valued and inspired to belong outdoors.

Mohammed Dhalech

Mohammed is a PhD candidate at the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies, where his research on Race and Rurality examines how the histories and experiences of racially diverse communities are remembered, represented and engaged with in Britain's countryside. A self-described "pracademic", he blends academic inquiry with three decades of hands-on practice in equality, inclusion and community engagement.

He began his career as a youth worker, locally, nationally and internationally, a foundation that continues to shape his commitment to empowering young people and creating inclusive, supportive environments for learning and exploration.

He contributes nationally through board and advisory roles, including the National Trust North Regional Advisory Group, the Friends of the Dales (Trustee), and as a Secretary of State-appointed member of the Northumberland National Park Authority. His professional background includes senior roles in the public and voluntary sectors, notably with Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service and Citizens Advice Witness Service. Across his research, governance roles and community work, Mohammed champions a simple idea: that nature, heritage and the outdoors should be places where every person feels represented, valued and able to belong.

Session 1 workshop choices (10.15-11.15)

| Workshop | Presenters |
|--|--|
| Where Do Students Shine? - Promoting positive behaviour outside the classroom to benefit behaviour inside the classroom | Dan Webber, Newbridge House |
| Learning to thrive in a climate of uncertainty | Rosie Wilson, Lifeworlds Learning CIC |
| Geography skills | Alison Cross, Ernest Cook Trust |
| Using place to develop curiosity and connection with Morecambe Bay Curriculum. | Stacey Gatley and Irene Wise, Morecambe Bay Curriculum |
| Experiential Learning for All: Inclusive Outdoor Practice for SEND Learners | Sean Day, Calvert Trust |
| Stirring Curiosity by Setting Up Outdoor Classrooms & Kitchens for EYFS | Lisa MacGregor, University of Cumbria |

Session 2 workshop choices (11.45 - 12.45)

| Workshop | Presenters |
|---|---|
| Taking the Curriculum Outdoors | Anita Foster, School Grounds North East |
| Growing to Cook: Embedding Sustainability through Food Growing and Cookery | Alex Hall, Rewilding Roots |
| How Carbon Literacy can support Outdoor Learning | Rebecca Stacey, Carbon Literacy Project |
| Disability Awareness in the Outdoors: Language, Inclusion and Practical Action | Phil Blair |
| Slow the Flow: SuDS for Schools | Mia Ambrose, West Cumbria Rivers Trust |
| Quick Wins Outdoors: Fieldwork That Starts Wherever You Stand | Chris Barlow, University of Cumbria |
| Structuring appropriate progression in learner centred outdoor education | Tom Bardon, Green Man Learning |

Session 3 workshop choices (13:45-14:45)

| Workshop | Presenters |
|--|--|
| Exploring and enhancing the nature on your school site | Jenny Lobo and Simon Colderley, NENP |
| Developing place sensitive learning activities at Earnse Bay, Walney Island | Geoff Norman, CDEC and Eve Mulholland, Natural England |
| Lumberjunking – Introducing woodwork to the primary curriculum | Sophie Etherington and Maria Littlewood, Crosthwaite Primary School |
| Outdoor and Experiential Learning - how not doing anything might be the most important thing you can do | Ed Kemp, Brathay Trust |
| Inspiring creativity, nature connection, understanding and care for the natural environment through curriculum-focussed, story-based activities outdoors. | Ruth Suddaby, Lake District National Park |
| The games we play | Tom Bardon, Green Man Learning |

SESSION 1

Learning to thrive in a climate of uncertainty

This workshop builds on the growing recognition of climate and nature-based anxiety amongst young people and the need for educators to address this. It looks at how engaging with the outdoors and nature can help us engage with uncertainty and create a more generative and positive mindset that builds both personal and social resilience. The session will share research and resources from a recent project and provide practical ideas for teachers and their practice.

We will explore the free set of learning and support materials inspired by a specially designed animation - Learning to Thrive. We will think about young people's relationship with, and connections to, the natural world around them. We will also reflect on our own experiences as adults and how these might influence how we approach these discussions.

Presenter: Rosie Wilson, Lifeworlds Learning CIC

Rosie is a creative practitioner and co-director at Lifeworlds Learning CIC as well as a practising teacher. She brings a philosophical perspective to projects, courses and resources around big issues, and enjoys leading learning communities through change by facilitating dialogue.

Experiential Learning for All: Inclusive Outdoor Practice for SEND Learners

This interactive session explores how to create truly inclusive outdoor learning experiences for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). We'll dive into strategies for involving SEND learners in shaping their own outdoor experiences, discuss how to adapt generic risk assessments into personalised support plans, and explore the use of adaptive equipment to remove barriers to participation. This workshop offers practical tools, real examples, and space for shared reflection and discussion.

Presenter: Sean Day, Calvert Trust

Sean Day is the Chief Executive of the Lake District Calvert Trust, where he has been instrumental in promoting outdoor activities for individuals with disabilities in leading various initiatives to enhance the organisation services. With a background in teaching and local advisory roles for outdoor education, Sean brings extensive experience in developing inclusive outdoor learning programmes and supporting schools and communities to engage safely and meaningfully with the outdoors.

SESSION 1

Geography skills

Become at ease with a compass and map, suitable for novices. Learn the basic navigation skills, map symbols, grid references, plus tips and outdoor activities on how to teach geography skills to children for KS1-KS2 national curriculum.

Presenter: Alison Cross, Ernest Cook Trust

Alison is Outdoor Learning Leader for The Ernest cook Trust, supporting schools in Lancashire and Cumbria over the last 8 years to embed outdoor learning into their Curriculum Plans.

Using place to develop curiosity and connection with Morecambe Bay Curriculum.

Morecambe Bay Curriculum is a movement of local educators exploring how to weave sustainability and place into everyday teaching, enabling every young person to feel empowered to be a change-maker. Through the Head (knowledge), Heart (values) and Hands (skills) framework, discover how these resources can support your subject knowledge teaching through blending active and experiential approaches, focusing on prioritising pupils' wellbeing and common good for society and the environment.

Presenters: Stacey Gatley and Irene Wise, Morecambe Bay Curriculum

Stacey is a former Secondary Senior Leader (of 14 years) and works in operations and delivery of codesigned curriculum materials for all members of the MBC to freely access. She has extensive teaching and learning experience, particularly working for and with coastal schools.

Irene has extensive experience of designing and delivering engaging award winning STEM and environmental education, events, training and resources, working with thousands of young people across Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria.

SESSION 1

Stirring Curiosity by Setting Up Outdoor Classrooms & Mud Kitchens for EYFS

Explore how outdoor classrooms and mud kitchens can transform early years learning (without needing fancy equipment or a forest school qualification). This workshop shares practical, research-informed approaches to setting up engaging outdoor spaces that support communication, physical development, early literacy, and sustained shared thinking. Leave with ideas you can implement tomorrow, whatever your setting.

Presenter: Lisa MacGregor, University of Cumbria

Lisa has been a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Cumbria since 2012. She has taught across a range of different education-focussed programmes, primarily 3-11 QTS teacher training, specialising in the Early Years. For the previous 20 years, she taught in primary schools across England, teaching children from the Early Years up to Year 6. Her main passions are getting children learning outdoors and developing student teachers' confidence to teach children outdoors.

Where Do Students Shine? - Promoting positive behaviour outside the classroom to benefit behaviour inside the classroom

Join Dan for an inspiring workshop exploring how outdoor learning and experiences can shape positive behaviour, build relationships, and improve engagement back in the classroom. The workshop will draw on practical strategies used at South Cumbria PRU to help students thrive through outdoor learning. Participants will take part in a hands-on activity, reflect on real-life scenarios, and leave with ideas they can immediately apply in both outdoor and indoor settings.

- *Practical behaviour tools that work in and out of the classroom*
- *Insight into how nature-based experiences support regulation and engagement*
- *Strategies for consistency and positive relationships across settings*
- *Come ready to collaborate, share ideas, and get a little bit hands-on!*

Presenter: Dan Webber, Newbridge House Pupil Referral Unit

Dan is an Outdoor Learning Instructor at the PRU in South Cumbria. He has been a behaviour specialist for 8 years but involved in mainstream and specialist provision for 15 years.

SESSION 2

Taking the Curriculum Outdoors

Whether you have a small area of tarmac, or a full blown forest in your school grounds, this session will show you how to Take your Curriculum Outdoors. We will try out a range of curriculum linked activities, using these to demonstrate models to help you plan and deliver effective teaching and learning outdoors.

Presenter: Anita Foster, School Grounds North East

With over 30 years experience, Anita specialises in helping schools and EY settings maximise the learning and play potential of their outdoor spaces. Anita was instrumental in establishing the Level 3 Award in Learning Beyond the Classroom for teachers who wanted to gain the confidence to take their teaching outdoors.

Growing to Cook: Embedding Sustainability through Food Growing and Cookery

Learn practical ways to embed food growing into your Science curriculum and link harvests with DT cookery lessons. Discover how gardening with nature can boost student engagement, support cross-curricular learning, and promote sustainability. Gain ideas for planning seasonal, nature-friendly activities that help students understand food origins, environmental responsibility, and sustainable living.

Presenter: Alex Hall, Rewilding Roots

Alex is CEO of Rewilding Roots, a charity transforming school grounds into vibrant gardens where young people reconnect with nature and discover the joy of growing food. A former teacher and countryside ranger, she inspires young people to lead climate action and cultivate a sustainable, hopeful future.

SESSION 2

Slow the Flow: SuDS for Schools

Discover how sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) can bring water management, ecology, and design technology together in your school grounds. In this hands-on workshop, led by Mia, you'll explore how to design and build simple SuDS features that reduce runoff and boost biodiversity. A practical session that you can replicate and expand in your setting, with your children.

Presenter: Mia Ambrose, West Cumbria Rivers Trust

Mia is a Learning & Engagement Officer, with a background in outdoor education that has grown into a strong focus on environmental education. She works to engage hundreds of children each year with nature, both in their own school grounds and across their local freshwater landscapes. Outside of work, she can be found fell walking with her Vizsla, swimming in the lakes year-round, biking, or gardening—anything that keeps her outdoors.

How Carbon Literacy can support Outdoor Learning

A look at what Carbon Literacy is - how it can support your action plan, sustainable values and outdoor learning.

Presenter: Rebecca Stacey, Carbon Literacy Project

Rebecca is a former Headteacher who became one of the first United Nations accredited Climate Change teacher, now delivering Climate education and training alongside Futureproof Cumbria and is the School Coordinator for The Carbon Literacy project.

SESSION 2

Quick Wins Outdoors: Fieldwork That Starts Wherever You Stand

Discover how to turn any outdoor space (school yard, city park, or roadside verge) into a rich learning environment. This practical, hands-on session explores quick and easy activities to spark observation, discussion, and recording skills in learners of all ages. No fancy kit required, just bring curiosity and a willingness to step outside.

Presenter: Chris Barlow, University of Cumbria

Chris is an ex-primary school teacher who has worked at University of Cumbria for 21 years, training teachers. Chris is a geographer at heart and a passionate advocate of fieldwork. Chris leads the Primary Post Graduate Environmental and Outdoor Learning Specialism and has been working closely with a Think tank of trainee teachers, local schools and agencies and Lancaster University in developing resources for The Morecambe Bay Curriculum.

Disability Awareness in the Outdoors: Language, Inclusion and Practical Action

A practical session designed to help school based staff confidently include children and young people with disabilities in outdoor learning. This workshop will introduce key concepts of disability awareness, with a strong focus on inclusive language, attitudes, and real-world strategies for making outdoor environments more accessible.

Presenter: Phil Blair

Phil Blair specialises in adaptive sports and outdoor experiences for people with disabilities. He has worked as Chief Instructor at Calvert Trust Lake District and as a freelance outdoor instructor, developing programs that prioritise inclusion, accessibility, and equity for all participants. Passionate about climbing, mountaineering, and a wide range of outdoor activities, Phil is committed to sharing the benefits of the outdoors with children, families, and clients of all abilities, helping them build confidence and resilience.

SESSION 2

Structuring appropriate progression in learner centred outdoor education

A Practical exploration of merging a child led approach with the need to provide meaningful skill based progression.

Presenter: Tom Bardon, Green Man Learning

Tom has been working in the outdoor learning sector since 2010 and running Green Man Learning since 2012. Tom wrote and released the WILD Passport in 2018 and now splits his time between running sessions in local schools and delivering training for adults, training up new Practitioners via the WILD Passport Practitioner award and working for Coventry Outdoors as an apprenticeship tutor on their Outdoor Learning Specialist training scheme.

SESSION 3

Developing place sensitive learning activities at Earnse Bay, Walney Island

This workshop will provide an update on the development of the proposed Beach School at The Earnse Hub, being developed at Earnse Bay, Walney Island. It will outline the progress made so far and share details of the planned educational offer for schools and other learning providers. Workshop facilitators will share their approach to designing learning resources for use at the Beach School and lead a discussion around the challenges of creating activities that:

- *enhance not replace the curriculum delivered in school*
- *are focused on outdoor delivery and are place-based (but are relevant to other coastal sites),*
- *are designed with the support and collaboration of local school settings*
- *are accessible for all learners*

Workshop attendees will be invited to share and discuss their own challenges in developing place-based outdoor learning within a content-filled curriculum, and will come away with ways to approach this in their own school settings and localities.

Presenters: Geoff Norman, CDEC and Eve Mulholland, Natural England

Geoff was a headteacher for 15 years and now works for CDEC on Global Learning focused projects and contracts, and for Northumberland National Park on the Welcome to Nature project. He is passionate about outdoor learning and nature connection.

Eve is a Senior Project Manager for Natural England and has been working on the collaborative project to develop the Earnse Hub on Walney Island.

SESSION 3

Outdoor and Experiential Learning - how not doing anything might be the most important thing you can do

Outdoor and Experiential Learning can foster independence, problem solving and self-esteem. Achieving this requires skilled practitioners to set clear boundaries, facilitate child led learning and challenge personal motivations for intervening.

The aim of the workshop is to develop a toolbox of techniques and ideas to encourage independence and empower the young people we work with, to be their own superhero. There will be a practical activity to challenge our ideas and to stimulate discussions.

Presenter: Ed Kemp, Brathay Trust

Ed is Schools and Communities Delivery Lead at Brathay Trust, Ambleside. He brings 9 years of classroom experience as a Primary Teacher with a specialism in Outdoor Learning, now complemented by 3 years facilitating residential outdoor experiences in the Lake District.

Lumberjunking – Introducing woodwork to the primary curriculum

How to introduce woodwork into your primary curriculum, across all age groups from nursery to Y6. The workshop will provide you with tips, ideas and inspiration to start woodworking on a budget. Covering curriculum links, risk assessments and project ideas.

**Presenters: Sophie Etherington and Maria Littlewood,
Crosthwaite Primary School**

Sophie teaches Outdoor Learning to all year groups at Crosthwaite and has done so for 4 years, covering everything from Forest School to gardening to woodwork. Prior to that she taught in Early Years for 15 years where her love of being outdoors with children began.

Maria is an enthusiastic outdoor learning leader who is passionate about promoting independence and confidence in children when working outdoors. She has 20+ years experience of working in different settings.

SESSION 3

The games we play

Using group games as a tool for cohesion and decision making.

Presenter: Tom Bardon, Green Man Learning

Tom has been working in the outdoor learning sector since 2010 and running Green Man Learning since 2012. Tom wrote and released the WILD Passport in 2018 and now splits his time between running sessions in local schools and delivering training for adults, training up new Practitioners via the WILD Passport Practitioner award and working for Coventry Outdoors as an apprenticeship tutor on their Outdoor Learning Specialist training scheme.

**Inspiring creativity, nature connection, understanding
and care for the natural environment through
curriculum-focussed, story-based activities outdoors.**

Join us for some story-inspired nature exploration and connection activities that you can do in your school grounds and local area. Supporting the curriculum in:

- KS1 in Art and Design, Science and Maths
- EYFS Understanding the world (natural), Expressive Arts and Design and Literacy (comprehension- enjoyment of stories)

Presenter: Ruth Suddaby, Lake District National Park

Ruth is the Learning and Engagement Manager at Brockhole, Windermere.

We deliver the Learning and Engagement Programme at Brockhole, The Lake District Visitor Centre and a number of externally funded educational projects. We focus on actively engaging young people with the natural environment and cultural heritage of the National Park/World Heritage Site, whilst delivering the curriculum, promoting health and well-being, and sustainability awareness. www.brockhole.co.uk/learning/

SESSION 3

Exploring and enhancing the nature on your school site

Join the National Education Nature Park in creative activities to identify the nature and habitats on your site and begin to explore and share ideas which could help to improve the biodiversity on your site. There's ideas for everyone, in every setting, whether you are urban, suburban or rural – great for outdoor learning and tangible ways of including pupil voice in the biodiversity strand of your Climate Action Plan.

Presenters: Jenny Lobo and Simon Colderley, NENP

Jenny and Simon are the North West regional team for the National Education Nature Park. Between them they have experience working and teaching in primary and secondary schools and have worked on a variety of exciting nature conservation projects.