

Using Nature for Nurture

John Muir Award Attainment Intervention



Many schools use a Nurture approach to highlight the importance of social environments on emotional skills, wellbeing and behaviour.



This is used as an intervention strategy with groups of pupils who have missed early nurturing experiences. Nurture encourages positive engagement with school and peers, and develops a pathway of enjoyment, engagement, behaviour, success, wellbeing and confidence that helps pupils be their best and raises attainment.¹

A Nurture type group in East Ayrshire who used the John Muir Award as an intervention found:

- **25% reduction in avoidance or rejection of attachment** – which can lead to difficulties in future years in positive relationships with others, affecting confidence and self-esteem
- **24% reduction in negativity towards self** – which can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety and depression
- **24% reduction in inconsequential or inappropriate student behaviour** – while each individual encounter may seem *inconsequential*, the cumulative effects caused by repeated encounters may result in critical *behaviour* change
- Additionally, an insecure sense of self, also a factor in lack of confidence and low self-esteem, **reduced by 14%**; and negativity towards others **reduced by 18%**.

This evaluation was based on The Boxall Diagnostic Profile², a two-part assessment tool designed to track the progress of cognitive development and behavioural traits of pupils through their education. In this case, pupil's social emotional wellbeing improved whilst achieving their John Muir Award.

“It is so nice to see the boys so relaxed and have the opportunity to chat to them all individually.” Principal teacher

The Bug Squad

The East Ayrshire Nurture group that was profiled – self-named *The Bug Squad* – included a mix of P5-7 students from a Primary School in which over 28% of pupils claim Free School Meals.

Six pupils came out of class two afternoons per week for three terms allowing them to experience differing seasons and weather conditions. The central focus for *The Bug Squad* was to complete their John Muir Award.



The school is situated in a small town with access to a nearby riverside path. This was *The Bug Squad*'s favourite greenspace to get active through literacy and numeracy activities. Pupils learnt about themselves, their relationships with nature, each other and staff. Positive engagement was encouraged through participating in poetry, hide & seek, camp fires, bug hunting, rocks and “skiddling” in the water. The flexibility of the John Muir Award allowed pupil interests to be followed, encouraging self-led learning.

“This is the only day I have enjoyed a whole day at school.”

Nurture group pupil

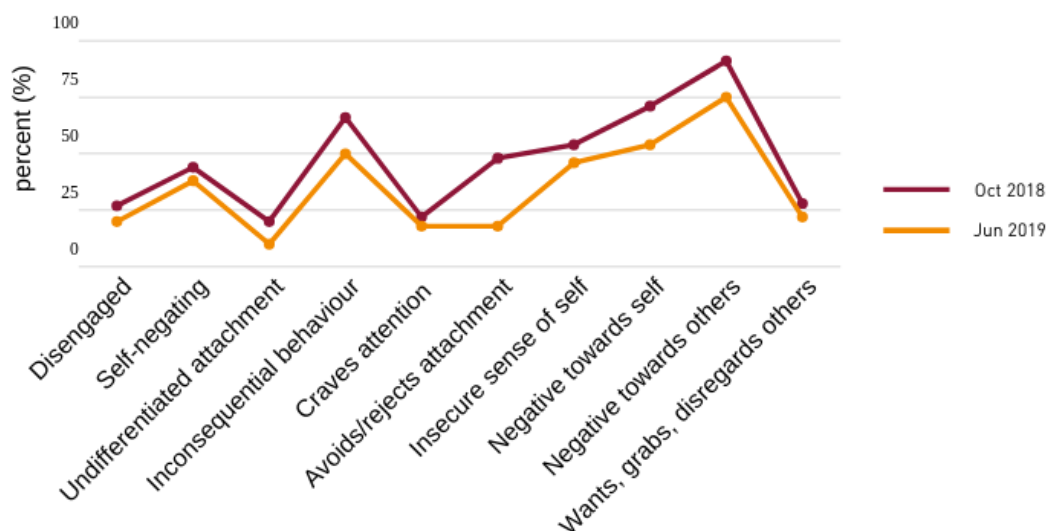
¹ The pathway to raised attainment through outdoor learning, Natural Connections 2012-16.

² The Boxall Profile www.nurtureuk.org

Impact

In order to assess the impact of the John Muir Award on each individual, the Principal teacher used the profiling tool before and after *The Bug Squad's* Award activity. All pupils showed positive reactions after achieving their John Muir Award.

Diagnostic Profile Data



Benefits of using the John Muir Award as an intervention

- *The Bug Squad* planned their John Muir Award alongside staff. Pupil ownership and leadership of their learning was encouraged with each member inputting own ideas.
- The open framework of the John Muir Award enabled pupil interests to be followed as well as targeting educational needs in an informal setting. This gave pupils confidence to tackle pieces of work they were reluctant to try during the routine school day.
- Caring for nature is a significant part of each John Muir Award. After clearing rubbish and planting a hedge in their local greenspace, the group felt a real sense of pride and a connection to their school and wider local community – demonstrating *Learning for Sustainability* in action.
- *The Bug Squad* felt good when reflecting on what they achieved in their community. They felt that their ideas and actions were valued, taken forward and celebrated through gaining nationally recognised John Muir Award certificates.

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme that encourages people of all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy, and care for wild places. In East Ayrshire, the Council invest in a partnership with the John Muir Trust to use the John Muir Award as an intervention strategy to focus on equity in education – improving activity in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing to ensure that all pupils reach their full potential and help close the poverty related attainment gap.³

Research shows that opportunities for people to give back and show compassion improve personal wellbeing and nature connectedness – things associated with positive behaviours.^{4,5}

Lorna Sloan, East Ayrshire John Muir Award Attainment Project Officer



³ Pupil attainment: closing the gap www.gov.scot

⁴ Search: Five Ways to Wellbeing <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org>

⁵ Health benefits of spending time outside www.sciencedaily.com