

## Piloting a Transformative Evaluation approach – with an East Ayrshire P6 class and teacher.

East Ayrshire Council and the John Muir Trust have a partnership now in its sixth year, supporting the post of a John Muir Award Attainment Officer. Unlike most other Trust staff managing Award activity, this post allows a dedicated attainment officer to work closely with Award Providers in East Ayrshire and therefore pilot a transformative evaluation on raising attainment and wild places.

The Transformative Evaluation pilot involved the John Muir Award Attainment Officer spending time with a class and their teacher in their wild place over a period of 8 months – 8 to 10 sessions. Positive relationships were formed with the class teacher and pupils which gave a good insight into the impact on raising attainment and protection of wild places through [John Muir Award](#) activity. This working relationship helped pupils and their teacher be open and free with their thoughts and share any impacts.

Towards the end of their Award the pupils completed a questionnaire, these were sorted and grouped by the class teacher who knows the pupils well and could observe and extract their transformation in attitudes to wild places and impact on learning. This process resulted in 3 pupils spending an additional 90 minutes with the attainment officer chatting through their replies and teasing out more information. This allowed a more in-depth focus on key transformative areas to create and share an impact case study – [Onthank Primary: Wild Places, Attainment and the John Muir Award](#).

Support from the school leaders was required to allow the class teacher to note outcomes taken back into class and extended learning.

The pupils expressed a compelling connection to nature and their respective wild place, suggesting the John Muir Award plays a vital role in facilitating this connection. The evaluation indicates that the Award supports raising attainment through curriculum-based experiences outdoors and empowering pupils, to taking action for wild places.

### **Onthank Primary connections with John Muir Trust**

The school have been delivering the John Muir Award for 5 years and have joined Trust led initiatives such as John Muir Day, along with broader wild place campaigns through adopting and using citizen science approaches such as the New Zealand Flatworm, Tree Health and Air Quality Surveys.

As East Ayrshire fund the Trust's attainment officer post there is no expectation for East Ayrshire Schools to become members of the Trust. John Muir Trust fundraising opportunities have been

shared widely in East Ayrshire. The school hosted a visit for David Balharry John Muir Trust CEO, and has agreed to also host a visit by Carol Mochan MSP later this year to allow Carol to learn more about the work of the Trust through how the Award impacts on wild places and raising attainment.

Collecting the evidence and seeing the changes first hand for this study gives the opportunity to tell personal stories. Pupils gave their consent for their stories to be shared as the evidence was collected.

### **Improvements**

In hindsight, a questionnaire covering: pupil experiences of wild places prior to starting their Award; their interests in caring for wild places; and curricular outcomes through outdoor learning would have been useful for gathering more quantitative data and allowing for a more comparative study. Spending time with the group was highly effective for gathering observations and building working relationships but this takes time.

[Transformative Evaluation - A Guide to Practice](#) by Dr Susan Cooper, University of St Mark and St John Plymouth is available via the link.

For more information on the Trust's pilot of a Transformative Evaluation approach contact Lorna Sloan, the Trust's John Muir Award & Attainment Project Officer [lorna.sloan@johnmuirtrust.org](mailto:lorna.sloan@johnmuirtrust.org)

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