

Kia ora koutou,

This Outdoor Education Alternative Curriculum for Phases 1 to 4 has been developed to clarify the knowledge and practices that sit within Outdoor Education across Years 0–10. It sits alongside Physical Education Phases 1-4, while making more explicit the distinctive content Outdoor Education contributes through learning in, through, and about the natural environment. The purpose is show how Outdoor Education can be more clearly described, more coherently sequenced, and more deliberately built across the years.

Outdoor Education involves a particular body of learning. It includes preparation, wayfinding, responding to changing conditions, environmental interpretation, group decision-making, and care for people and place. These are not simply one-off activities or settings for other learning. They are important knowledge and practice areas that can be progressively taught so that students develop sound judgement, increasing responsibility, and the ability to participate safely and meaningfully in the outdoors.

This Alternative Curriculum for Outdoor Education therefore focuses on knowledge-rich content and progression. It aims to strengthen what is taught, when it is taught, and how learning builds from early experiences in local places through to more deliberate planning, navigation, environmental understanding, and shared responsibility in later years. In doing so, it seeks to support a clearer and more usable curriculum pathway for Outdoor Education within the wider learning area.

Education Outdoors NZ has worked with PENZ extensively over the past year to ensure we delivering a coordinated and consistent message to the Ministry of Education on what we see as realistic, achievable and engaging for Years 0-10 ākongā.

We encourage everyone to engage with the consultation process and share your thoughts with the Ministry of Education. Submissions on the draft are open until Friday, 24 April 2026. You can access the Health and PE form for submissions at <https://education.surveymonkey.com/r/NWCBTPH> and the NZ Curriculum | Te Mātaiaho survey form here <https://education.surveymonkey.com/r/NWWJVTV>. Feedback back can also be sent by email NationalCurriculum.Refresh@education.govt.nz.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all of the EONZ members and team who have contributed their time, energy and passion to creating this Alternative document and continuing to advocate for the value of Outdoor Education.

Ngā mihi nui,

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Outdoor Education is a separate strand as part of the PE learning area. EONZ believes this the best way to recognise the distinct body of knowledge that is Outdoor Education.

The following are examples of how EONZ thinks that Outdoor Education could be explained in the current Ministry of Education Draft HPE Purpose statement, Learning area structure and Introduction.





Alternative Curriculum Framing for Outdoor Education

These statements are designed to sit alongside those produced by PENZ for the Physical Education strands of the HPE Learning Area.

Purpose Statement

Outdoor Education provides opportunities for students to learn through engagement in the natural environment, developing place-responsive judgement through wayfinding, preparation, and responsive decision-making in dynamic conditions, alongside environmental interpretation and care for people and place.

Learning Area Structure

Outdoor Education equips students with the knowledge and practices required to participate safely, confidently, and responsibly in the natural environment across their lifespan. Through Outdoor Education, students develop disciplinary knowledge that enables them to understand how preparation, changing conditions, wayfinding, environmental interpretation, and shared decision-making shape safe and responsible participation and care for people and place.

Outdoor Education is embedded within Physical Education as an area of learning, providing opportunities for students to engage with Outdoor Education's distinct body of knowledge and practices through learning in, through and about the natural environment.

As students' progress through Outdoor Education, they deepen their understanding of place, participation, and judgement, enabling them to prepare effectively, navigate and interpret the natural environment, manage risk in dynamic conditions, lead and collaborate with others, and act with care for people and place. This supports students to participate confidently in a wide range of outdoor experiences and to develop patterns of engagement that contribute to wellbeing, stewardship, and lifelong connection with the outdoors.

Introduction

Within this learning area, Physical Education develops understanding of movement across varied contexts, while Outdoor Education extends this learning through engagement with the natural environment and through knowledge and judgement that are specific to participation outdoors.

In Years 0–3 In Outdoor Education, students begin learning simple routines for safe participation outdoors, noticing features of local places, and showing care for people and place.

In Years 4–6 In Outdoor Education, students extend their knowledge of local places, changing conditions, preparation, and shared responsibility, using this knowledge to participate safely and respectfully in outdoor experiences.

In Years 7–10 In Outdoor Education, students develop more deliberate judgement by learning how planning, conditions, navigation, environmental interpretation, and group decision-making shape participation in the outdoors. Across these years, teaching supports students to connect what they know with how they act, building confidence and responsibility in a wide range of physical and outdoor experiences.



Outdoor Education

How learners engage safely, confidently, and meaningfully in natural environments through place-responsive judgement.

Students learn propositional knowledge about how people participate safely, confidently, and meaningfully through engagement in the natural environment, and how place-responsive judgement is developed through interacting environmental, social, and organisational demands. This includes how navigation and wayfinding support locational awareness and route planning; how weather and changing conditions shape comfort, risk, and decisions; how planning, preparation, and safety systems support risk management in relation to hazards, group capability, and activity demands; how environmental interpretation (including ecological and local cultural knowledge) informs respectful and reciprocal care for place (tiakitanga); and how group roles, leadership, and shared decision-making shape collective outcomes. These understandings include how outdoor experiences build agency and wellbeing over time.

Key Disciplinary Knowledge:

1. Place and environmental interpretation

How to read outdoor places by noticing patterns and relationships in the natural environment (e.g., ecosystems, interdependence, and local features) and using this understanding to make informed decisions and act with care.

2. Navigation and wayfinding

How location awareness is built through signs, symbols, landmarks, direction, and maps, and how these tools support route planning and safe movement through natural environments.

3. Dynamic conditions and weather judgement

How weather and changing environmental conditions influence comfort, safety, and decision-making, and how interpreting forecasts supports preparation and adaptive choices in the outdoors.

4. Risk, safety, and preparation systems

How safety outdoors depends on proactive preparation and responsive risk management, identifying hazards, assessing risk in context (environment, activity, group capability), and selecting controls to support safe participation.

5. Relational practice and group functioning outdoors

How outdoor participation is shaped by relationships, roles, and shared decision-making, how individuals contribute to group cohesion, leadership, and collective outcomes in outdoor experiences.

6. Wellbeing, agency, and learning through challenge

How outdoor experiences develop agency by strengthening self-management strategies (e.g., coping with challenge/adversity, confidence, communication, seeking support), and how these support wellbeing and personal growth over time.



Outdoor Education (Phase Overview)

	PHASE 1					
	During Year 1		During Year 2		During Year 3	
	Knowledge <i>The facts, concepts, principles, and theories to teach.</i>	Practices <i>The skills, strategies, and applications to teach.</i>	Knowledge	Practices	Knowledge	Practices
Outdoor Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible behaviours outdoors keep us safe. Being outdoors encourages curiosity, creativity and personal growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following agreed outdoor safety rules and routines while exploring. Identifying who to check in with before going outside (e.g., teacher / whānau caregiver). Exploring local outdoor places (school grounds or local place) by moving on different surfaces (e.g., mud, sand, grass, slopes) through guided activities (e.g., scavenger hunts; collecting/comparing natural objects; creating art out of natural objects). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning outdoors is good for social, cognitive and emotional development. Nature deserves our respect/care. Weather influences comfort and experiences in the outdoors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with others to create, build, and play using natural materials (e.g., move logs safely, dig sand structures, build shelters), practicing kindness, turn-taking, and respect for people and place. Following simple codes and rules to apply respectful practices during outdoor activities (e.g., take rubbish, respect plants/animals, leave places tidy). Wearing appropriate clothing/footwear for conditions (e.g., sun hat, warm layer, waterproof layer, closed-toe shoes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor experiences with others support relationship development. Signs and symbols support locational awareness and route planning. Outdoor learning builds connections to the natural environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating in cooperative outdoor group tasks using interpersonal skills (e.g., turn-taking, negotiating, assertive communication, sharing, boundary setting). Using simple maps, signs, and landmarks to locate key places and choose safe routes in familiar environments (e.g., school grounds, local park). Noticing and describing features of the natural environment using the senses (e.g., sights, sounds, textures, smells) and share observations respectfully.



PHASE 2						
During Year 4		During Year 5		During Year 6		
Knowledge	Practices	Knowledge	Practices	Knowledge	Practices	
Outdoor Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning in the outdoors builds confidence in exploring new places. Aspects of the natural environment are connected and affect each other. Weather conditions influence decision-making in the outdoors. Effective collaboration outdoors enables task completion and strengthens group cohesion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring a range of outdoor places in the school grounds and local community, showing confidence to visit new spaces safely. Recalling and sharing outdoor experiences through reflection (e.g., oral recounts, drawings, simple journals) to build awareness of feelings and learning. Applying understanding of ecosystem connections and interdependence (e.g., species relationships and the water cycle) by making respectful choices in the natural environment (e.g., avoiding damage to young plants). Describing weather conditions using accurate vocabulary (e.g. wind direction, strength, types of rain (showers, light, heavy), and choosing suitable clothing/activity options for the conditions. Using group strategies to complete shared outdoor tasks (e.g., pitching a tent, building a shelter, setting up a cooking area, group orienteering on a basic map). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor experiences can help people learn about themselves and others. Actions to protect and enhance natural environments have lasting effects. Outdoor activities in different natural environments require specific preparation considerations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflecting on outdoor experiences using a simple structure/tool (e.g., photo journal, sit spot, think-pair-share) and identifying what helped/hindered. Identifying the skills and attitudes needed for participation (e.g., perseverance, communication, preparedness) and practising them in context. Investigating how people's actions affect outdoor places over time and identifying practical ways to protect/enhance the school environment. Recognising features of different environments (beach, forest, park, urban area) and making preparation choices (e.g., footwear, layers, sun protection) based on conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being responsible in natural environments involves minimising human impact on the land, water, and ecosystems. Landmarks and basic directional awareness are essential for navigating outdoors. Outdoor experiences build skills in shared decision making, supporting others, and taking responsibility in group situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying ways to engage responsibly with natural environments during outdoor activities (e.g. 'leave no trace' principles, demonstrating guardianship and tiakitanga). Using basic wayfinding strategies (e.g., landmarks, sun position, handrails) and identifying cardinal directions (North, East, South, West) in familiar settings. Taking a role in group outdoor activities (e.g., navigator, timekeeper, gear checker) and following through on shared responsibilities.



PHASE 3				
During Year 7		During Year 8		
Knowledge	Practices	Knowledge	Practices	
Outdoor Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with natural environments enhances wellbeing and develops a connection with the outdoors. Safety in outdoor environments is supported by an understanding of NZ outdoor safety principles. Map reading supports location awareness and route planning using symbols, scales, and features. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying ways in which natural environments support wellbeing. Reflecting on a meaningful outdoor experience and identifying contributing factors (place, people, challenge, safety choices). Applying the NZ Outdoor Safety Principles to practical scenarios (e.g., clothing/temperature management, shelter, water management, cooking). Reading a simple map and planning a short route using symbols, scale and features, then checking progress while moving. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local communities offer opportunities for diverse outdoor learning experiences. Environmental low-impact principles support ecosystems and demonstrate stewardship. Safety in outdoor environments involves an assessment of potential hazards due to environmental variability, group capabilities, and activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying local outdoor learning opportunities and engaging with community groups/organisations in safe, respectful ways. Applying sustainable practices during outdoor activities and demonstrating tiakitanga and guardianship through actions that protect and respect the natural environment e.g. leave no trace principles and or managing waste responsibly, staying on designated tracks, and avoiding disturbance to flora and fauna. Identifying hazards and risks by considering environment variability, group capability, and activity demands, then choosing context-appropriate controls.



PHASE 4				
During Year 9			During Year 10	
Knowledge	Practices		Knowledge	Practices
Outdoor Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor experiences enable people to develop agency and strategies to manage adversity. Active participation enhances the functioning of a group outdoor activity. Ecological and cultural knowledge is important to enact environmental care. Planning and preparation are essential for safe and enjoyable outdoor experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describing strategies that can help manage challenges and build agency, e.g. confidence, emotional regulation, coping strategies, communication, self-awareness, seeking support). Reflecting on a challenging time outdoors (e.g. hot/cold day, long walk, hunger/thirst) and identifying the strategies for coping. Identifying ways in which individuals affect the group functioning, in the outdoors. Learning about a local place (ecology and cultural values/practices) and using that knowledge to guide respectful decisions/actions. Preparing for a trip/activity by selecting gear/food, checking weather, setting expectations, and planning contingencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and preparation for outdoor experiences involves identifying and managing risks. Group work requires individuals to perform roles that support the group in achieving its goals. Reciprocity is a key principle of interaction between people, and with the natural environment. Protecting Aotearoa New Zealand's unique natural environment requires identifying what a place needs and the actions to address those needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a simple safety management process to plan an outdoor activity (identifying hazards, assessing risk, selecting controls, allocating roles, briefing, reviewing). Demonstrating fundamental skills and safety procedures in outdoor activities (e.g. keeping a group together, waiting at forks, communicating clearly, location awareness, regular food and water breaks). Understanding and describing roles and responsibilities within a group in the outdoors. Identifying personal preferences for role-taking. Describing types of leadership and participation. Negotiating group goals and challenge level based on skills, capability, and conditions, then communicating decisions clearly(e.g. difficulty of a walk, trees to climb, roughness of track, rivers/lakes to cross, navigation). Demonstrating reciprocity with people and place by planning and taking action that shows care for the environment and community. Designing initiatives that promote environmental stewardship, tiakitanga in your school or local community. Participating in activities that enhance or protect natural features in your school or local community. Identify native plants, animals and birdlife, and their interdependence within local ecosystems. Identify and understand different types of ecosystems across Aotearoa NZ including wetlands, native forest, alpine and Coastal environments.