

Grounds for Learning, **sportscotland** and Play Scotland

School Grounds Literature Review
Phase One of the Scottish School Grounds Research Project
2002/3

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Introduction

'We are looking to create schools which are conducive to pupils learning and teachers teaching, which are accessible and welcoming, and which are an integral part of the community. (Building our Future, Scottish Executive, 2003:15)

Children and young people can spend up to twenty five percent of their total school time in the school grounds. School grounds therefore offer an important resource for learning, play and child development, and to promote positive health and well-being, understanding of the environment, citizenship and physical activity for children. However there is a belief that in many schools the potential of this resource currently lies untapped.

This literature review of existing research undertaken in Scotland, the UK and abroad is the first phase of the Scottish School Grounds Research Project 2002/3 on the use of, and attitudes towards the use of, school grounds in Scotland.

It aims to take a broad look at school grounds research and therefore does not focus on any one particular use or user group.

As well as considering existing school grounds research the review provides a policy context. Therefore in addition to published research and articles from refereed journals, the literature review makes some reference to extended case-studies and unpublished research where it is current and of relevance to the Scottish context. Legislation and policy guidelines are also included where they inform the research project context.

The review is divided into four broad areas:

- an overview of school grounds
- the break time use of school grounds including discussions of: the social value of break time; tradition and culture in the playground; inclusion; supervision; trends and concerns
- change and school grounds including: the case for change; outdoor learning and play spaces; change focussing on behaviour, health and activity; participation; successfully supporting change; school grounds as compensation
- the current planning, programming and policy contexts

An overview of school grounds

The term *school grounds* has been used throughout this review rather than *playground* to reflect our interest in the diverse uses that school grounds have, rather than the one (very important one) implied by 'playground'. Lucas (1994, in Blatchford and Sharp eds.) has suggested that the term school grounds carries less 'semantic baggage' in that it does not imply, for example, conflict between play and learning, use of play equipment or the hard surfacing which has become almost synonymous with the school *playground*. The term *school grounds* may also be considered more appropriate for the outdoor environment of secondary schools. The use of this more inclusive term is important particularly if one considers the conclusion of Peter Blatchford (1998a) that more consideration must be given at secondary level to pupils' use of outdoor space and the pupils own dissatisfaction with the outdoor environment which meant, for instance, that breaktime was of interest despite rather than because of where it was spent.

The development of school grounds and their use can be seen in interesting historical perspectives presented by authors offering examples by individuals and illustrating cycles in attitudes to use of school grounds. In her discussion of the centrality of the outdoor space to nursery education, Bilton (2002) draws a distinction between primary and nursery school playgrounds given that nursery education was not simply an offshoot of primary education.

'From looking at the roots of nursery education it is apparent that that this area was initially carefully designed and laid out and its use was carefully planned on a daily basis. It was not a place to run about in after the work was done inside. It was an area in which the children were able to play for the entire session, weather permitting. It was an area where education and care went hand in hand, a wholly new concept at the beginning of the (20th) century. It was an area where a healthy body and mind could be developed. It was an environment in which teachers were expected to work and play with the children.' (Bilton, 2002:30)

In the 1930s, outside influences caused the decline in the centrality of the outdoor learning space. Nursery education came to be seen as a means of compensating for disadvantage, to help children onto the next phase of education or as means of identifying particular needs. Bilton suggests that today there is still some prevalence of the attitude that created a division between work and play, with indoors seen as the work place and outdoors as the less important play area. In the 1930s and again in the 1970s and 80s drops in the birth rate meant that primary classrooms were falling empty. When these became the venue for nursery classes, Bilton suggests that again a significant change happened that undermined the outdoor space. The emphasis shifted to adapting the indoor classroom rather than building an appropriate outdoor space (p29).

With current resonance, citing Whitbread (1972), she describes how the nursery school garden came to be seen not as a learning environment but as a health promoting environment (p28) which she suggests is a label still attached to it today. It was understood that cognitive growth could not be achieved without physical well-being and the nursery movement was successful in improving the health of young children through a balance of outdoor learning, exercise, diet and rest, which then lead to this misapprehension or 'mistaking the route for the destination' (Bradburn (1976) cited by Bilton).

Titman (1994) concludes from her review of literature that though it was once fairly common for schools to use the school grounds for both formal and informal curriculum, 'the tradition waned during the last three decades or so to the point that, in the main, school grounds became used only for PE, games and 'playtime', with the exception of a few remarkable pioneers who continued to recognise and utilise this valuable resource for a wide range of educational purposes' (p5).

Examples of Titman's 'remarkable pioneers' can be found in current descriptive pieces and extended case studies. The Coombes School is one of the most widely recognised examples. Susan Humphries and Susan Rowe (1994, Blatchford and Sharp eds.) describe eloquently the thinking behind the development of the 'biggest classroom'.

'Children at work and at play in a lively, changing and diverse landscape will react imaginatively, and build up high expectations and happy recollections of school life. As a group of teachers, we agreed to develop the grounds as a living unit to be enjoyed for aesthetic reasons as well as curricular gains.' (p116)

For many of us the most obvious use of school grounds is the place where playtime and breaks are spent. The most comprehensive survey of the characteristics of school breaktime in primary and secondary schools (in England) was undertaken and reported by Blatchford (1998a, 1998b, Blatchford and Sumpner 1998). This found that in around half of schools there had been changes to the length of breaktime (comparing 1990/1 and 1995/6), with the main changes being a reduction to the length of the lunch break and the loss of the afternoon break.

Therefore while there are examples of 'pioneers' utilising the school grounds there are general trends suggesting concern about the use of the outdoor space. These will be discussed and other examples offered in a later section.

The somewhat undefined nature of school grounds, allowing diverse understandings of them, is reflected in the various approaches and starting points taken to school grounds research, for example school grounds as:

- a site for social learning and development
- a source of problems and anxiety
- a reflection of the outside world
- a forgotten space where what happens is little valued
- a distinct and separate world with its own culture and tradition
- a site for environmental education and awareness
- the outdoor classroom
- a site for research
- a site for intervention
- a place to play
- part of the whole school/whole community

In turn the view that school grounds can compensate for a diverse range of diminishing opportunities in the 'outside world' – opportunities for play, for adult free time, for interaction with the environment, for healthy activity – is expressed from various perspectives, which we will go onto later.

School grounds and break time

It seems logical to begin this review with the school grounds' most obvious current use – playtime or breaktime. The memories adults have of their childhood play and breaktime experiences (both good and bad) often far outweigh memories of their time spent in the classroom - illustrating the long-lasting significance of these experiences.

Before attempting to comment on the social world of the school grounds many researchers have sounded cautionary notes, often from their own experience, against *interpreting* without first truly attempting to *understand*.

The Opies' observed in 1969 that 'the belief that traditional games are dying out is itself traditional; it was received opinion even when those who now regret the passing of games were themselves vigorously playing them' (p14). The belief that children don't play 'like they used to' is widely repeated and similar views have been found to be prevalent around the world (Bishop and Curtis, 2001). Research described from a number of settings over the 1980s and 1990s in *Play Today in the Primary School Playground* (2001) paints a contrasting picture, not of decline, but of 'vibrancy, creativity, continuity and variety'. This picture challenges us to 'examine our adult assumptions about children's contemporary play activities and the effects of our own personal experience on our perceptions of them' (p2).

Further to this point it has been said that

'adults face particular difficulties in understanding much of what goes on in the playground. Sometimes when in the school playground an observer can record individual behaviours, but remain unclear how they fit together - for example, what the game is and how it is played. Many staff have remarked how difficult it is sometimes to know whether the children are playing or fighting. Who better then to act as informants than the children themselves?' (Blatchford, 1994:19)

In her review of literature on the broader question of the impact of the physical environment on children's behaviour and attitudes Titman (1994) found that much research *concerned* children but far less often actually *involved* children. She observes that some researchers cite the difficulty of obtaining reliable data from children, while others 'for whom children's views and opinions were fundamental, created methodologies designed to enable this objective thereby producing a rich source of data as well as a range of interesting research models' (p3).

Hart (1997) also remarks that 'of the many hundreds of projects in my files involving environmental actions by children, very few describe a process for involving children in research.' And as Titman hints in her remark, this implies fundamental differences in attitude and ethos towards the involvement of children. Hart's argument links to a deeper analysis that

'children need to understand the right of all persons to have a voice in establishing a healthy and meaningful life for themselves on this planet... it has been argued that this can only be achieved through frequent experiences with direct democratic participation in institutional settings... most notably schools' (p192).

The role of children's involvement in research is critical to this argument - that in order to develop competent, responsible environmental behaviour, it is necessary to have the ability to evaluate issues critically as a guide to action (p91).

Therefore coming back to the question of investigating the nature of activity, interactions and behaviour in school grounds researchers are presented with methodological and ideological challenges. Authors, having learnt from history and their own experience, advocate being alert to the complexities of children's interactions with each other and the environment in school grounds, in order to understand the reality from the children's perspective rather than through the prism of the adult view. The changing needs of children from nursery through primary and secondary schooling should also be considered. A strong argument is made for supporting the development of children's ability for ongoing critical interaction with the environment.

The social value of breaktime

In their discussion of the developmental and educational significance of breaktime in schools Pellegrini and Blatchford (2002) draw together research from the USA and UK which, they argue, demonstrates that breaktime is 'crucial to academic achievement, peer relations, and more general school adjustment'. They suggest that 'most children learn social skills by interacting with their peers in meaningful social situations – interaction with peers during breaktime is one of those meaningful times' (p62).

These conclusions draw on a body of work which has contributed to a lively debate on the value of breaktime in school which suggests a misalignment between the research record and current educational policy.

A recurrent tension is reported between the perceived need to manage breaktime and the importance of time under children's own agency with relatively low levels of adult intervention. Interpreting his study of pupils experience of breaktime in junior schools, Blatchford's main findings regard the social value of breaktime - in relation to the formation and maintenance of friendships and social networks, development of strategies for avoiding conflict and the opportunity to 'find freedom and a social life independent of the classroom, where the rules of conduct are more their own, and where activities stem from their own initiative' (1999:64).

At both primary and secondary levels pupils value breaktime for its social opportunities, but the relationships between aspects of social relations like friendship and breaktime activities change with age (Blatchford, 1996:23). The findings from the pupils own perspectives were that playtimes at younger ages were seen as more carefree and enjoyable, more active, and more games took place. The pupils explained these changes as brought about by a growing sense of maturity and self understanding, a greater value attached to choice about how to spend breaktime, a greater sense of the importance of school work, and changes in the nature of social relations (p21). Blatchford urges caution in concluding that over the school years there is a progressive loss of activities. Rather, as they move through the secondary years, 'pupils social lives become important in new and deeper ways, and are vital in their developing sense of who they are and what they want to do... social concerns are not so tied to location and activity and, in contrast to primary school, are not so visible to staff.'

The significance of playground play and games to the formation of friendships has been noted (for example Opie 1969, Blatchford 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1999, Pellegrini and Blatchford 2002). The study of different aspects of children's friendships has also been the subject of much research however discussion of it is outwith the scope of this review.

Tradition and culture in the playground

The distinct culture or counter culture emergent in school grounds is also of note (for example Sutton-Smith 1990, Blatchford and Sharp 1994, Bishop and Curtis 2001, Factor 2001, Grugeon 2001). Reference is also made to the important role of oral playground rhymes and their contribution to linguistic, literary and musical development (Grugeon 2001, Widdowson 2001 who points to a reawakening of interest in 'childlore' amongst researchers, teachers and wider society).

'children's play traditions often reveal dimensions of creativity, artistry and complexity in their own right, including carnivalesque, subversive and parodic elements as well as normative ones' (Bishop and Curtis, 2001:8).

It is suggested by Bishop and Curtis that 'the paradoxical nature of children's lore' results (in the field of child- and folklore) in 'a concern with the child's point of view concerning their own traditions' and therefore a 'methodology that tends towards accumulation of empirical data drawn from empirical detailed micro-studies based largely on ethnographic observation and interview, prior to broad generalisation.' This premise is encapsulated, they suggest, by Boyes:

'children's traditional culture is an expression of their own beliefs and values, not isolated from the adult world, but specific to themselves. Rhymes and other linguistic play are created and reproduced for children's own purposes, not those of folklorists, the educational system or publishers... children create and pass on their rhymes for their own enjoyment as they play. They are a living, active art, made by children for their own purposes, their content to be taken in at the child's own level, and that is how they are best understood.' (Boyes, 1995:138 - 9, cited in Bishop and Curtis, 2001:8)

Therefore we begin to build up a picture of the complexity of action, behaviour, history, tradition and culture taking place in the schools grounds – that there is a 'culture of school playground play, just as there is a culture of schooling' (Sutton-Smith. 1990:5).

Inclusion

It has been found that 'play and playtime are integral to children's *experience* of inclusion' (Casey, 2003) therefore given the increased emphasis on 'inclusion' in schools more understanding is needed of the ways in which inclusion, friendship and play relate.

The dominance of the school grounds by boys playing football is always guaranteed to stir up debate. As one example, Swain (2000) explores the 'part football plays in the social construction of hegemonic masculine practices' amongst boys at an English junior school. He argues that:

'football acts as a model for the boys, and they use the games as a way of constructing, negotiating and performing their masculinity. Girls are excluded from the games, along with some of the boys in the subordinated group who become feminised by their lack of skill and competence, and are subject to homophobic abuse as the hegemonic group act under the 'cultural imperative' of heterosexuality'(p95).

Although the playground was found to be only one of a range of 'stages' in the school day for the dominant group of boys to 'perform their masculinity' it is a particularly visible one. The researcher questions whether school policies and organisational routines are used to enforce equal opportunities policies and whether teachers challenge or collude with this dominant practice.

Interesting studies by Smyth and Anderson (2000 and 2001) explore issues of inclusion and exclusion in breaktime play and games. The first considering whether a child's performance on a test of motor ability is related to later involvement in both social and physical activities in the school playground. While they acknowledge that developmental courses linking social exclusion and poor coordination remain to be explored there are interesting implications from the study suggesting 'various routes to social exclusion.' Understanding the divergence (some children overcome coordination problems and take part in socially structured physical play

while others do not) is of importance for the 'development of appropriate programmes of intervention.'

'The inclusion of children (with developmental coordination disorder) in fantasy play, but their exclusion from informal and formal team games and skill mastery in groups, suggests that social activity which is not dependent on motor skill is important for young children with impaired coordination. That is, social play decreases as the physical demands of play increase' (p409).

The later study by the same authors (2001) goes on to examine early coordination problems and later football participation in the school playground finding that 'high status social and physical games like football may function both to exclude some children from play and to give others the opportunity to be accepted' (p378).

The authors refer to two significant points: that the child's own motivation to achieve and make considerable effort is an important factor and the importance of sporting activity for children and their integration into play and social life. In this study it is found that 'postural control impacts directly by making sports difficult, rather than indirectly via the perception of differences or general incompetence in the many domains of the school life.' Findings such as these contribute to an interesting debate, with implications for interventions aimed at supporting 'inclusion' in school grounds.

'It may be the case that the efficacy that children experience at games in the playground during their first year of schooling transfers to more general feelings of competence in school. This sense of efficacy in a school context, albeit an informal one, may have resulted in children having a more positive attitude to school. Further research should examine the extent to which these social emotional processes relate to attitudes to school in later school years, when the academic regimen becomes markedly less social and more solitary' (Pellegrini and Blatchford, 2002:61).

Supervision

The level of supervision in playgrounds and playtimes leads to debates about the roles of these adults and the effect of their presence in the school grounds. The ambiguity both of children's behaviour and of the role of adults in the school grounds lends itself to the uncertainty and anxiety.

'Children's playground behaviour may appear ambivalent to those adults who are faced with supervising them in this context. This ambivalence, or rather the way in which it is resolved would probably have implications for the way in which supervisors respond to the behaviour of the children in their care.' (Boulton, 1994: 49, in Blatchford and Sharp eds)

Behre et al (2001) found that teachers' reasons for intervening in violent incidents in school were associated with their perceptions of location. (The study involved teachers in elementary and middle schools in the USA). He draws on studies by Astor et al (1999) to report that students described how teachers were unclear regarding procedures and inconsistent in their interventions (p135) when in undefined spaces in the school (those without 'ownership': corridors, transitional space, the school grounds). Teachers themselves had a clear sense of the classroom as the locus of their professional responsibility.

It is unsurprising therefore, that adults asked to supervise playtimes without clear roles and responsibilities are in an ambiguous situation. A 1991 pilot project found supervisors 'unsure of their status' (Andrews and Hilton); a 1994 (Titman) questionnaire survey regarding the roles and job descriptions of 'dinner time supervisors' found little consensus on what the role entailed; the pervasive problem of lack of status was identified by Sharp (in Blatchford and Sharp eds, 1994); in 1999 PlayLink findings were still repeating that the complexity and demands of the role were not being recognised (p16). Each of these also identifies the need to recognise the complexity of the role and give appropriate support.

Sharp however did suggest 'trends indicating that training for lunchtime supervisors is being recognised as being a valuable and worthwhile investment' and that even where training was not provided playtime could be improved by focussing on 'improving status of supervisors,

clarifying roles and responsibilities, communication, sharing skills and strategies, making lunchtime systems efficient and effective (p130-1)'

The intervention/non-intervention tension has still to be adequately explored and recognised.

Trends and concerns

Recent literature (Ball 2001, Pellegrini and Blatchford 2002, Thomson 2000, 2002) continues to challenge the 'growing restrictions on pupils traditional freedoms to interact and play in school settings' (Blatchford, 1998a:6) questioning the assumptions on which these restrictions are based and the apparent contradiction between research finding and current trends.

It does seem that the current movement is towards decreasing lunch and breaktime and the abolition of the afternoon break (Blatchford and Sumpner 1998 reporting on a survey of characteristics of breaktime in schools in England). This trend has also been noted in Australia (Evans, 1996) and USA (Pellegrini 1995). Blatchford and Sumpner found that the reasons cited by teachers for this decrease were: increased time spent teaching and the perceived behavioural problems of pupils (p90).

For some children at some points in their school lives breaktime is not a positive experience. As well as offering the opportunity for 'independence and freedom from teachers and classrooms; and the management of conflict, aggression, and inter-group relations' break time in schools can also be 'a site of harassment, cruelty and domination' (Blatchford 1998a, 161).

While by no means the prevalent experience of children, a predominantly negative view of breaktime has been found amongst school staff (discussed by Blatchford 1998). That the school grounds are a source of anxiety, seen as a problem, is often remarked upon. Greater awareness of the bullying has also served to draw attention to the school grounds where most bullying occurs (Whitney and Smith, 1993). Other studies have found bullying occurring in the playground and the classroom (Wolke et al, 2001, in a study in England and Germany) and significant differences in the frequency and nature of bullying in the classroom and the playground reflecting the 'constraints of the context' (Craig et al 2000). The researchers of this last piece have drawn the conclusion that findings highlight the necessity for a 'systematic intervention programme that addresses not only individual characteristics of bullies and victims, but also the roles of the peer group, teachers and the school' (Craig et al 2000).

It is this question of intervention that poses particular difficulties at a number of levels. Various models of change and intervention will be discussed in the following sections. However, here we wish to highlight the dominant trend in the UK and some countries overseas towards greater restrictions placed on pupils in school grounds, increased levels of supervision and decreased time for breaks.

Thomson (2000) takes forward the discussion, considering reasons behind increased playtime intervention. She refers to the 'current developments moving us towards a more interventionist approach' (citing Blatchford 1998:9) and sets out to explore these current developments, considering 'the reasons behind the increased specialisation, territorialisation and partitioning of this space' (p2).

As we have seen, the school grounds contain complex and diverse behaviour, interactions and models, however it is 'undefined space' where boundaries and roles are unclear. The school grounds can not be seen in isolation from the outside world:

'areas such as risk, litigation, allegation, health, safety, surveillance and the blame and compensation culture are all concepts which form part of a set of discourses on modern life that implode on the contemporary primary school playground.' (Thomson, 2000:17)'

and

'It seems that the strategies that have been developed to protect the occupants of the primary school playground from a variety of risks has meant that the framework

of control is a real constraint to children's playtime entertainment.' (Thomson 2002:102)

Thomson found that it was rare to find any cases taken to court where a ruling against a school regarding playtime supervision has been made (p100). However the defensive position encouraged, in order to avoid any possible litigation, can result in 'peculiar and irrational' decisions being made such as the 'arbitrary banning of playground games.'

Thomson's central premise that 'prescriptive agencies (such as the Health and Safety Executive, teachers' unions, and parents) all influence the tenor of playground activities which then leads to increased control of the space' (p17) begins to identify processes through which the restrictions begin to tighten around the school grounds in a 'culture of blame and compensation.'

Significant research by Ball (2002) on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive goes some way to address these issues. Though the focus of the research is 'playgrounds which are outdoors containing fixed equipment' this does include school grounds in some cases. The conclusions put forward however are very illuminating to discussion of supervision and restriction in school grounds.

Ball proposes that

'during the last decade or two, the safety community has had by far the strongest voice in the playground debate, arguably followed by the individualists (commercial, legal interests et cetera) who are usually able to look after themselves. Less prominent has been the egalitarian perspective which would have a natural instinct to seek a less rule-bound resolution to the matter with far more emphasis on the realisation of the benefits of play. Almost absent from the debate has been the voice of children who have, as is well known, no votes and consequently negligible lobbying power.' (Ball, 2002: section 8.1)

The report articulates

'In marked contrast to the common concern over safety on the playground, the evidence gathered here suggests that the crucial societal problem of playgrounds and their provision relates less to safety of playgrounds per se, than to the issue of how to realise for children the full range of social, physical, emotional and cognitive benefits associated with play (one of which is considered to be the learning experience gained from exposure to modest risk).' (Ball, 2002: section 8.1)

Summary of school grounds and breaktime

This section began by considering the need to understand school grounds from the perspective of the primary users - children - and the interesting challenge this presents to researchers. In the school grounds a complex picture emerges of interaction between children, and the environment, and activity, culture and tradition. A tension is identified between the value of breaktime to pupils of all ages and trends towards greater management and supervision. The aspiration of inclusive education also leads to us to consider the way in which breaktime games and organisation serve to include or exclude individuals or groups of children. Finally the trend towards greater restriction and reduction of breaktime was highlighted against the recognition of the whole range of benefits that can be realised through play in the outdoors.

Change and school grounds

School grounds are the focus for processes of change for reasons of improvement, development and problem solving. The case for change can be made in terms of curriculum, ethos, play, quality of experience, and health and activity, amongst others.

Like the caution to *understand* before interpreting the social world of the school grounds, many commentators strongly urge thorough understanding before attempting to *make change* in school grounds. They remind us of good intentioned attempts that have resulted in unexpected or undesired results. Therefore this section, which considers research on 'change' and interventions, begins with some of these observations.

Armitage (in Bishop and Curtis eds., 2001) reports findings from a number of 'play audits' in Northern English schools between 1993 and 1998, finding that playgrounds and surroundings are informally organised by the children and made up of accepted spaces and features that act as the centre of particular forms of play. He reminds us that if children are to be able to play spontaneously and naturally in school grounds then the environment provided for them 'must respect the finding that children themselves are informally organising their available space and features to meet their own needs' (p56).

Of children's own play and playground culture as described above a predominantly negative view has been found amongst adults. Coupled with this, trends suggest that this negative view and the safety lobby (Ball 2002) make up the dominant voice leading to the perceived need for intervention and supervision of school grounds.

Blatchford (1994) describes what he calls the 'romantic' and the 'problem' view of playground behaviour that characterises research. The first emphasises what children enjoy and learn without adult interference in their play while the later tends to focus on problems that arise such as bullying, aggression and antisocial behaviour for which alternatives should be sought.

The Opies are much cited in their view of childhood play and culture and the dangers of adult intervention.

'If children's games are tamed and made part of the school curricula, if wastelands are turned into playing fields for the benefit of those who conform and ape their elders, if children are given the idea that they cannot enjoy themselves without being given the 'proper' equipment, we need blame only ourselves when we produce a generation who have lost their dignity, who are ever dissatisfied, and who descend for their sport to the easy excitement of rioting, or pilfering, or vandalism.' (1969)

While the language might not sit easily with us now, similar concerns are expressed, for example by Thomson (2002) who suggests that the current climate of anxiety and adults' attempts to prevent accidents and limit risk, have led to the school grounds being an area where 'children's conduct is channelled into certain patterns of behaviour so that certain outcomes can be determined or avoided' (p17).

Blatchford himself suggests that the 'romantic' and the 'negative' view are actually 'two sides of the same coin'. Development of professional practice in the field of playwork offers an attempt to reconcile the spontaneous child-led nature of play and the need at times for some degree of adult involvement characterised as 'low intervention, high response' combining the core roles of enrichment of play and management of risk.

'Because of the developmental importance of children's free play, and the satisfaction they gain from playing freely, playworkers aim for the minimum intervention in children's activity consistent with keeping them free from harm.' (Best Play, 2000:16)

The Opies' assertion that the presence of adults in itself changes the quality of children's experience presents a useful challenge to attempts to understand, interpret and intervene in the school grounds.

'In the games which adults organize for children, or even merely oversee in a playground, the outside world is ever present.' (1969:1)

The suggestion that a 'counter-culture' may exist in school grounds means that imposed changes may be short-lived. 'Playground life has a structure and a history and activities imposed on pupils are unlikely to be maintained for very long' (Blatchford, 1998:71)

The case for change

In 1989 Denton-Thompson asked the rhetorical question 'do the sites surrounding our schools stimulate a sense of pride and belonging and promote lasting memories arising from a rich interaction between the developing child and the environment?' and went on to describe the school estate (in England) as one of the 'most impoverished, sterile and climatically exposed landscapes in the country'. The contrast between the aspiration and the reality is striking.

There is certainly a strong case being made for improvements to school grounds. Descriptions of actual examples from practice and their reported benefits provide some of the strongest and most persuasive cases. Inspiring examples of the processes and results can be found in *Grounds for Sharing* (Stoneham, 1996) and *Grounds for Learning* (Kenny, 1996). The first provides guidelines to developing special school sites and case studies from around the UK while the later describes school site developments in Scotland with extended case studies. The benefits reported by the principle teachers in these cases reflect the words of Humphries and Rowe (1994, as above)

- the development of an ethos of care, ownership and responsibility
- an improvement not just in the quality of the environment, but also to the appearance and reputation of the school
- a reduction in accidents and incidents of vandalism
- the creation of additional resources to support all aspects of the formal curriculum, of play and of child development more generally (Kenny, 1996:2)

Other descriptive examples can be found in *Inside Out and Outside In*, Stirling Council undated; *The Nursery Garden, Cambussbaron Primary School*, Jane Hunter, 1998; *The Wee Green School Pack*, McKinnon and Carroll, Edinburgh, undated; *Improving an inner city playground and the quality of children's play*, Keen and Smith, *Early Education*, Spring 2000.

There is little evidence of widespread change in the years since Denton-Thompson's comments on the school estate. The examples described above demonstrate individual efforts rather than a strategic policy of change. In the 1990 (Adams) report from The Learning through Landscapes Trust it was suggested that many of the local initiatives reflecting a growing interest in nature conservation and improvement of play facilities were fragmented and of variable quality. Their report aimed to consider the then 'current state of affairs in relation to the use, design, management and development of school grounds' with an attempt at 'illumination rather than prescription'. The findings, while inter-related, suggested the need for widespread change at various levels including attitudes, policy, roles and relationships, development programmes, training and support networks. In this report two different perceptions of the landscapes around schools are identified:

'the landscape created as a provision, a resource, a facility, to which pupils and teachers might respond in a number of ways. Or the other, of the landscape resulting from the users' involvement with the school grounds – a tangible expression of the school's philosophy and educational practice. In the first, the landscape influences the practice. In the second, the philosophy and practice creates the landscape. The truth might lie between the two.' (Adams, 1990:13)

Research from the Learning through Landscapes Trust formed the basis of 'The Outdoor Classroom' from the Department for Education (1990). This reaffirmed the findings that much learning 'common to a variety of curricular areas, can be promoted strongly and naturally outside' (p viii). The Hidden Curriculum identified in the earlier report is also alluded to in that 'the nature of the grounds also has a profound effect upon activities outside lesson time, and on the attitudes of pupils towards their environment.'

Further to this point Titman (1994) found the enormous importance of the school grounds to children as signifiers of the ethos of the school and 'because children understood the grounds as being essentially a place for them, which they believed the school had designed for their use, the grounds were read by children as reflection of their value to the school' (p60).

The 'Outdoor Classroom' identified the under-utilised potential of the school grounds as an educational resource (p viii), and that it was uncommon for unsupervised play to be well provided for and rather more likely for playtime to take place in 'dull playgrounds'. The exceptions described as 'outstanding' make provision for 'play environments with equipment, stimulating artefacts and arrangements for quiet gathering places where individuals and small groups can meet' (p ix).

The sometimes unrecognised social value of breaktime was discussed above. The low value placed on breaktime appears to be reflected in the low value given to the space in which it takes place. Blatchford (1996:23) concludes that 'at secondary level pupils are left to engage in what they value most in ways that owe nothing at all to any thought about how they might spend that time.' He later reports themes emerging from pupils views about school grounds based on interviews, in particular a general dissatisfaction with outside environment available.

'For many it seemed that breaktime was of interest despite, rather than because of, the environment provided. The school grounds used, especially at secondary level, seemed to be rarely considered by staff. It appears to be assumed that pupils will just get on in their own way.' (1998a:35)

It is argued that important forms of independence are being developed at breaktime in school, and that these can come from pupils determining their own activities.

'But boredom arising out of an impoverished environment, and an accompanying sense of not knowing how to spend one's time, is surely not in the interests of pupil or school.' (1998a:36)

Thus more often than not school grounds have been identified as meeting neither the social, play nor educational needs of its users (Adams 1989, Denton-Thompson 1989, Department of Education 1990, Sutton-Smith 1990). There is therefore a strong case for change which, as indicated above, should be based on knowledge and understanding of the special dynamics within the whole environment of school grounds.

Outdoor learning and play spaces

Improvements to the physical environment of school grounds are undertaken to address a number of issues. Schools' motivation for change, identified by Kenny, tend to fall into six categories: curriculum use; improvement of behaviour; better play facilities; improvement of safety; enhancement of the image/appearance of the school; attracting wildlife and improvement of the natural heritage value of the site (Kenny 1996:6).

The work of Learning through Landscapes has been particularly influential in the UK in increasing understanding of the potential of school grounds and processes of change. Titman's research in 'Special Places, Special People' (1994) helped to highlight how the environment influences the behaviour and attitude of children.

Titman asked: 'does the physical environment of school grounds and the way they are managed affect children's attitude/behaviour, and if so how/why?' Central to her approach (utilising semiotic research methodology) is the 'significance of culture, in terms of both the physical nature of places and the social context in which children use and relate to them' (p15).

The research, which centres on understanding children's own experience of the school grounds environment, suggests that to children school grounds are 'essentially signifiers of the ethos of schools'.

The findings are summarised as follows:

- 'School grounds, by their design and the way they are managed, convey messages and meanings to children which influence their attitude and behaviour in a variety of ways.'

- Children read these messages and meanings from a range of signifiers which frame the cultural context of the environment – this constitutes the Hidden Curriculum of school grounds.
- The Hidden Curriculum has considerable influence, in a range of subtle but significant ways, on the operation of all schools.
- It is within the power of those who manage schools to determine the nature of the Hidden Curriculum of their school grounds. (p63)

These 'signifiers' include a natural landscape with living things, natural colour, nooks and crannies, flexibility. For children then, school grounds that demonstrate the importance of these elements are giving children the message that adults value and care for them since they are providing a space that meets their needs. Groves and Mason (1993) in an Australian study also found that having adaptable elements available in school grounds was the strongest preference of both boys and girls, along with naturalness and colour.

Once again the motivations for change and the range of benefits are inter-related. Is it possible or desirable to make a distinction between school grounds as a place to learn, or a place to play? As Bilton described above, the concept of the nursery garden was intrinsic to the development of nursery education and Moore (1973), for example, describes the school yard as a place for play and learning.

Drawing on research projects conducted in 1966 and in the early 70s, Moore (1973) offers a set of *qualitative design concepts*, relating to the evolution of 'viable play and learning space.' These qualities, making up a rich supportive environment for children to play and learn, begin with the 'elusive quality of *placeness* - *placeness* seems to depend on the number of things you can do 'in' and 'with' the environment; generally the degree of psychological stimulation and physiological comfort' (p232). He goes on to identify other qualities making up the design concepts: space, time, change, movement, manipulation, openness, scale, interface, nature, sensory dimensions.

These design concepts chime with 'criteria for enriched play environments' (Best Play, 2000:35) which include such elements as: varied physical environment, challenge, natural elements, movement, stimulation of the five senses, social interaction, playing with identity and the opportunity to experience a range of emotions.

In his work, Moore indicates the inter-related nature of environmental awareness, the quality of the environment and the quality of children's experience within and interacting with it. This again links back to the possibility that school grounds have a significant role to play in enhancing children's learning experiences, formal and informal. Significantly Titman suggests that 'because the Hidden Curriculum of schools can be identified it can be changed.'

Children learn from the value placed on the school grounds:

'where children perceived that the ethos of the school demonstrated 'non-caringness' in relation to the school grounds...either they accepted this dominant culture and suppressed their instinctive, personal inclinations, or they rejected the school ethos and all that goes with it.' (Titman, 1994:62)

However, where children perceived that the school grounds (and therefore the children) were valued they were happy to adopt the culture this message delivered.

This point can be expanded upon to consider other dimensions. An interesting example is given in terms of design for inclusive schooling with a basic principle that 'inclusive design attempts to break down unnecessary barriers and exclusions.' (Department for Education and Employment, 2001:7). As well as extended consideration of processes, provision of space, movement etc the guidelines suggest that design will extend subtle messages to children and adults about who particular spaces are intended for and their status.

'...the naming and placement of different areas' (within the whole learning environment) 'can be a fundamental consideration when becoming more inclusive, for a number of reasons. Take the example of *sensory rooms*. The name *sensory room* tells us a great deal about who is expected to use the space, the kinds of

special needs they are assumed to have and, on a psychological level, their place as special within the school' (p50).

The view taken of the school grounds may also reflect the perceived function of them, as well as the underlying philosophy and practice of the school (as Adams suggested above).

For example, in a wide-ranging discussion towards realising the rights of children in the urbanising world, Bartlett et al (1999:181) propose school yards as sites for play, learning and also models of sustainable development.

'Natural and diverse environments best suit many of the children's play and leisure needs, and can also become demonstration sites for the basic principles of sustainable development and urban regeneration. A bio-diverse school landscape serves not only as a rich microcosm for children to learn a wide range of environmental knowledge and skills, but as a training ground for environmental management.'

In a case study from a Columbian 'New School' Hart (1997) describes how children's participation in managing the environment of the school and the community is integral to the basic concept of the school as a community-based centre for democratic learning. Describing a visit to the school where the student representatives lead him on a tour of the grounds he is struck by the integration of the curriculum and the life of the community. 'The grounds of the school seemed to be limitless and my tour extended quite naturally out into the hills beyond' (p129).

Therefore we see that use of school grounds may serve to reflect and model the aspirations of the school and society more generally.

These aspirations as well as a number of other social and historical factors, education policy and programming create the framework for schools own use of school grounds for formal, informal and hidden curricula. Within the 3-5 curriculum framework (Scottish Office, 1999) explicit reference is made to the importance of outdoor experiences ('the outdoors can provide a scale and freedom for a type of play that is difficult to replicate indoors') however within the 5-14 reference is implicit rather than explicit. School grounds and links to the curriculum in Scotland are discussed in a later section of this paper on policy context.

Change focussing on behaviour, health and activity;

It is extremely difficult to separate health, play, physical activity and behaviour in the playground. We discussed above the interlinking of tradition, culture and the 'society of the playground', with all its attendant benefits, within which children also experience challenging or even harmful situations. The catalyst for environmental change as remarked above may be a desire to foster more 'positive' play, to reduce incidents of bullying or anti-social behaviours. As well as there being instigators for change within the school community, the school grounds are also identified as sites for intervention in terms of broader societal goals – to improve levels of physical activity, to increase environmental awareness, to engage with citizenship etc.

The 1998 Scottish Health Survey (cited in Lets Make Scotland More Active, 2003) found that amongst primary aged children one in three girls and one in four boys were not achieving the minimum recommended levels of activity. By the age of 14-15, only 65% of boys and 35% of girls were attaining it. There is clear potential for schools (and therefore school grounds) to provide consistent and equitable opportunities for healthy activity, in an appropriately supportive environment, for children and young people.

The evaluation of the Active Primary School Programme (SCRE, 2002) provides some useful data on children's current activity levels during playtime, physical education and after school (though it is not specified whether or not these take place in the school grounds). The programme aims to promote the range and quality of opportunities for play, sport, physical activity and active travel, both within and outwith the formal curriculum (p v). This is done by the provision of co-ordinators who take forward the programme's 'holistic approach to the potential of schools to influence the health and well-being of young people' (p1).

The evaluation highlights promising indications in the impact of the coordinators as well as reinforcing issues arising elsewhere (gender differences in physical activity with girls significantly less likely to engage in physical activity during play and lunchtimes, and the need for the programme to be supported by all in the school).

This evaluation found that headteachers did not formally monitor links between physical activity and learning or ethos targets. However it provides a useful review of evidence from the USA (citing Shephard et al 1884 (sic), Shephard 1997, Symons et al 1997) and UK (citing Schools Health Education Unit 2001, Lowden et al 2000) indicating links between physical activity and concentration, behaviour and academic achievement.

The 'holistic' approach differs from others which have a more specific focus of intervention. For example Stratton (2002) reviews work undertaken to address physical inactivity in children. While it is shown that particular interventions (e.g. introducing playground markings, a skipping programme) stimulated physical activity in the short term, the longer term effect is not known. The premise that because playgrounds are largely peer controlled they represent a more sustainable environment for the promotion of physical activity than other contexts such as physical education lessons again illustrates a central question in playtime intervention. As we discussed above, regarding the nature of children's experience in the school grounds, it could be argued that interventions since they don't originate from the playground culture, are less likely to be sustained because of the peer-controlled nature of the playground.

Participation and change

Children's participation in change, improvement and development of outdoor environments sparks debate on various levels – how best to involve children in processes of design and implementation, the benefits to the children and to the final designs; the rationale for involving children which may require a fundamental shift in adult-child relationships; how children's participation in school grounds developments can connect with broader agendas such as social inclusion and citizenship.

Sheat and Beer (1989) consider the potential for user participatory design as a way of 'providing a school environment that provides for and promotes a wide range of environmental learning experiences for pupils'. If children are to have some level of true participation in the design they emphasise the importance of a commitment to redistributing power through a reassessment of roles between adults and children. Their investigation of responses by children and Landscape Architecture students to various models of user participation raises interesting issues, of both a moral and ideological justification for user participation as well as economic and managerial.

Motivation for participation at different stages of the design process and the practical implications are considered by Sheat and Beer, for example, in developing a model of participation for professional designers, teachers and pupils, that as they put it 'aims to find a workable compromise between the extremes of full participation and no participation at all' (1994:90).

The Learning through Landscapes Trust has developed an eight stage 'process of school grounds development' that underpins their practice (Stoneham 1996, Kenny 1996) from sharing the concept, through establishing needs, to monitoring and evaluation. They say that, while what is done outside is important, it is the way that it is done that is particularly significant, stressing a long term process, a whole school community approach and participation of children with adults.

Mannion (2003b: 11) offers an interesting take on 'different essential fictions of the child-as-participant' portrayed by the diverse approaches to the changing school grounds - positioning children as different types of learners, actors or subjects. Different opportunities are identified, repressed or excluded due to this positioning of the child-participant. A typology of the 'prevailing utopic patterns of safety, romance, community, citizenship, sustainability and the "tribal child"' connect with identifications mobilised for children. For example, the eco-activist child identification connects to the 'utopics of sustainability: children work to address

biodiversity and conservation issues' or the child-in-need-of-teaching: 'play spaces become colonised as learning spaces in the utopic of the outdoor classroom'; and the tribal-child: 'children's unstructured free play and children's own cultures are important.' These types, purposes and the values inherent are likely to overlap.

Mannion (2003a:10) suggest that school grounds developments can be seen as 'efforts to create spaces for alternative cultural practices, wherein identities and learning can be opened up'. Behind these efforts are 'hopeful views about the 'place' of children in society.' He describes that in school grounds development projects the mode of learning was distinctly different from traditional schooling and that in some schools the projects were challenging the established values and effecting the culture of the whole school.

'Citizenship, community and ecological activism were literally emerging as important at the 'margins' of school sites and school culture.' (Mannion, 2003:15)

Hart (1997:26) describes the main goal of children's participation projects as 'conscientization.' Civic education, he suggests, must involve exposing children to different perspectives and values in their own community.

In Scotland, Mannion (2003b) describes a growing debate on how education might address the need for a more active citizenry, a debate fuelled by the new Scottish Parliament, growing scepticism about traditional structures of democracy and low participation rates in elections. He identifies signs towards a different view of education for citizenship, for example in this recent consultation document on education for citizenship:

'Approaches to all aspects of education for citizenship in the classroom, or the wider life of the school or community should be informed by the awareness that citizenship is best learnt through experience and interaction with others. In short, learning about citizenship is best achieved by being an active citizen'. (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2002: 10)

School grounds then offer an important site for the real experience and interaction with others through which children and adults might achieve models of participation and active, informed citizenship.

Insert Figure 1 – Influences on the use of school grounds

Successfully supporting change

Lessons for successfully supporting improvements and developments are discussed here by way of summary. Due weight should be given to the strong notes of caution given, regarding the importance of the arena school grounds provide for children's self-directed activity, the complex dynamic of school grounds, and the difficulty of understanding it from the perspective of children. However since school grounds are rarely seen to meet the play, the social or the educational needs of the school community, there is certainly a strong case for change and development.

Richardson (2000) in a study of processes of playground improvement in five schools found practical barriers to improvement including a 'pattern of daily disruption', an inclination to relinquish responsibility to 'experts' or to be funding-led. This is understandable given the competing demands on staff time and indeed schools are busy places. School teachers themselves estimate that they spend between 15% and 50% of their contracted working hours (HM Inspectors of Schools, 1999) on administrative tasks much of which could be done by support staff. The report recommends questioning current staffing structures in schools (which mean that teaching staff are diverted away from activities which are aimed at delivering high-quality education and improving attainment) and the development of alternative models (p3).

However attitude to the school grounds and their use is also fundamental. Titman (1994:57) points out the difference between adults' and children's view of the school. Children viewed their school - the grounds and the building - as an entity whereas for adults particularly teachers, the school meant the building and the grounds were merely the space outside.

However she found that where the school grounds had been developed in some way the views of the children and the adults came together with the building and the grounds now being seen as one entity. This challenges the indoor, fixed curriculum based teaching approach with a more open-ended, outdoor and outward looking one.

There is a strong argument that a 'whole school approach' is the most supportive factor in school grounds development and change. Although there may be individual instigators and motivations for change, where the process becomes one for the whole school community these changes are most likely to be sustained. This whole school approach is seen to be significant to change not just in environment but in interventions on play and behaviour.

PlayLink (1999) Play at School 'focuses on adult perceptions of play and examines how these perceptions help to create the play environment... Schools were in essence given the opportunity to create value: a play policy; a play committee; a requirement to work together' (p23).

'We have become increasingly aware that there are many layers and levels involved in addressing playground issues... for example, bullying and/or racism and sexist behaviour, issues of the use of and management of play space.... There is a need to concentrate on a variety of areas of focus and involve all members of the school community. (Ross and Ryan 1994:172 in Blatchford and Sharp eds.)

'Playground development needs to be viewed in the overall picture of school management, with an understanding of how the society of the playground operates, and a systematic approach to making sense of children's behaviour within it.' (Blatchford and Sharp, 1994:184)

Put quite simply we can see that more should be done to provide school grounds that actually meet the range of needs of its range of users.

'The goals of the school must be clear and the physical environment must be planned to support these goals' (Bartlett et al, 1999:177)

End note: school grounds as compensation

Sutton-Smith argues that free play in the school playground deserves support on the basis of children's rights.

'If it be contested that this is a matter for their own private and home time, it can be pointed out that with smaller families and less street play, many of the political opportunities and skills once taken for granted as being acquired in children's free play are not so readily available. The schools now remain one of the few places in which access to other children is in sufficient numbers for playmate choice in age and disposition to be available.' (1990:7)

Sutton-Smith here, along with others raises the issue here that school grounds can compensate for a diverse range of diminishing opportunities in the 'outside world' - opportunities for play, for adult free time, for interaction with the environment, for healthy activity. For example:

'Schools are one of the few places left where parents feel it is safe to send their children' (PlayLink, 1999:5)

'School grounds represented a repository for all the needs which they (children) believed could only be met through the environment' (Titman, 1994:56)

'In short, the school playground festival is now one of the few places where a distant and nonintrusive supervision is possible so that children's political rights can be guaranteed consistent with an adult concern for their safety. The school playground still provides the one assured festival in the lives of children' (Sutton-Smith, 1990:7).

'Social surveys have shown that because children are now spending less and less time 'playing out', the school playground becomes correspondingly more important as a social setting for outside, 'unofficial' and self directed activities.' (Blatchford and Sharp, 1994:33)

As Adams (1990:5) suggested (in the last century)

'the vision of the new school landscape is a challenging one. It rejects our preconceptions of what the school environment is for and what it should look like. It requires us to project into the future and to consider the nature of schooling in the next century and to consider what functions the school environment might serve'.

This question of *school grounds as compensation* raises important questions regarding the capacity and appropriateness of school grounds to fulfil these societal needs and functions, and whether there is the vision and the motivation to do so.

School grounds in the Scottish policy and planning context

At the time of writing three key documents of particular relevance to school grounds have been launched by the Scottish Executive: Building our Future, Scotland's School Estate (2003); Educating for Excellence, The Executive's Response to the National Debate (2003); Let's Make Scotland More Active, A strategy for physical activity (2003). This section deals with making the connections between school grounds and these and other documents, covering:

- Regulations & non-statutory guidance
- The school estate
- Linking the school environment and the National Priorities in Education
- Curriculum connections
- Educating for Excellence
- Values, ethos and citizenship

Regulations and non-statutory guidance

The school estate in Scotland is made up of around 2300 primary schools, 400 secondary schools, 200 special schools and units and 400 self standing nursery schools, as well 1000 nurseries attached to primary schools. (Scottish Executive *Statistical Bulletin* Education Series 20 June 2002).

The regulations for standards relating to their grounds are found in the School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967 and the amendments of 1973 and 1979. The standards relate to the area of sites, minimum education accommodation and ancillary accommodation which includes outdoor educational and recreational areas. The Schools (Safety and Supervision of Pupils) Scotland Regulations 1990 provide that in primary schools with fifty or more pupils and in special schools, pupils will be supervised by at least one adult in the playground at break times.

The Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Educational Records) (Scotland) Act requires local authorities and other bodies responsible for schools to prepare and implement accessibility strategies to improve over time access to education for pupils and prospective pupils with disabilities. The improvements fall into three strands: access to the curriculum, the school environment and school communication. Children with disabilities should be able to access all areas and activities of the school including outdoor facilities.

Non-statutory guidance is also provided in Area Guidelines for Schools (Building Bulletin 82, DfEE, 1996) which includes school grounds and recognises the formal, informal and hidden curriculum aspects of the school grounds. Of the formal curriculum, only PE (and only 50% of that) is assumed to be timetabled out of doors. School grounds are seen as offering opportunities for pupils' education, recreation and social development; for community use; and for developing links with sports clubs (p45). Further non-statutory guidance is provided in a short chapter in Special Schools (Building Bulletin 77, DfEE 1992) which draws again on the earlier Outdoor Classroom (Building Bulletin 71, DfE 1990) and Learning through Landscapes' 'Grounds for Sharing' (Stoneham, 1996). Building Bulletin 94 (DfEE 2001) on Inclusive School Design also gives a small amount of advice on outdoor landscapes, play and sport.

The Strategy for Physical Activity (2003) recommends that all children and young people take part in at least one hour a day of physical activity – including PE, play, sport, exercise, dance, and outdoor activities - much of which could be supported by schools. It therefore appears that far more attention could be given to the outdoor space rather than relegating it to the status of 'ancillary accommodation'. In particular, children with disabilities are found to be at greater risk of diseases associated with inactivity because they are less active than other young people. Therefore an appropriate outdoor environment is particularly important to meeting their needs.

sportscotland was made a statutory consultee on all planning applications for development affecting playing fields, through the National Planning Policy Guideline 11 (NPPG11) Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space. However development pressures on playing fields are as strong as ever and **sportscotland** has adopted a policy for the protection and improvement of playing fields (**sportscotland**, undated). The policy points out several important issues that must be borne in mind. **sportscotland's** remit extends only to sport, while planning authorities must also take into account the importance of playing fields for public amenity and informal recreation. The planning system can prevent development on a playing field, however it cannot ensure that a playing field continues to be used for sport and recreation.

The School Estate

Through Building our Future, Scotland's School Estate, published in early 2003, the Scottish Executive aims to 'raise and then maintain the quality of the school estate across Scotland'. It states that the vision of the strategy is for:

'well designed, well built and well managed schools that:

- support national and local priorities;
- inspire children, young people and communities

a future school estate that:

- meets our aspirations;
- responds to evolving needs;
- is effectively managed and maintained over the long term' (p5)

Implementation of the strategy will primarily be through the development of a school estate management plan for each local authority.

'Local authorities should prepare initial school estate management plans, and submit a summary of these to the Scottish Executive, by December 2003. These will provide a picture of the school estate locally and across Scotland, and inform national decisions on issues such as funding. It is likely that local authorities will want to update these plans on an annual basis, with a more fundamental review every 3-5 years.' (p10)

'This plan will be a valuable management tool: it will be a living document which will draw together information to allow the authority to plan, implement and monitor progress. It should be integrated with the authority's wider asset management plans, its corporate plan and, increasingly, with its community plan.' (p8)

There is a concern that unless it is clear that the school *grounds* are a fundamental part of the school *environment* then it is possible that the focus of plans will fall back onto buildings. Mention is made of the outdoor space for example on page 31, 'external environment: this includes the physical construction and condition of buildings and grounds, and the impact on the local environment, taking account of issues such as noise, pollution, efficient use of resources, sustainability and transport'.

However the emphasis is on the delivery of 'better services within the school environment that focus on:

- the child at the centre – meeting the needs of individual children
- the school at the heart of the community – meeting the needs of communities' (p24)

These reflect a growing number of activities that children experience in school for example out of school provision, integrated education, social work and health education and promotion services.

According to the framework for the development of out of school care (Scottish Executive, School's Out, 2003) in the period to 2006, local authorities and childcare partnerships should give active consideration to having an out of school care club in every school (p104). At present, there are out of school clubs in around 18% of primary schools. The school estate strategy and the rolling out of the community school approach, mean that it will be particularly important for childcare partnerships, clubs and others with an interest in childcare to ensure that their needs are fully understood and indeed met when these strategies are put into practice (p46). The recommendations of the Physical Activity Taskforce again are particularly

relevant here since out of school care has the potential to enable opportunities for the range of physical activity recommended above for children, in the club and in the school grounds. While attention is given in this report to the fitness of premises, this focuses on meeting standards for building control, environmental health and fire safety rather than on the outdoor environment.

The new community schools approach is also very relevant to the Physical Activity Task Force strategic objective to 'develop and maintain long-lasting, high-quality physical environments to support inactive people become active (p23).

Linking the school environment and the national priorities in education

The School Estate Strategy makes explicit the link between the school environment and priorities in education.

'The National Priorities in Education were designed to ensure that every young person has the chance to meet their full potential and that the gap for those not sharing the general level of attainment and well-being is closed. The school environment is central to this.' (p4)

The 'National Priorities in Education' as approved by the Scottish Parliament 2000, are defined under the following headings:

- Achievement and Attainment
- Framework for Learning
- Inclusion and Equality
- Values and Citizenship
- Learning for Life (source: National Priorities in Education Website)

The priorities are linked to a framework of outcomes and referenced against performance and quality indicators from the 'how good is our school?' evaluation system. It is possible to link National Priorities to the school grounds through these outcomes and indicators, although it requires a process rather like excavation to unearth the possibilities.

The third outcome of the priority 'Framework for Learning', is 'enhanced school environments which are more conducive to teaching and learning.' Reference is also made to quality indicator 6.1 from 'How good is our school' which relates to accommodation and facilities.

The explanation of the fourth priority on 'values and citizenship' is 'to work with parents to teach pupils respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society and to teach them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society.'

Reference is made to performance and quality indicators for example the percentage of schools participating in the eco schools award or similar accredited environmental awards.

'Learning for Life' is intended 'to equip pupils with the foundation skills, attitudes and expectations to prosper in a changing society and to encourage creativity and ambition.' Reference is made to the performance measures indicating the proportion of pupils participating in cultural, sport and learning activities in the core curriculum.

The exercise is similar with the 3 - 5 and 5 - 14 curricula, in which explicit links to the outdoor environment can be found for the younger children, but where these are implicit for 5 - 14 year olds.

Curriculum Framework for Children 3 - 5

The curriculum framework intends to help staff to plan activities and experiences that promote children's development and learning in five areas:

Emotional personal and social development

Communication and language

Knowledge and understanding of the world

Expressive and aesthetic development

Physical development and movement' (Scottish Office, 1999)

This area of 'knowledge and understanding of the world' refers to the importance of children's natural curiosity, which 'drives them to explore the environment in a variety of ways by using their senses and at times to wonder at its beauty and scale' and recognises that through this children will also 'develop interests in their natural surroundings, including familiar animals and plants. They readily become involved in the care of plants and pets and should recognise features of living things.'

In 'physical development and movement' the many benefits of physical play are detailed and also the need for 'energetic play that involves running jumping and skipping'. It highlights the importance of 'large scale apparatus such as a climbing frame, wooden logs, a climbing frame and small tricycles, bicycles and carts.'

It clearly states that 'opportunities for physical activity should be provided both inside and out' and that 'the outdoors can provide a scale and freedom for a type of play that is difficult to replicate indoors, for example, opportunities to dig a garden, explore woodland, run on the grass, roll down a grassy slope and pedal a car across a hard surface.'

The 5 -14 Curriculum

The 5 -14 Curriculum (Scotland) Guidelines are produced by the Scottish Executive and Learning and Teaching Scotland (source Learning and Teaching Scotland website).

Of the key areas of the curriculum for 5 – 14 year olds the following can be identified as of particular relevance to school grounds:

- It is expected that through Environmental Studies pupils will gain the skills, knowledge, and understanding of environmental, economic and social factors, which will help them to adopt informed values and attitudes to the environment and to take better-informed decisions. Pupils are expected to develop an active awareness and understanding of broad ranging issues - global and development issues and sustainable development - and to develop an understanding of their rights and responsibilities, the importance of active citizenship.
- The expressive arts (which includes physical activity)
- Religious and Moral Education (RME) should provide opportunities for the development of moral values. 'By the establishment of a caring atmosphere, an emphasis on good personal relationships, the ethos of the school will be an important element in developing appropriate moral values and a sense of individual and collective responsibility.'
- Personal and Social Development (PSD) and Health Education (HE): the central focus of which is the 'health-promoting school', for enabling pupils to respect their own personal and social development and health, and that of others. 'An effective programme for PSD and HE will offer pupils opportunities to develop their self-awareness and self-esteem, recognise their uniqueness, explore attitudes and values, develop an interpersonal skills and increase their knowledge and understanding about a range of lifestyles and health issues.'

The guidelines also raise the importance of cross-curricular aspects in particular in the areas of Personal and Social Development, and Education for Citizenship.

Educating for Excellence

In January 2003 The Scottish Executive responded to the National Debate in Education, with 'Educating for Excellence, Choice and Opportunity.' The outcomes stated in the framework for improvement are set in the context of the new Standards in Scotland etc Act 2000, the Act which introduced the setting of the National Priorities in Education.

In response to the National Debate four key areas of development are identified, prioritising 'immediate action' and 'further development' (p 5). The areas include:

- learning and teaching;
- pupils, parents and the community;
- working together;
- and modern schools.

Two key areas are linked directly to school grounds in the response: 'pupils, parents and the community' and 'modern schools': 'school facilities could be open longer' and discipline problems and bullying should be successfully tackled by pupils, teachers, and parents and communities working together' and 'through implementing the recommendations of the Discipline Task Group' (p10).

The report acknowledges comments and responses made during the debate. For pupils especially, the physical environment of the school is very important. 'Some school buildings do not assist effective learning' and 'ageing buildings make pupils feel that education is not valued by society... Pupils want more resources for new furniture, more books, more computers, improved playgrounds and personal lockers' (p18).

A key step identified as a priority, is to

'improve the condition of the school buildings and develop new schools to create a new schools estate in which all schools have the right facilities, are well designed, well built and provide a flexible environment which continues to meet future needs' (p18).

The terms 'school environment' and 'school estate' used in the document are somewhat ambiguous and may be open to interpretation. In the 'first step for action' the school grounds are not flagged up for particular attention or reflective of the kind of values expressed in, for example, The Outdoor Classroom which emphasised the potential of school grounds as a learning resource. On the other hand it could be argued that 'the right facilities' or 'a flexible environment to meet future needs' would necessarily include outdoor learning and play.

The report states that it aims to complete the programme to build or substantially refurbish 300 schools by 2009. The report also states that it aims to 'work with education authorities and other stake holders to plan how to make further improvements to school buildings and make sure they are well maintained' and to 'produce revised guidelines on Devolved School Management with greater control over budgets to head teachers'. This in turn links back to 'Building our Futures'.

Values, ethos and citizenship

In 2001 the Discipline Task Group from the Scottish Executive produced a report, 'Better Behaviour – Better Learning'. In forming the key principles the Task Group referred to the National Priorities in Education.

The report addresses issues in relation to discipline and behaviour in the context of all aspects of school life including the underpinning values and ethos, such as participation, citizenship, equality, respect and inclusion. The 36 recommendations at the end of the report make it clear that policies in relation to discipline cut across the whole school including 'public areas within the school' and that 'schools should develop agreed systems for shared responsibility between staff at all levels for the conduct and behaviour of children and young people in corridors, playgrounds and all public areas within the school' (p13).

The report recognises that:

'There is concern over increasing levels of indiscipline and anti-social behaviour witnessed outside the classroom in corridors, playgrounds, dining areas, on school buses and also areas immediately adjacent to school grounds' (p5)

The report highlights the need to reduce systems which are bureaucratic and negative. It highlights the need for there to be a positive ethos 'which needs to be nurtured and developed

over time to bring lasting benefits' (p6) and for pupils and parents to have a sense of ownership in relation to improvement strategies.

'Many schools, supported by their local authorities, are experimenting with ways of genuinely involving young people and their parent/carers in decision making about aspects of school life' (p 6).

Much of the research in relation to school grounds refers to the social interaction and behaviour of the children. This also links many aspects of the curriculum and the school grounds. For example the 5 -14 curriculum guide identifies the importance of Personal and Social Development in fostering positive qualities in young people, drawing on the whole life of the school.

The Moral and Religious Education also emphasises that the ethos of the school is an important element in developing appropriate moral values and a sense of individual and collective responsibility.

The 'Education for Citizenship in Scotland' paper sets out the position of the Advisory Council of Learning and Teaching Scotland on education for citizenship together with recommendations for actions. This paper also links the curriculum and citizenship and quotes case studies highlighting the significance of school grounds.

The paper suggests two core themes which they suggest need to be considered by local authorities, school and early years centres: that young people learn most about citizenship by being active citizens; and that, the development of capability for citizenship should be fostered in ways that motivate young people to be active and responsible members of their communities.

The paper provides interesting examples from Stirling and Stromness where outdoor play and playground design were the motivating factors resulting in improved participation of pupils.

An interesting discussion of the directions of education relating to citizenship, inclusion and social inclusion with a Scottish context can be found in Mannion (2003b).

Summary

School grounds are literally and metaphorically on the outside. The literature review found much research that was relevant to the grounds while not making it the central focus. Similarly school grounds are directly relevant to the policy and strategic framework however much is open to interpretation.

The primary users of school grounds, children and young people, were not generally found to be active participants in research. From children's perspective the school grounds contribute significantly to their experience of school and the development of their attitude to the environment as a whole. In Scotland we do not have baseline information on the range of uses and users of school grounds or their attitudes to the school grounds. Nor do we know if the trend towards reduction and restriction of break and lunchtime is moving in the same direction in Scotland, as information has not been collected nor changes monitored.

There are clearly opportunities within the framework of policy and priorities for greater and more beneficial use of school grounds. These connect to improvement of activity levels and health, the new community school approach, curricula and cross cutting issues such as rights, responsibilities and citizenship. However these are *opportunities* and do not reflect a general recognition of the importance of school grounds nor a strategic approach to realising their potential.

Ensuring that school grounds are explicitly considered at these strategic levels remains to be argued for. For example, it seems reasonable to argue that out of school provision that is fit for purpose would necessarily mean that children have access to appropriate outdoor environments; that school estate management plans and monitoring should include school grounds; that in order to educate for excellence the 'flexible environment to meet future needs' would necessarily include outdoor learning and space to play.

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Policy Context

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