



BLAIRVADACH
OUTDOOR EDUCATION SERVICES
IMPACT
REPORT
2024/26



Contents

- 3 2024 - 2026 in numbers
- 4 Welcome
- 5 Stuff we shout about
- 7 All Learners All Achieving
- 8 Residential Experiences
- 13 Duke of Edinburgh Award
- 16 Blairvadach at Pinkston Basin
- 19 Therapeutic Outdoor Education
- 21 Collaborations and Partnerships
- 23 Conclusion



2024 - 2026 in numbers



5,682

young people
experienced
a residential



1,905

experienced a
Glasgow Urban
Adventure Award at
Pinkston basin



Worked with

154

schools and units



27,534+

Learning Days

(one person = one day)



4,000

DofE Enrolments
and Expeditions
supported



“They developed a keen sense of self-awareness and appreciation for their own and others' contributions, creating a nurturing environment where everyone's efforts were valued.”

Welcome

For more than 50 years, Blairvadach has made a sustained contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people through high-quality outdoor learning.

You will notice the name of the service has been officially changed this year, the word 'Service' has been included instead of 'Centre'. This change reflects the wider remit and greater reach of our work. We are now known as **Blairvadach Outdoor Education Services** and includes our residential centre, outdoor learning training, a city-based outdoor centre, a peripatetic team working with care experienced young people and support for the city's Duke of Edinburgh's Award. This evolution strengthens our ability to deliver accessible, equitable and responsive outdoor education across Glasgow.

Our work directly supports Curriculum for Excellence, developing the knowledge, skills and attributes young people need to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. We present this 2026 Impact Report at a time of significant national change, including Scotland's introduction of statutory residential outdoor education provision. This policy commitment reinforces the vital role outdoor learning plays in supporting wellbeing, attainment and equity.

Amid rapid technological advancement and increasing concern around young people's anxiety and resilience, the importance of relational, experiential and place-based learning has never been clearer. In response, all Blairvadach programmes - residential, city-based and outreach - are intentionally designed to promote emotional regulation, positive behaviour and relationship-based practice.

Our revised residential programme now operates as a coherent learning pathway, incorporating structured pre- and post-visit classroom learning to strengthen progression and sustained impact. Across all strands, we remain committed to equity and inclusion, ensuring high-quality outdoor learning is accessible to all.

This report evidences the breadth, depth and impact of Blairvadach Outdoor Education Services in supporting Glasgow's young people to thrive.

Neil Wightwick

Blairvadach Outdoor Education Services



Stuff we shout about...

Delivery of the Glasgow Urban Adventure Award (GUAA) at our permanent city centre base at Pinkston Watersports Centre.

In partnership with Glasgow Virtual School and Glasgow Psychological Services, our instructional team work with young people who struggle to engage with schools and are care experienced. The therapeutic outdoor education programme builds trust, resilience and confidence in young people. In many cases, this programme is the only formal education engagement these young people have.

Residential Programmes facilitate personal and social growth for individuals, support the transition from Primary to Secondary and in later years deliver supported study and skills acquisition experiences.

Blairvadach supports schools through outdoor learning training, resources and special projects. Delivering training in school grounds, local parks and wild areas. Hosting and maintaining a suite of outdoor learning resources which includes the very popular school camps orienteering maps.

A team of Award Coaches supports School Leaders and DofE Coordinators to deliver Scotland's most successful Duke of Edinburgh Award programme, through training, advice, administration and direct delivery.



Recent programme developments

- ✓ Further integration of the Blairvadach experiences **into the school journey** through the pre and post visit portfolios.
- ✓ A place of **digital detox** or integration of digital learning and Outdoor Learning
- ✓ Established the GUAA as a **bespoke outdoor learning award** for Glasgow Schools - relevant and authentic to their own city.
- ✓ Outdoor Learning as an **entitlement to all learners** not just an enrichment.
- ✓ Outdoor Learning City Centre Base. A resource for **support and delivery** of outdoor learning
- ✓ Further research into the **known positive impacts** Outdoor Learning has on social, economic and academic outcomes.

“ I loved seeing some of the young people problem solve during some activities, such as the night light task - they all had to rely on communication and listening which for a good few of them is very difficult. ”



All Learners All Achieving

Blairvadach's services respond to the five grand challenges identified in All Learners All Achieving by providing:



Wellbeing and Learning

Positive role models sharing opportunities and creating life long memories.

Pupil led programmes where choice delivers engagement and achievement.

Fully immersive experiential learning experiences. Bringing learning to life.

Learning that is relevant to local communities creating responsible global citizens.

Networked Learning Organisation

Our team have built a culture of collaboration where they work and learn together.

A networked, self-improving learning system with collective agency.

Achievement and Progress

Recognising achievement with alternative national accreditation.

Providing alternative learning environments to support appropriate pathways and outcomes for all.

Supporting a range of wider achievement programmes that build confident learners that enables them to reach their potential.

Through the way the service is funded we remove the largest barrier to accessing wider achievement programmes across the city, improving life chances for all.

Connected Learning

Proven learning experiences that are interest-driven and directly influenced by the pupil voice

Peer-supported and academically orientated experiences

Connections to the spheres of home, school, community and real-world learning

Engaging activities that promote lifelong learning.

Engagement, Participation and Inclusion

A service committed to UNCRC Article 29.

A service that tailors provision to meet the needs of its young people.

Listening to the pupil voice and celebrating the success of learners at every opportunity.

Providing authentic experiences in an extraordinary environment that translates back to the ordinary.

Residential Experiences

Residential visits to Blairvadach give young people the chance to learn, grow and build confidence in a setting that is very different from the classroom.

Being away from home and learning outdoors helps young people discover new strengths, develop important life skills and build stronger relationships with their peers and teachers.

Learning during a residential visit is active and hands-on. Young people work together to solve problems, take part in outdoor challenges and reflect on what they have learned. These experiences help them build confidence, resilience and a positive attitude to learning. Many young people return to school more willing to try new things and with a stronger belief in their own abilities.

Residential experiences are carefully planned to support learning in school. Activities link to Curriculum for Excellence and cover a wide range of learning areas. Topics such as climate change, sustainability, biodiversity and caring for the environment are woven throughout the programme, helping young people understand their role in the world and encouraging them to become responsible and informed citizens. Learning does not stop when the residential ends; pre- and post-visit activities help young people make clear connections between their outdoor experience and classroom learning.

Time spent away from home plays an important role in supporting young people's wellbeing. During their stay, young people take responsibility for their belongings, shared spaces and equipment. They help make decisions, manage everyday routines and learn how to live and work alongside others. These experiences support independence, emotional resilience and positive behaviour.



Strong bonds are formed between young people and school staff, creating a supportive and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued.

For many young people, residential visits provide a powerful sense of achievement. Completing activities they once thought were too difficult helps build self-esteem and pride. These successes often carry back into school life, leading to improved confidence, motivation and engagement with learning.

“ You can see the children developing their life skills and qualities during the week and after they return to school. ”

Primary School Teacher, 2025



Residential experiences also offer valuable opportunities for wider achievement, particularly for young people who may find it difficult to shine in traditional classroom settings.

Blairvadach continues to develop its residential programmes to ensure they meet the changing needs of young people and schools. By extending learning into the classroom before and after visits, we maximise the positive impact of every residential experience.

Together with families, schools and partners, Blairvadach remains committed to providing high-quality outdoor learning experiences that support young people to thrive - both in education and beyond.

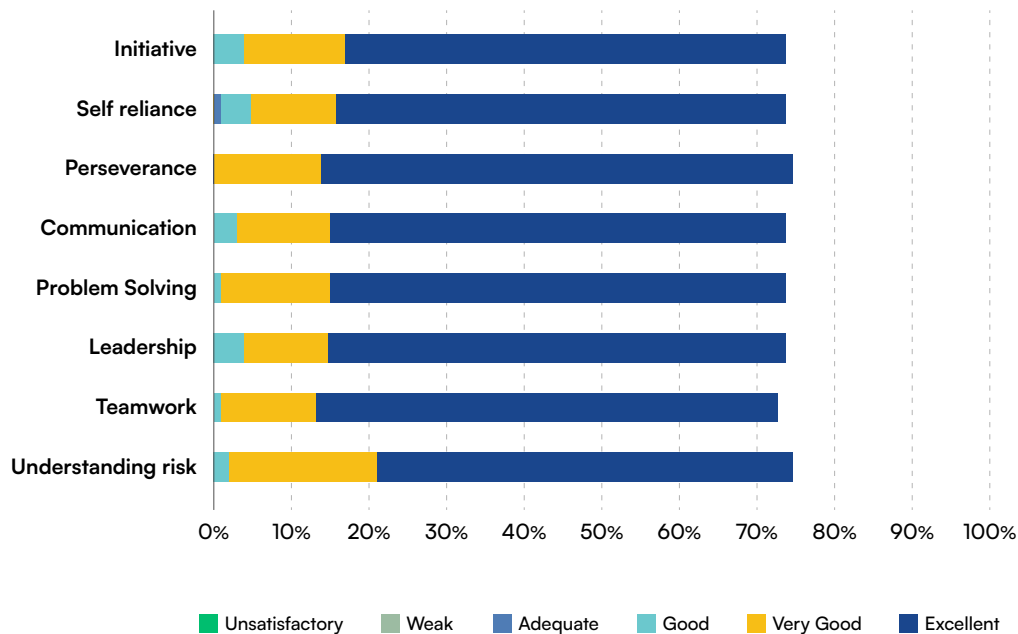
“ Their week at BV was a special chance for them to grow and focus on important qualities and life skills. Many showed great initiative. They learned to rely on themselves and on others in their groups, becoming more confident in their abilities, and they showed perseverance as they faced challenges with determination. Their communication skills were encouraged by their instructors, helping them express themselves clearly and effectively. ”

Primary School Teacher, 2025



What teachers said about Blairvadach Residential Experiences

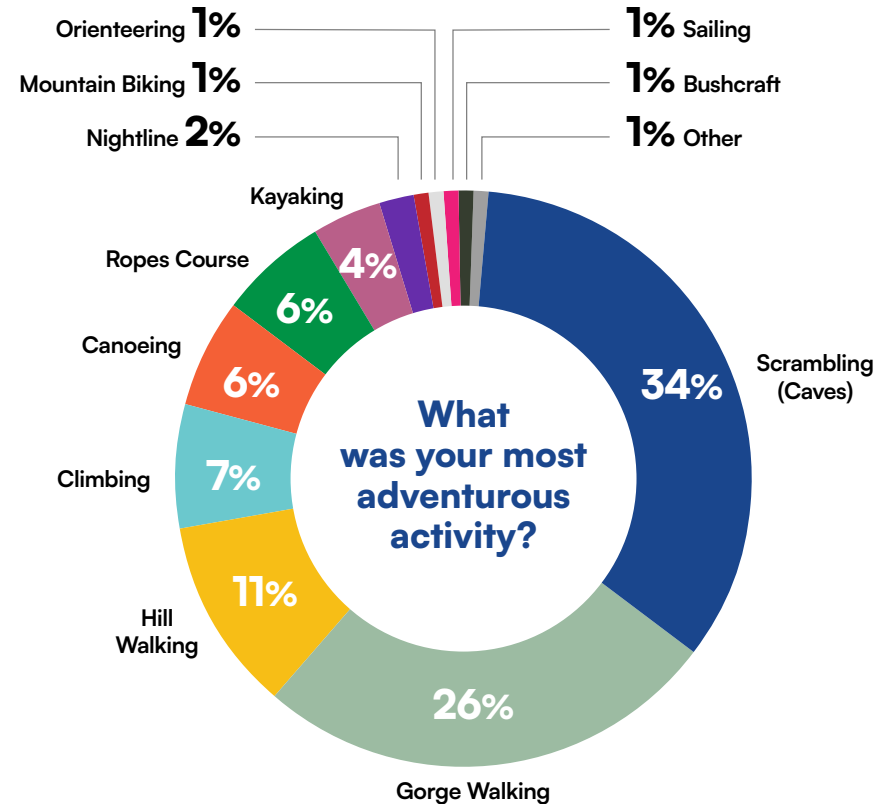
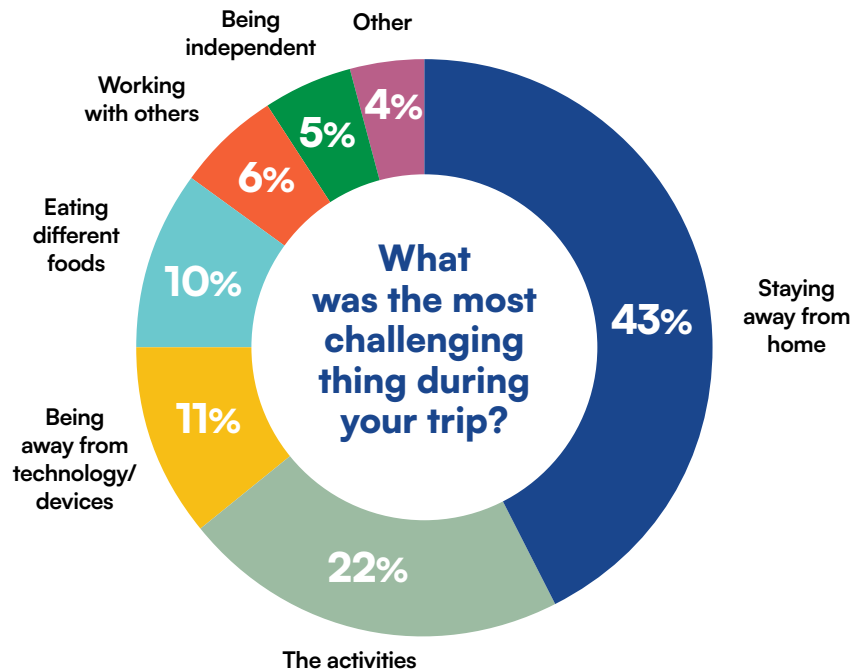
Developing and extending their use of Personal Qualities and Life Skills



“The excellent instruction staff provided the right amount of support and challenge to each child in their group and helped them to develop these lifelong skills/qualities.”

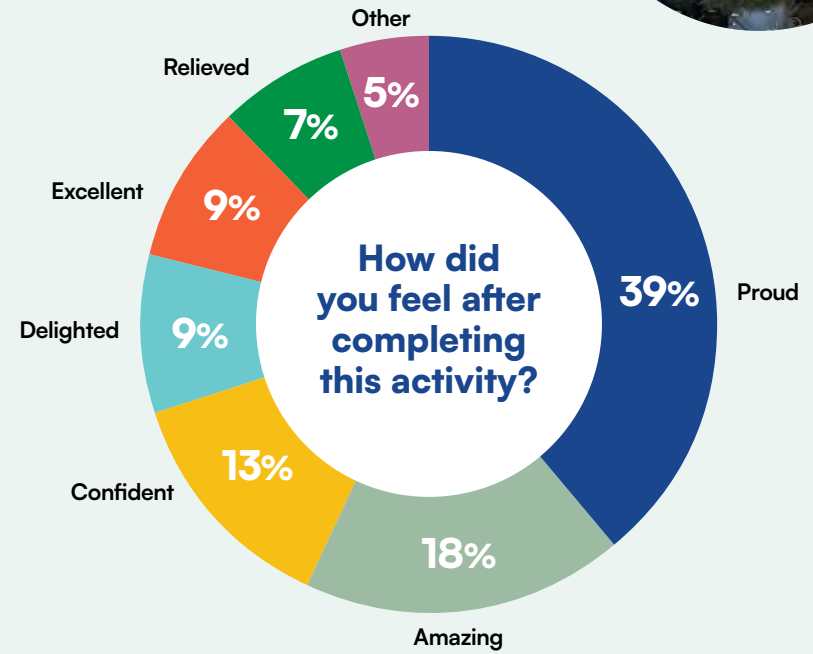
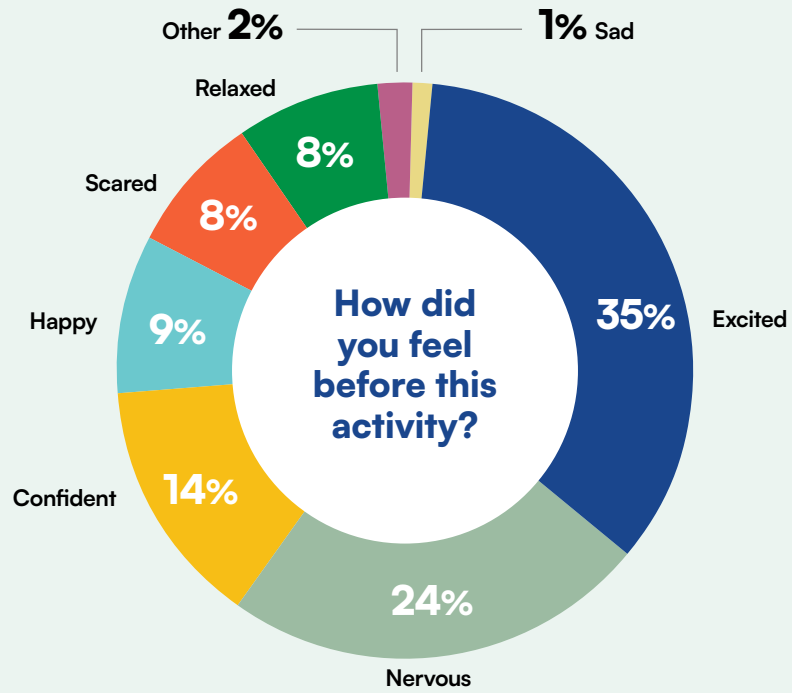
Primary School Teacher, 2025

What pupils said about Blairvadach Residential Experiences



“ Within the groups it was really nice to see different young people excel during different activities, you could really see where some of them had confidence, reassurance and would naturally volunteer to go first to show the group and become a great team member through reassuring the rest of the group. ”

What pupils said about Blairvadach Residential Experiences



Duke of Edinburgh Award

The Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) Glasgow Team plays a vital role in developing young people across the city by building strong support networks around the Award.

Through high-quality leader training, direct school support, and citywide initiatives, they ensure consistent, inclusive delivery in every mainstream secondary school. By strengthening programme capacity, they create more opportunities for young people to build confidence, resilience, leadership skills, and a sense of achievement. Their work helps remove barriers to participation, enabling more young people—regardless of background—to access life-changing experiences that broaden horizons, develop employability skills, and encourage active citizenship within their communities.



19,266

hours of voluntary community service which equates to **£92,669** of local economic benefit

In 2024/26 the award contributed:



1,525

young people took part in an expedition, delivering a total of **5,266** outdoor days on a DofE programme

52.2%

of Glasgow awards achieved are from **SIMD 1-3**, **8.5%** from ASN and **31.3%** from ethnic minority

47.7%

of Glasgow enrolments are from **SIMD 1-3**, **8.5%** from ASN and **29.8%** from ethnic minority

Glasgow is leading the way nationally with these statistics.

“The Silver expedition was such a great experience, not just because of the paddling, but because of the people. At night we’d sit by the campfire, talk, laugh, and just chill after a long day on the water. We’ve all become really close since then - some of us weren’t even friends before. The trip brought us together, and now we’ve got memories and friendships that’ll last. It’s something I’ll never forget.”

Springburn Academy Pupil, 2025



Blairvadach at Pinkston Basin

The Blairvadach hub at the Pinkston basin offers access to our high quality outdoor education service in the city centre. The facility has a focus on delivering our Glasgow Urban Adventure Award, National Outdoor Learning Award and National Proficiency awards in kayaking and canoeing.

2024-2026 Glasgow Urban Adventure Awards

The Glasgow Urban Adventure Award (GUAA) at Blairvadach is an exciting, city-centre outdoor learning experience designed to inspire young people through challenge, choice and real-world adventure. Delivered at Pinkston Basin, the award blends kayaking, canoeing, problem-solving, environmental action and teamwork into a dynamic programme built around three pathways: Wild Self, Wild Others and Wild Environment. Young people develop confidence, resilience and leadership skills while gaining nationally recognised awards. Rooted in Glasgow's communities and aligned with Curriculum for Excellence, GUAA makes outdoor learning accessible, relevant and empowering - proving that powerful adventure and meaningful achievement can thrive right in the heart of the city.

The GUAA incorporates both an inclusive approach with "All Learners all Achieving" and values the "engagement and celebration of the voice of children and young people enabling contributions and ideas to be heard and considered to support the development of a meaningful curriculum" in line with the Glasgow Educational Strategy 22-27.

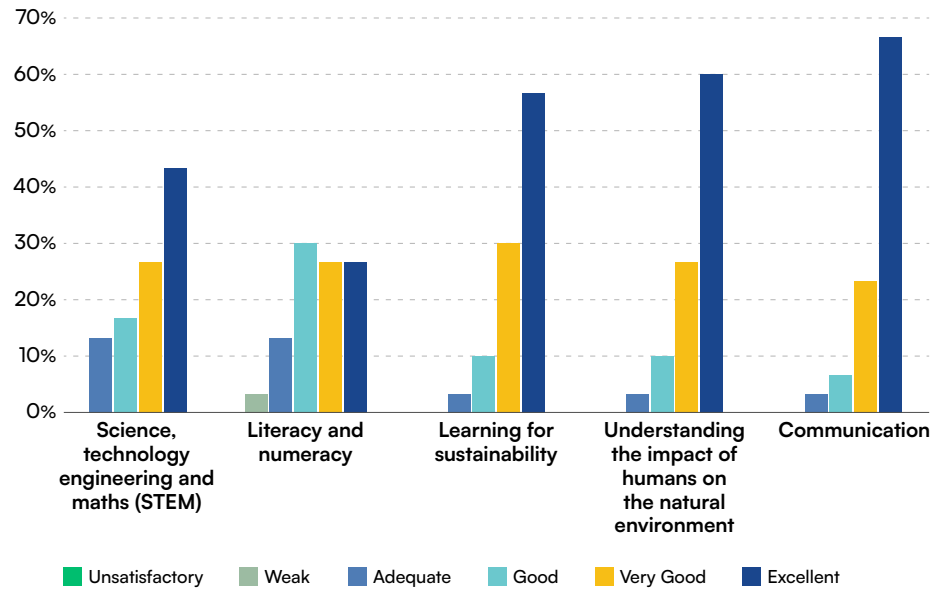
“ They learn to express their ideas, listen to others, and negotiate roles in a way that fosters teamwork and other skills. They develop empathy by seeing how their actions impact others, learning to support peers who may feel left out or frustrated. ”



What teachers said about Blairvadach at Pinkston Basin

The extract below from our school's feedback demonstrates the success of this programme at delivering a broad general education experiences and widening horizons. The full feedback survey can be found here.

How well did the course promote learning in the areas of Curriculum for Excellence



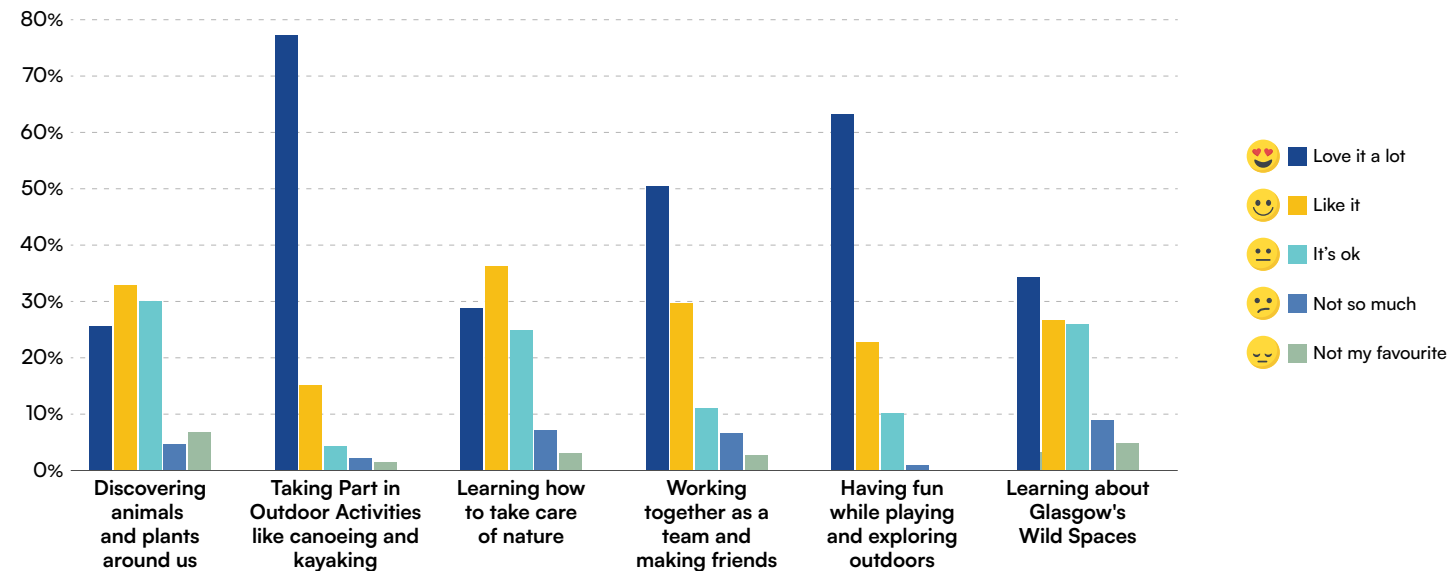
“The programme offered excellent opportunities for experiential learning in an urban context. It was well structured, engaging, and encouraged teamwork while modelling creative approaches that I could transfer into my own teaching. I particularly valued how it highlighted Glasgow’s local environment and culture as rich learning resources.”



Developing and extending their use of Personal Qualities and Life Skills



What were the important parts of the GUAA to you?



“Activities were varied each week and allowed children to appreciate the nature around them and have also given them knowledge of parks around Glasgow that they might now be likely to visit.”

“The pupils particularly enjoyed the water activities. Most, if not all, had never kayaked before and some were very apprehensive about it, so it was lovely to see them kayaking in the water and taking part in all these activities. I know they felt a real sense of pride and achievement and the majority of them want to try this again.”



Therapeutic Outdoor Education

Four years into this programme of partnering with the Glasgow Virtual School to provide care experienced learners with one to one or small group therapeutic outdoor education experiences.

Delivering 440 contact days to 32 young people. This high impact programme consistently delivers positive reports for young people who face many challenges.

The Outdoor Education Therapeutic Service at Blairvadach is a powerful intervention for care-experienced young people who are struggling to sustain their school placements. Set within a nurturing and inspiring environment, the programme uses outdoor learning as a catalyst for transformation - rebuilding trust, restoring confidence, and reigniting a sense of purpose.

Through carefully structured challenges and therapeutic support, young people rediscover their strengths, develop resilience, and experience success in ways that may previously have felt out of reach.

As their self-esteem and self-belief grow, so too does their capacity to re-engage positively with education. Participants consistently strengthen their social and emotional skills, build meaningful relationships, and develop a deeper sense of self-efficacy - skills that transfer directly back into the classroom.

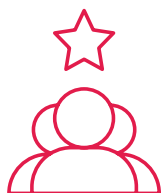
The result is not only improved engagement, but measurable improvements in educational outcomes, wellbeing, and long-term aspirations. Blairvadach provides more than an intervention; it offers a turning point.



“ Thanks for your work and patience with our young person and myself. Both the Primary team and I have noted a substantial change in the pupils behaviour and emotional state this year. Whilst a number of factors have led to this, I think the experiences with you have been a major component in this change, presenting an opportunity for them to develop, demonstrate and celebrate their capabilities ”

Parent of Young Person, 2026





Some young people do not attend school and this is the only or **one of few educational programmes they participate in each week**, usually with excellent attendance

100% of Blairvadach young people who attended **achieved a unit/course**



78.6%

engaged and sustained programme, with most **requesting further sessions**

QUALIFICATIONS ACHIEVED

2x

National Navigation Award Scheme (NNAS) outdoor discovery award 1 star

7x

Paddle Start Awards

3x

Paddle Discover Awards

3x

Go MTB Level 1 award

2x

Go MTB Level 2 award

5x

National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme (NICAS) level 1

1x

Go MTB Level 3 award



Collaborations and Partnerships



Extended Opportunities

Work Experience

We work with a range of education establishments to deliver meaningful work experience programmes. For the first time last year we hosted a long term work experience pupil from our local secondary school who, not only grew through the development opportunity of work experience but also gain a National 4 in Skills for Work.

DofE Gold Residentials

The Gold DofE Residential at Blairvadach Outdoor Centre is an unforgettable adventure on Scotland's stunning coast! Try sailing, kayaking and climbing while making new friends and pushing your limits. Build confidence, independence and teamwork skills - and leave with amazing memories, new strengths and a serious sense of achievement.

 **91** pupils on Gold DofE residentials

Promoting sailing

Blairvadach's partnership with the RYA, Royal Naval Sailing Association and Andrew Simpson Foundation delivers high-performance sailing pathways for all. Together, they expand access, develop talent and build confidence, leadership and resilience. The programme strengthens community connections, creates progression opportunities and inspires lifelong participation in sailing locally and beyond.





Glasgow Schools MCR Pathways 'Go For It' Programme

Empowering Young Lives Through Outdoor Education: The Impact of Trades House Sponsorship

In summer 2025, Trades House funded residential outdoor education for young people in the MCR Pathways Programme across Glasgow schools. These fully funded opportunities offered more than a break from the city - they created transformative experiences that fostered resilience, confidence, and connection.

Outdoor education is a powerful driver of personal growth. Through adventure learning, teamwork, and immersion in nature, pupils developed essential skills such as problem-solving, leadership, and collaboration - abilities vital for success in school and beyond.

For many participants facing personal and educational challenges, the impact was profound. Time away from familiar environments allowed them to uncover new strengths, build self-belief, and experience a sense of achievement. The calming influence of nature also supported mental and physical wellbeing, easing stress and anxiety.



The full report for 2024 can be found here



The full report for 2025 can be found here

Conclusion

As we look ahead in 2026, the national emphasis on learning in different environments and inclusive practice strongly affirms the direction of travel for Blairvadach.

Following years of change and challenge, our Wider Achievement services have remained agile, responsive and firmly child-centred - shaped by the dedication of our staff and the voices of young people, schools and families.

Across Scotland, there is growing recognition that achievement must be broad, equitable and rooted in real experiences. Outdoor learning delivers this. It removes barriers, re-engages learners who may struggle in traditional settings, and provides meaningful contexts where resilience, teamwork, leadership and problem-solving flourish.

By weaving outdoor experiences more intentionally into classroom learning, we strengthen progression, attainment and wellbeing simultaneously. Our ambition is clear: to deepen integration with schools, embed entitlement to high-quality outdoor learning, and expand inclusive pathways such as residential experiences, wider achievement awards and citywide initiatives. In doing so, we align fully with national priorities - equity, excellence and wellbeing.

Blairvadach is not simply responding to policy; we are actively realising it. Outdoor education remains a powerful, proven vehicle for inclusion, attainment and lifelong impact for Glasgow's young people.

“The children had a wonderful time during their residential week, filled with joy and personal growth. They took part in all their activities with eagerness, participating fully with the encouragement of their instructors. They were always supported and encouraged as they faced each day with curiosity and courage.”





Blairvadach Outdoor Education Centre

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