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# School Grounds in Scotland Research Report Summary

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Scottish Poverty Information Unit  
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## REPORTS

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## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

School grounds are an inexpensive yet versatile resource, which offer a unique setting to promote positive health and well-being, understanding of the environment, citizenship and physical activity for our school children. Grounds for Learning, Play Scotland and **sportscotland** commissioned John McKendrick, of the Scottish Poverty Information Unit, to undertake the first national survey of state sector school grounds in Scotland. This survey sought evidence on the current attitudes toward and use of Scottish school grounds, in order to inform national debate on how to target resources more effectively, support new initiatives and establish best practice in Scottish education.

## **SCHOOL GROUNDS IN SCOTLAND**

Improving Scotland's school grounds is a worthy objective in its own right. However, the significance of school grounds extends beyond their perimeter boundaries. School grounds should be viewed as an integral part of wider concerns with education in Scotland and children in society. Although school grounds have an important contribution to make to a diverse range of Scottish Executive priorities, this potential is rarely acknowledged in official documents, strategies and plans. The ten policy areas which this report contributes to, and which are examined in more detail in the full report, are: the nature of education, Scotland's school estate, McCrone and staffing, schools and their communities, community transport and planning, sustainability, biodiversity, inclusion, children in society, and sport and physical activity. The potential for incorporating "joined up policy interventions" in Scotland's school grounds is rarely realised. A strategic approach to school grounds development could, potentially, involve a wide range of agencies to address a wide range of concerns.

## **ABOUT THIS STUDY**

Every school in Scotland was surveyed in 2003. All local authorities in Scotland endorsed the research. Schools were approached with the permission of the Director of Education (or their equivalent) within their local authority area and head teachers (or their equivalent) were asked to arrange for the completion of the survey on behalf of their school.

Appropriate questionnaires were designed for nursery, primary, secondary and special schools and three abbreviated inserts were designed for schools that incorporated more than one age-stage and type of school on a single site (nursery class, primary section and Special Educational Need unit (hereafter SEN)). A sample questionnaire can be found in the annex to the main report.

The total number of questionnaires completed was 1963. The overall survey response rate was 47%, comprising 36% for providers of nursery level education (518 surveys returned), 53% for primary schools (1148 surveys returned), 52% for secondary schools (207 surveys returned), and 47% for special schools (90 surveys returned). Response rates for local authorities ranged from 28% (Edinburgh and Stirling) to 63% (East Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire).

Survey returns were sufficient to allow detailed analysis including differences emerging by school type, school roll, local authority and age of school.

The dataset will be lodged with the ESRC data archive in 2005.

**Key Points: The Study**

- 1,963 questionnaires were completed.
- 47% of schools took part in the survey.
- Schools from every local authority in Scotland participated.
- The research had the support of all 32 Directors of Education (or their equivalent).

**RESEARCH FINDINGS*****Scotland's School Estate***

Results from the *Scottish School Grounds Survey* provide useful context for current debates and policies that aim to develop Scotland's school estate. It is found that the Scottish Executive's on-going school building programme in Scotland is not of a sufficient scale to significantly alter the age profile of Scotland's schools (particularly primary schools and rural schools); concern over loss of school grounds seems disproportionate to the amount of land lost to development in recent times, although - given the Scottish Executive's commitment to support sport in schools - concern over the loss of playing fields in secondary schools may be warranted. Furthermore, the Scottish Executive's concern to foster 'community-based' schools is far removed from the reality of primary school grounds in Scotland, given that only one in eight primary school grounds are currently used by community-based organisations.

There is great variation in size within each school type; reference to 'primary schools' or 'secondary schools' must therefore be made with caution.

The character of Scotland's school estate varies across geographical areas. There is some evidence of an urban/rural divide in terms of school roll (smaller primary schools in rural local authorities), age of school (more older schools in rural local authorities) and grounds sharing (which is most likely to be found in more rural authorities).

Variations in the character of Scotland's school estate can also be discerned across school type. Primary schools tend to be housed in older buildings and a significant number of secondary schools have lost land to development in recent times.

**Key Points: Scotland's School Estate**

- 31% of Scotland's schools were built before World War Two.
- 25% of Scotland's primary schools were built before 1900.
- 19% of secondary schools have lost school grounds to development in the last ten years; about half of this (10% of secondary schools) was loss of playing fields.
- Almost a third of secondary schools share their grounds with community groups (30%), although ground sharing with community organisations is less common in other types of school (e.g. only 12% of primary schools).
- Ground sharing is most prevalent in four rural authorities (e.g. 88% of schools in Orkney) and is least prevalent in the City of Dundee (17%).
- The average roll for primary schools, among schools surveyed, was 180.
- 16% of primary schools surveyed had a roll of 35 or less, while one in five primary schools had at least 300 pupils.
- The average roll for secondary schools, among schools surveyed, was 798.

- 12% of secondary schools surveyed had a role of 200 or less, while one in three (32%) had at least 1000 pupils.

### **Character of School Grounds**

In general, the *Scottish School Grounds Survey* found widespread satisfaction with the size of the area given over to school grounds in Scotland. However, one in ten schools considered their grounds to be “much too small”, and one in five considered their grounds to be either “too small” or “much too small”, which may be a cause for concern. This is consistent with findings showing that those school grounds which were judged to be “too small” were more likely to be those which: had more pupils (more demand for space), had fewer features; had fewer area types; were used less in curriculum learning; and had been reduced in size having lost ground to development in the last ten years.

In the survey, schools were asked to describe the types of area (e.g. grass, hard surface) and specific features (e.g. bins, fixed play equipment) that could be found in their grounds.

Scottish schoolscapes are diverse with most grounds possessing a range of area types and features. Hard surface playgrounds, planted areas (ground and containers), car parks, grass areas not used for sport and trees are commonplace in Scottish school grounds. However, there is there is widespread demand for sheltered areas, shelters and seating areas.

In addition to area types and features that are commonplace throughout schools in Scotland, there are also characteristics that are particular to sectors. For example, secondary schools are more likely to have bike racks and weather stations, and nursery schools are more likely to have equipment storage facilities and non-fixed play equipment. Nursery schools tend to have more diversity of features and area types than nursery classes.

In accounting for differences among schools, it would have been reasonable to expect smaller schools (defined by school roll) to have a more limited range of area types and features. However, it was found that the very smallest (and the very largest) secondary schools are those that are most likely to have the most diverse school grounds. Furthermore, while there is no correlation between area type diversity and school size for primary schools, the smallest primary schools tend to possess *more* school grounds features.

#### **Key Points: Character of School Grounds, Area Types and Features**

- Of the 15 different types of **area** that may occur in school grounds (as defined for this study), schools reported relatively few, with an average of about five different types of area per school.
- The most common area type found in Scottish schools is the hard surface playground, which is found in 97% of primary schools, 92% of secondary schools, 82% of special schools and 70% of nursery schools.
- Four other area types were common, each found in about two-thirds of schools: planted area (ground), planted area (containers), grass areas (other than sports playing fields) and car parks.
- Nine of every ten respondents expressed a desire for more area types in their school grounds.
- The most desired area type is that of sheltered areas, which is wanted by almost half of all primary and secondary schools.

- Of the 24 different school ground **features** defined and used in the survey, schools reported an average of six in their school.
- On average respondents expressed a desire for 7 more features for their school.
- Schools in rural local authorities tend to have more features than those in urban areas.
- Trees were frequently mentioned as an existing feature (48% of nursery schools, 61% of primary and special schools, and 67% of secondary schools).
- 95% of respondents expressed desire for more of at least one area type for their school grounds.
- The two most wanted features for all school grounds are seats and outdoor shelters. Fixed play equipment is the third most wanted feature for nursery, primary and special school grounds, while picnic tables is the third most wanted feature for secondary school grounds.
- 69% of school grounds in Scotland are considered, by the respondent, to be “about the right size”.
- 29% of secondary school grounds in Scotland are considered by the respondent to be too small
- 39% of schools which had lost ground to development in the last ten years were considered to have grounds which were “too small or much too small” (compared to ‘only’ 22%) of those schools which had not lost grounds to development).

### ***Provision for Sport in School Grounds***

The *Scottish School Grounds Survey* provides an evidence base to inform understanding of sport in Scottish schools. This importance of this issue has heightened in recent years as the Scottish Executive has accorded a key role to schools (and their grounds) in the drive to increase levels of physical activity among children and young people.

Provision for sport in school grounds is commonplace in secondary schools with the majority possessing grass sports pitches and around half possessing an athletics track. Athletics, football, hockey and rugby are widely played on an organised basis in secondary schools. Almost half of primary schools have grass sports pitches. The most common sports played on an organised basis in primary schools are small-sided football, netball, rounders and athletics.

The survey confirms that there are marked variations in the provision of sports pitches and the number of sports practised in school grounds across age-stages (more pitches and more sports in schools for older children). For example, while 90% of secondary schools have on-site sports pitches, these feature in only 50% of primary schools.

There is also a strong regional character for some types of pitch (blaes/mineral is most prevalent in west central Scotland) and sports (rugby is played more frequently in the Scottish Borders).

Although there is more provision for sporting activity in secondary schools, there are fewer pupils per pitch in primary schools. Furthermore, primary schools tend to have a higher proportion of their pupils engaged in active play during break times than in secondary schools.

Secondary schools are more likely than primary schools to report that their grounds are very important for sport. However, 40% of secondary schools reported problems with the quality of their sports pitches and 25% have taken steps to improve provision for sports through school grounds project development work.

#### **Key Points: Provision for Sport in School Grounds**

- 45% of primary schools have no sports pitches, compared to only 4% of secondary schools.
- 92% of secondary schools have at least one on-site sports pitch compared with 52% of primary schools.
- Grass pitches are the most common type of sports pitch; they are found in 25% of special school grounds, 44% of primary school grounds and 82% of secondary school grounds.
- The higher the school roll, the more likely a school is to possess its own on-site sports pitch. Secondary schools with more than 1000 pupils have an average of 4.4 pitches, while those with at most 200 pupils have an average of 2.1 pitches.
- The highest levels of ownership of on-site sports pitch and 'other' outdoor sports facilities are found in secondary schools; 82% of secondary schools have a grass pitch, 43% have an athletics track, 21% have tennis courts, 15% have a synthetic surface pitch and 6% have a cricket wicket.
- 9% of schools have access to (their own) sports pitches off-site.
- The playing of organised sport varies enormously by age stage, e.g. hockey is played in 72% of secondary schools and 21% of primary schools.
- The number of organised sports practised in school grounds varies across school types; on average, six sports are practised in secondary school grounds, compared to three in primary and two in special school grounds.
- The main sports that are played on an organised basis in school grounds are athletics, rugby, football, netball, rounders and hockey.
- Some sports have a strong regional basis of participation, e.g. shinty (north west Scotland), rugby (south east Scotland and the Scottish Borders) and cricket (central/eastern Scotland).
- Three-quarters of all schools reported that either 'all' (45%) or 'almost all' (31%) of their pupils are engaged in active play during breaks, with primary school children being much more active than secondary school pupils.
- School grounds are judged to be 'very useful' or 'essential' as a resource for sport in 72% of secondary schools and 42% of primary schools.
- Poor quality sports pitches is considered to be a problem in 35% of primary schools and 43% of secondary schools; it is the main school grounds problem in 26% of secondary schools.
- 90% of schools use their grounds for physical education.
- Sport is the focus of school grounds improvement projects in 15% of primary schools and 27% of secondary schools.
- Secondary school grounds are used, to a substantial extent, by the community for sporting activity outside school hours; two-thirds of secondary schools reported that their grounds are used for 'organised sport' with one-third reporting use by the community for non-organised sport.

### **Extra-Curricular Use**

The *Scottish School Grounds Survey* demonstrates that school grounds are used at different times outside school teaching hours, i.e. breaks during the school day, activities that ‘wrap-around’ the school day (formal pre- and after-school activity), and outside school opening hours (a range of formal and informal activities by the school and the wider community during evenings, weekends and holidays).

The school day is punctuated by morning break and lunchtime. Morning breaks tend to be either 15 or 20 minutes in duration and the majority of lunch breaks are either 45 or 60 minutes in duration (a minority of schools also timetable an afternoon break).

At the time of the survey, the most schools in Scotland had after-school clubs and a substantial minority had pre-school clubs. However, given Scottish Executive support and encouragement for such provision, it is likely that this snapshot is from a trend of extending provision.

Secondary school grounds are more widely used than primary schools by the local community outside school hours. The majority of secondary schools are used by schools for extra-curricular activity, by after-school clubs and by the local community for organised sport. They are also used, to a lesser extent, as a short-cut, as a site for non-organised sport, for ‘curricular’ activity that takes place outside school hours and for pre-school clubs.

#### **Key Points: Extra-Curricular Use of School Grounds**

- 60% of schools in Scotland have after-school clubs, with 20% having pre-school clubs.
- Clubs are most common in secondary schools (81% have after-school clubs and 28% pre-school clubs).
- All primary and secondary schools have a morning break and a lunch break but only 13% of schools have an afternoon break.
- Morning breaks tend to be either 15 or 20 minutes in duration.
- Lunch breaks tend to be either 45 or 60 minutes in duration.
- 14% of primary schools and 4% of secondary schools have lunch breaks that are less than 45 minutes in duration. However, 16% of primary schools and 8% of secondary schools have lunch breaks that are more than 60 minutes in duration.
- 90% of secondary school grounds are used outside school hours, compared to 61% of primary school grounds, 35% of special school grounds, and just over a quarter of nursery school grounds (28%).
- Organised sport, outside school hours, is reported to take place in 66% of secondary school grounds, 8% of special school grounds, 13% of primary school grounds and 4% of nursery school grounds.
- 58% of schools utilise their grounds outside school hours for extra-curricular activities and 53% have their grounds used by after-school clubs.

### **School Grounds as a Learning Resource**

The *Scottish School Grounds Survey* asked respondents about: the value placed on their school grounds for curriculum learning for sport and for play; whether or not

school grounds are used to support learning in specific curriculum fields; the frequency with which they are used for physical education/games and 'other' learning; and school participation in educational projects which would be expected to utilise school grounds.

It is clear from the responses that school grounds are valued and used as a resource for play, sport and curriculum learning. However, significant differences are evident which inform understanding of the nature of this resource.

In nursery level education school grounds are seen as particularly important as a learning resource and are used in support of a wide range of curriculum areas. Secondary schools tend to use school grounds more frequently than other schools for physical education and games and tend to value school grounds highly as a resource for sport.

Nursery schools tend to use grounds more often, and value them more highly, than nursery classes within primary schools.

The perceived value of grounds as a learning resource is closely associated with the character of the grounds themselves. Thus, more diverse grounds are more highly valued for curriculum learning, grounds in which sport is played more frequently are more highly valued for sport and those grounds with more play equipment are more highly valued for play. Similarly, schools with a wider array of 'ecological' elements are more likely to be *Eco-Schools*.

Although higher levels of provision are associated with more positive evaluations of school grounds as a resource for learning, play and sport, it is significant to note that the smaller the primary school, the more likely its grounds are to be used for *each* of the 5-14 curriculum learning fields specified for that age group.

#### **Key Points: School Grounds as a Learning Resource**

- Almost two-thirds of schools participate in at least one project that is initiated or developed by an outside agency, e.g. *Eco-Schools*.
- A wide range of opinion was expressed on the usefulness of school grounds as a curriculum learning resource, a resource for sporting and physical activity and a play resource.
- Nursery schools are most likely to value grounds as a curriculum learning resource (63% responding that they are 'very useful' or 'essential'). This figure reduces to 38% for special schools, 32% for secondary schools and only 25% for primary schools.
- Only 10% of nursery schools reported that their grounds were 'not at all useful' as a curriculum resource.
- More diverse school grounds are more likely to be valued as a curriculum learning resource; 98% of those grounds with at least seven area types are considered to be useful (quite, very or essential), compared to 'only' 75% of those grounds with less than four area types.
- Secondary schools are most likely to value grounds as a resource for sports and physical activity (72% responding that they are 'very useful' or 'essential').
- 98% of school grounds that are used most frequently for physical education teaching are considered 'very useful' or 'essential' as a resource for sport and physical activity, compared to only 38% of those grounds that are not used for teaching physical education.
- Nursery schools are most likely to value grounds as a play resource (74% responding that they are 'very useful' or 'essential').

- There are marked differences between types of school with regard to the use of school grounds to support learning for specific areas of the curriculum. For example, 87% of nursery schools, 71% of primary schools and 22% of secondary schools use their grounds for learning in emotional, personal and social development. This pattern of response is consistent across 5-14 curriculum fields, other than physical education and movement.
- 91% of nursery schools, 87% of primary schools and 91% of secondary schools use their grounds for curriculum learning in physical education and movement.
- The vast majority of nursery schools use their grounds for curriculum learning in emotional, personal and social development (87%), communication and language (85%), knowledge and understanding of the world (88%), mathematics (88%), and expressive and aesthetic development (78%).
- The majority of primary schools use their grounds for curriculum learning in environmental 'scientific' studies (83%) and for personal and social development (71%).
- The majority of secondary schools use their grounds in technological studies (72%).
- The smaller the primary school, the more likely its grounds are to be used for *each* of the 5-14 curriculum learning fields specified for that age group. For example, 48% of those with up to 35 pupils use their grounds for art and design, compared to only 28% of those with more than 300 pupils.
- Three-quarters of secondary schools use their grounds 'very often' or 'all the time' to support physical education and games during school hours (74%).
- 41% of nursery schools use their grounds 'very often' or 'all the time' to support curriculum learning in fields other than physical education and games.

### ***Regulation and Monitoring in School Grounds***

The extent of segregation, monitoring and restrictions on access to school grounds contradicts the common portrayal of school grounds as a "children's space". Virtually all school grounds are monitored during school breaks; most schools are monitored outside school hours; most forbid children from accessing parts of their school grounds during break time; most enforce extra restrictions in inclement weather and most have a behaviour code. Many primary schools segregate their grounds in some way. Thus, school grounds are spaces in which children are controlled and regulated by adults who are charged with their responsibility.

Regulation is marginally more prevalent in primary schools. Notably, behaviour codes for school grounds and the enforcement of restrictions on access to, and use of, school grounds in inclement weather is common in primary schools.

More generally, however, there is considerable variation in the way in which school grounds are regulated across school types. Monitoring of grounds during school break times, for example, is highly variable across school types with janitors being prevalent in primary and secondary schools, assistants being more prevalent in nursery, primary and special schools and teachers being more prevalent in nursery, secondary and special schools.

### **Key Points: Regulation and Monitoring in the School Grounds**

- The majority of schools either have (83%), or are planning to introduce (7%), a behaviour code for school grounds.
- 93% of primary schools, 72% of special schools, 71% of secondary schools and 65% of nursery schools have a behaviour code for school grounds.
- In schools with SEN units, there is little evidence of school grounds segregation on the grounds of 'special educational need' (7% of schools), whereas 66% of nursery classes in primary schools reported that their pupils have their own grounds which are set apart from those of older pupils, i.e. segregation on the grounds of age.
- School grounds are segregated in some way in half of Scotland's primary schools.
- The larger the primary school, the more likely that school is to segregate its grounds, e.g. grounds are segregated in 74% of those with at least 300 pupils, but 'only' 25% of those with between 35 and 99 pupils.
- Less segregation is encountered in school grounds from rural local authorities in Scotland (35%, compared to 62% of urban local authorities), which may be related to the size of school or the size of available grounds.
- Virtually all school grounds are monitored during school breaks and two thirds of school grounds are monitored outside school hours.
- Significant contributions to break-time school grounds monitoring are being made by classroom/nursery assistants (58% of all schools surveyed), janitors (46%), school grounds supervisors (43%) and teachers/nursery teachers (37%).
- The likelihood of janitors monitoring school grounds during break times increases for larger primary schools (6% in the smallest and 68% in the largest), but decreases for larger secondary schools (77% in the smallest and 10% in the largest).
- Janitors are the most prevalent form of school grounds monitoring outside school hours for all age stages and sectors (43% of nursery schools, 61% of primary schools, 83% of secondary schools and 72% of special schools).
- Virtually all primary schools place restrictions on use of school grounds in inclement weather (97%), as do a large majority of special schools (82%). However, over a third of nursery schools place no restrictions on pupils' use of school grounds (37%) and only a minority of secondary schools enforce restrictions on the use of school grounds in bad weather (24%).
- The majority of schools forbid children from accessing parts of their school grounds during break time, i.e. 84% of primary schools, 70% of secondary schools and 67% of special schools.
- Preventing access to car parks during break time is commonplace (87% of secondary schools, for example).
- Pupils are not permitted access to sports fields during break time in 11% of secondary schools.

## **Challenges in School Grounds**

The types of problems reported cover both those concerned with protecting grounds (vandalism, maintenance, CCTV) and the poor quality of grounds (lack of surface variation, quality of sports pitches). Car parking is also a particular problem that manifests itself in a number of guises. There are problems that are generic to most school grounds (e.g. vandalism, lack of CCTV, lack of surface variation and poor maintenance). Similarly, the lack of car parking spaces for parents and the inadequacy of dropping off/picking up areas are fairly common car-parking related problems.

The likelihood of problems being reported is closely linked with the character of school grounds. Thus, those grounds which are used as short-cuts and spaces in which people 'hang out' after school hours are more likely to have problems with vandalism; those schools without a maintenance policy for their grounds are more likely to be troubled with maintenance problems; and the larger the school, the more problems that are reported.

The poor quality of sports pitches is more of a problem in primary and secondary schools than nursery or special schools; problems caused by intrusion from others and a lack of supervision are most keenly felt in secondary schools; and problems related to car parking provision for parents are reported to be more of a problem in both primary and secondary schools.

### **Key Points: Challenges in School Grounds**

- On average, respondents reported 2.6 problems in school grounds, with fewer than five problems being reported for 90% of schools.
- Nursery schools are more likely than other school types to consider that they do not have any school grounds problems (21%).
- Vandalism is the most prevalent problem in Scottish school grounds – over a third of secondary schools (36%), two-fifths of primary and nursery schools (40% and 44%) and more than half of special schools (56%) reported vandalism to be a problem. Indeed, this is identified as the main problem in 26% of nursery schools, 22% of primary schools and 43% of special schools.
- The poor quality of sports pitches is a particular problem in primary school grounds (35%) and secondary school grounds (43%). This is identified as the main problem in 26% of secondary schools.
- Vandalism is a problem in 67% of school grounds that are used as a short-cut, compared to 39% of those school grounds that are not used as a short-cut.
- 13% of primary schools with 35 or fewer pupils do not have a problem with the 'lack of space' in their grounds, compared to 27% of primary schools with at least 300 pupils.
- The majority of all school types were reported to experience problems with car parking in their grounds. A 'lack of car parking spaces for parents' (71%) and 'inadequate dropping off/picking up areas' (66%) feature as a problem for the majority of all school types.
- Among car-related problems, child safety was reported to be less of a problem than the lack of car parking spaces for staff across all school types.

### ***Special Educational Needs and School Grounds***

Comparisons between special schools (for children with SEN) and those schools which are defined according to their age stage (schools from which children with SEN have traditionally been excluded) were considered for each theme in the *Scottish School Grounds Survey* and findings are presented under each heading of this summary. Additionally, this section considers issues that pertain directly and exclusively to children with SEN.

Although only 26% of schools make an explicit reference to school grounds in their inclusion strategy the majority of school grounds are found to be fully accessible. There is little segregation of grounds on account of SEN, and school grounds play is characterised by integration of SEN and non-SEN pupils.

However, responses indicate that school grounds are considered to be particularly useful in special schools, especially in stand-alone special schools.

#### **Key Points: Special Educational Needs**

- A quarter of schools in Scotland reported that their school made reference to school grounds in their inclusion strategy (26%). Secondary schools were least likely to make reference to grounds in their strategy (19%).
- The two authorities in which schools were most likely to make reference to school grounds in their inclusion strategy were Midlothian (45%) and Stirling (38%).
- Segregation in school grounds is more likely to be influenced by age of pupil than by SEN, with most respondents (97%) reporting that children with SEN used the grounds at the same time as other pupils.
- More than half of respondents reported that all of the pupils with SEN mix with others through school grounds play, while one quarter reported that “almost all” pupils with SEN mix with other pupils in school grounds play.
- The highest level of integration of SEN pupils through play is in Glasgow; 91% (or 10 of 11) of special schools in Glasgow reported that ‘all’ or ‘almost all’ SEN pupils mixed with others through school grounds play.
- The majority of respondents from special schools consider school grounds to be more important to pupils with SEN than to pupils without SEN (54%); in SEN units in mainstream schools, 80% consider school grounds to be equally important to pupils with SEN than to pupils without SEN.
- 72% of all special schools and schools with SEN units report that their school grounds are “fully” accessible for SEN pupils.

### ***Developing Scotland’s School Grounds***

Although school grounds are accorded a low priority in development planning and although most schools (70%) do not have a school grounds maintenance policy, the extent to which schools have improved their grounds in recent years tends to suggest that they are important to schools. Three-quarters of schools in Scotland had improved their grounds, although this was less common in the secondary school sector (59%).

Improvement projects are multi-faceted with regard to motivations, instigators, project focus, pupil involvement and sources of funding. However, there are features that are common to improvement projects across school types. Thus, most projects are of recent origin, most seek to ‘improve the appearance of school grounds’, and head teachers typically instigate improvement projects.

There is considerable variation across sectors in the nature of school grounds improvement projects. Notably, pupils are less involved in secondary school projects; parents are more likely to instigate projects in primary schools; community and education authorities are more likely to instigate projects in secondary schools; curriculum learning is most likely to be a reason for improvement work in nursery schools; fostering school identity and improving the behaviour of pupils is most associated with primary schools; improving sports resources is most typical of secondary schools; and whereas most nursery projects are described as 'on-going', most special school and secondary school improvement work tends to focus on a specific project.

The main barriers to improvement are reported to be lack of time and money.

### **Key Points: Developing Scotland's School Grounds**

#### **Development planning**

- School grounds are described as a low priority in relation to school development plans in 27% of schools and are not referred to at all in development plans in a further 30% of schools.
- 58% of nursery schools described school grounds as a 'main' or 'high' priority in development planning.
- 64% of schools which consider their grounds to be 'very useful' or 'essential' as a curriculum learning resource also describe them as either a 'main' or a 'high' priority in their school development plan, compared to 'only' 34% of schools which consider their grounds to be 'not at all useful' or only 'quite useful' as a curriculum learning resource.

#### **Improvements**

- The majority of all types of school reported having already made improvements to school grounds (75%), ranging from 57% (secondary schools) to 84% (primary schools).
- School grounds improvement work which is on-going is most characteristic of nursery schools (80% of improvement projects), whereas specific project work is most characteristic of secondary schools and special schools (72% and 91% of improvement projects, respectively).
- The majority of school grounds improvement work is of recent origin, e.g. 74% of work in secondary schools was undertaken in the last four years.
- Except in nursery schools, most projects tended only to cover a 'small part' of the grounds. In nursery school grounds projects are as likely to cover all (34%), most (35%) or a small part (31%) of the grounds.

#### **Project focus**

- On average, improvement projects focus on two or three themes.
- Appearance of the school is the focus for 67% of nursery school grounds projects, 61% of primary school grounds projects, 55% of secondary school grounds projects and 50% of special school grounds projects.
- A nature-related focus (including food growing, plant growing and wildlife areas) is more common in nursery schools. For example 25% of nursery school projects involve food growing, compared to 1% of secondary school projects.
- Half of secondary school grounds projects focus on sport (51%). This compares with 20% of primary, 18% of special school and 10% of nursery school grounds projects.

### **Project initiation**

- On average, 2.5 people were credited with the idea for school grounds improvement projects.
- Head teachers initiate 85% of projects and two-fifths involve teachers. Pupils contributed to the start of school ground improvement work in half of primary schools, but in only a third of secondary schools, a quarter of special schools and one in seven nursery schools.

### **Pupil involvement**

- High levels of pupil involvement (defined as performing at least three roles such as fundraising, planning, constructing, initiating) are most likely in primary schools (77% of primary schools), followed by special schools where the equivalent figure is 53%. In secondary and nursery schools pupil involvement tends to be much less.

### **Fundraising**

- Schools tend to draw on a range of funding sources to finance school grounds improvement projects; averages range between 1.8 sources per project (secondary schools) and 2.3 sources per project (primary schools).
- School fundraising is prominent as a funding source for school grounds improvement work in nursery, primary and special schools (51%, 56% and 56%, respectively), but is relatively less widely used for secondary school grounds projects (31%). This may partly reflect the larger size of sports projects, which are more common in secondary schools.

### **Barriers**

- The two main barriers to school grounds improvement work in each school sector emerge as a 'lack of time' and a 'lack of money'.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The report has resulted in a substantial number of recommendations and proposals for areas requiring further understanding.

- 1 The *Scottish School Grounds Survey* should be used to propose a two-tier list of (i) key indicators (ii) thematic indicators, which would serve as measures for monitoring and target-setting in Scotland's school grounds. These indicators should be transparent, robust and facilitate self-evaluation. These would be of value to local authorities and the Scottish Executive and should include information on the size and character of school grounds in Scotland. This would follow the lead taken by the Department for Education and Skills and would afford the potential to monitor change, or the lack of change, in the condition, use and perception of school grounds in Scotland. The development of a school grounds strategy (either for Scotland as a whole, or for individual local authorities) would require the availability of such data.
- 2 The results from the *Scottish School Grounds Survey* should be used to raise awareness among those responsible for school grounds that size of grounds is not a barrier to developing a rich and diverse schoolscape.
- 3 Consideration should be given to using derelict areas or wasteland as a focus for a campaign to target school grounds improvements, using to the full any opportunities to promote sustainable practice and support biodiversity.

- 4 The need for schools to include their grounds in development planning should be highlighted. School grounds were not referred to in development plans in 30% of schools, and considered a low priority in terms of development planning by a further 27%.
- 1 The School Premises Regulations should be reviewed and enforced to ensure there is adequate provision for school grounds for various purposes including sport and physical activity.
- 6 Consideration should be given to how to promote equity in the use and provision of school grounds for curriculum learning across the sectors, and to address differences found between encapsulated and stand alone providers. In particular, further investigation should be undertaken to identify how nursery classes' grounds could be improved.
- 1 Research findings may reflect current perception rather than real understanding of educational opportunities offered by school grounds. This poses the question of whether enough is currently being done across all sectors to raise awareness and understanding of the potential value of school ground as a curriculum resource. Existing barriers should be challenged and opportunities explored.
- 2 The reasons for existing lower participation in school grounds educational projects in secondary and SEN schools need to be addressed, and ways of developing opportunities for these sectors explored.
- 9 There is a need to explore opportunities to promote diversity of area types and features in school grounds as this is clearly linked to their value as a curriculum resource.
- 10 Consideration should be given on how to support the development of higher levels of physical activity in schools, particularly in secondary schools.
- 11 Consideration should be given to how best to respond to the expressed demand by secondary schools for synthetic sports pitches. The level of demand is high (67%) and relatively much higher in secondary schools than in other school types.
- 12 The findings from the *Scottish Schools Grounds Survey* should be used to support the need for adequate provision for sports fields in new build schools.
- 13 The *Scottish School Grounds Survey* finding that school grounds are widely used for the purposes of curriculum learning should be used to campaign for a broadening of *Scottish Executive Education Department and School Estates Division* to focus on the school campus (buildings and grounds), rather than the current, more limited, focus on school buildings.
- 14 Flexibility should be provided within the maintenance policy where this is contracted out (for example PPP schools), to give schools the ability to influence and shape the nature of their school grounds for educational benefit over the lifetime of the contract.
- 15 Local authorities should be briefed on the need to incorporate play-related training into the staff development of classroom assistants and playground supervisors. Such training would address issues such as safety, but would also raise awareness of the importance of play, the value of risk and best practice for adults in facilitating play.
- 16 Local authorities should be encouraged to undertake staff development work with teachers, which would demonstrate the potential of using school grounds in learning. Such staff development could draw upon exemplars of good

practice and may be indicative of a supporting role for organisations such as *Grounds for Learning*.

- 17 Findings should be shared with Scottish Executive Biodiversity Group, the LBAP network, Eco Schools and other partners in the field, in order to highlight the significant role school grounds play in providing opportunities to support biodiversity, and what support can be provided to promote best practice, with the underlying concern that hard surface areas still dominate the school grounds landscape.

## **FURTHER ENQUIRY**

- i In further school grounds research, particularly for areas of investigation where subjective assessments are required (such as perceived problems), it would be worthwhile to obtain views from other key stakeholders, such as teachers, support staff, directors of education, members of school boards, janitors, local residents and, of course, school pupils.
- ii More detailed research on school grounds' area types and features should be undertaken using a case study approach. More detailed information on the size of areas and the quality and character of area types and features would provide greater depth of understanding and give an opportunity to highlight good practice.
- iii Schools which consider their grounds too small are less likely to use them as a learning resource. Further analysis could identify whether it is the size of ground that discourages an outdoor focus or whether the main barrier is lack of awareness/experience.
- iv Restrictions on children's access to certain areas of the school grounds may limit the value of school grounds as a resource for formal and informal learning and play. The impact of accessibility on learning and play should be considered in more detail to provide best practice guidance.
- v Further research should be undertaken to examine the ways in which school grounds are being developed and used to enhance their value as a learning resource.
- vi The data gathered looked at how schools perceived the value of their school grounds to deliver the formal and informal curriculum. More information is needed particularly regarding the hidden curriculum of school grounds, and how this can support or detract from a positive school ethos. This would require a more pupil-centred approach.
- vii Further school grounds research should be undertaken on social interaction at break times.
- viii The value of other features and area types in school grounds - outdoor shelters or wooded areas for example, that act as a catalyst for play, needs further enquiry and promotion of their play value for children.
- ix Children's perception of their school grounds as a resource for play, taken across all ages and sectors, needs further enquiry, in order to have an inclusive approach to best practice and design. The drop off in perceived active play in older children has implications for children's health and well-being, and needs further analysis, particularly from a child's perspective.
- x Consideration should be given to commissioning supplementary research or granting permission for research to develop the dataset by adding a classification of whether secondary schools are within the catchment areas of

Social Inclusion Partnership areas. This would allow for the results of the *Scottish School Grounds Survey* to be used to provide baseline information relevant to the *Sport 21* targets.

- xi Further research should be undertaken to understand the reasons why the poor quality of sports pitches was judged to be a particular problem in primary (35%) and secondary schools (43%). The importance of this issue is heightened given the potential role of sports pitches in meeting community needs and suggests that this issue should be considered as part of a community sports development strategy.
- xii Further research should be undertaken on sports pitch availability in primary schools. Half of Scotland's primary schools possess their own sports pitch. The reasons why the 'other half' do not possess a sports pitch – and the prospects for providing sports pitches among these schools – would be worthy of further consideration.
- xiii Further research should be undertaken on the grounds lost to secondary schools, 19% of which have lost grounds in the last 10 years, with 10% losing playing fields. It is important to ascertain whether the area lost is a threat to the resource base, or whether lost ground was surplus to requirements.
- xiv Further research should be undertaken to examine the relationship between in-school and out-of-school activity patterns. The suggestion that active play in school grounds should be included in the analysis of the extent to which physical activity targets are being achieved among children raises the question of the extent to which active play in school grounds compensates or merely replicates out-of-school patterns of physical activity among children.
- xv The issue of afternoon breaks should be reviewed. One in ten schools have an afternoon break. It would be interesting to explore the reasons for having such a break and whether there is an evidence base to support it on pedagogic grounds. Such a study should include an examination of the effects of the length of breaks (including morning and lunchtime breaks) on the nature of activity undertaken.
- xvi Given the importance of grounds to learning, sport and play, consideration should be given to commissioning supplementary research to examine the significance of grounds lost to development in more detail.
- xvii Local authorities using PPP should be encouraged to consider the implications for school grounds, *at each stage of the re-development process*. Anecdotal evidence included with questionnaire returns by survey respondents, suggests that the proposed redevelopment of schools is a significant reason for not developing school grounds as a learning resource in the interim period.
- xviii Local authorities should be encouraged to clarify the responsibilities for school grounds maintenance and, in particular, the role accorded to schools. One in ten respondents did not provide data on whether their school grounds had a maintenance policy (10%). Subsequent research should also clarify the author of maintenance policies for school grounds, i.e. the school or local authority.
- xix Further school grounds research should examine the implications of the McCrone report on school grounds development projects. It may be reasonable to assume that teachers will be less motivated to initiate or become involved in projects that do not have a curriculum focus, as McCrone has led to relief of responsibility for these matters. This may lead to a

- narrowing of focus for improvement projects (curriculum learning becoming more prominent).
- xx Future school grounds research should be undertaken into the nature of community use of school grounds. The *Scottish School Grounds Survey* provides headline data on the incidence of grounds sharing with community organisations. Given the wider significance of community-school interactions under the *Integrated Community Schools* initiative and national strategies to make Scotland more physically active, there would be merit in furthering understanding of the nature of community use of school grounds. In particular, it would be helpful to understand why community groups use school grounds in only an eighth of primary schools and why grounds sharing is more common in rural areas.
  - xxi Sustrans and other agencies concerned with promoting safer journeys to and from school should be encouraged to explore the reasons why three-fifths of schools in Scotland report that they 'do not have' and 'do not want more' bike racks. Although a fifth of schools in Scotland report a need for more bike racks, the overall findings will be a cause for concern for those concerned with promoting more sustainable journeys to and from school.
  - xxii This baseline survey provides useful input to, and one possible measure of the impact of, the Eco Schools programme. If the survey is repeated after a period of time it could provide a useful indicator of local authority efforts to implement recycling and sustainable practice within the school community.
  - xxiii Further consideration needs to be given to the measurement of sustainability of school grounds projects as this is a key element of success.
  - xxiv The desire by schools who already have a range of area types to want more may suggest that exposure to diversity (which will include natural area types) enhances appreciation of their benefits. The role for raising awareness and understanding of these benefits should be explored, both from the point of view of child and adult.
  - xxv Current information provided to schools on biodiversity needs to be assessed in order to enhance advice that supports the role schools can play in promoting biodiversity, as well as furthering understanding of biodiversity across the whole curriculum.
  - xxvi Consideration should be given to using the survey to contribute toward social inclusion debates in Scotland. It would be helpful if a measure of community well-being was included in the analysis of the dataset in order to inform understanding of extent to which all children have access to a quality school grounds environment in Scotland.
  - xxvii Future school grounds research should explore whether or not segregation by age changes behaviour and whether de-segregating school grounds may lead to a more inclusive environment at break times. It might be most interesting to explore this for primary schools with a population of between 100 and 200 pupils (which are equally divided between those with segregated grounds and those whose grounds are not).
  - xxviii School ground behaviour codes are commonplace throughout Scotland's schools. Future school grounds research should ascertain the extent to which children and young people are empowered or constrained through these codes, i.e. the extent to which they are envisaged as 'active citizens' or as a group to be controlled and regulated.

- xxix The reasons why schools restrict access to certain areas of the school grounds needs further enquiry - whether this is due to real or perceived risk, poor grounds design, inadequate outdoor shelter and clothing, or behaviour issues and supervision reasons
- xxx In accordance with Article 12 of the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child*, further research should seek to engage children to ascertain their perspectives on the issues raised in this report.

## **CONCLUSION**

The *Scottish Schools Grounds Survey* demonstrates that school grounds are valued and used as a resource for curriculum learning, sport and play. However, there are many ways in which school grounds, and the ways in which they are used, could be improved and developed. The findings of this study highlight a range of issues for consideration by policy makers and practitioners.