

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

# EVIDENCE FOR IMPROVED EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

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One pupil stated "This is the first time I have come back into school and thought I can do anything if I work hard and put my mind to it". His recent test results show that he has exceeded expectations in every area of his study. ”

Steve Williamson, Head Teacher, Northern Saints Church of England Primary School (Sunderland).

Feedback provided in April 2015, four–six weeks after the course.

Not only did students feel more confident about their own learning, classroom engagement and relationships, they expressed a far greater sense of efficacy in terms of their future potential to achieve goals and ambitions, with effort, in the future.

### THE RESEARCHER CONCLUDED:

A statistical analysis of the predicted Attainment 8 and actual Attainment 8 scores show that the attainment of the research group was significantly different to that of the comparison group. Whilst neither group achieved the overall expected attainment, the research group did much better, with attainment just under the expected.

The study highlights the importance of developing students’ confidence as learners, their belief that they can achieve their goals and the role of effort in improving actual attainment. Many of the outcomes described so far in this report point to students improving their skills in these areas, although we haven’t yet studied the effect on their progress and attainment directly. The following case study, however, provides an account of the evidence one school has gathered on pupil attainment following their participation in a programme jointly delivered by The Outward Bound Trust and SkillForce.

There is increasing interest in whether outdoor learning programmes can improve the progress and attainment of pupils. Self-efficacy, conscientiousness and self-control developed in childhood have been associated with educational attainment. A recent study<sup>23</sup> conducted by Reading University has provided further evidence for how outdoor residential experiences can lead to improved educational attainment.

The study involved a group of students in Year 9 (aged 14) who took part in twice yearly, three–day residential visits over a period of three years, and a control group of students that did not\*. It identified how the outdoor residential experience had an important influence on the levels of self-efficacy the students felt they had, and the activities undertaken were seen by the young people to directly translate back into the classroom, in terms of promoting changes in attitudes, confidence and behaviour.

## THE OUTWARD BOUND TRUST AND SKILLFORCE\*<sup>1</sup>

The Outward Bound Trust and SkillForce began working in partnership with Dundee City Council in 2015 to improve the performance of pupils from four schools in Dundee. One of the schools, St. Pauls’ RC Academy, is evaluating the programme by tracking the pupils’ attendance, behaviour and academic progress. This case study presents the findings from this evaluation.

### THE PROGRAMME

A rigorous process was used to identify pupils who would benefit the most from the programme, which involved guidance teachers identifying those who were not fulfilling their potential, consideration for attendance and behaviour and MidYIS<sup>22</sup> scores. 24 pupils were selected to take part and, in December 2015, started to work with SkillForce staff for two periods a week for four weeks, focusing on developing a ‘toolbox’ of skills they would take with them to Outward Bound, including teamwork, responsibility and timekeeping. In January 2016, they attended a 5–day Outward Bound course at Loch Eil in the Scottish Highlands. This involved canoeing and a hiking expedition, and experiences such as cooking a meal outdoors in the dark. The skills they started to develop with SkillForce were developed further by learning about Fixed and Growth Mindsets<sup>3</sup>, about different forms of trust and about social capital. On their return to school, pupils continued to work with SkillForce for another three weeks, to plan the ‘take the lead tea party’, where they gave a presentation on their experiences and led the audience through some of the teambuilding challenges they had overcome.

### EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Pupils completed a questionnaire at the start and end of the programme. School performance data was also used.




### INTERIM FINDINGS

*“It was a great experience which made me closer with my friends. I now go out more. Why? Because I know I can now do without my mobile and it’s encouraged me to go and see my friends. It has given me more confidence to speak out more in class and to push myself, not just ‘get by’. I want to do my very best in everything now!”. Pupil, St. Paul’s RC Academy*

Academic progress for all pupils from first to second year is measured by looking at their Secondary On Screen Curriculum Assessments<sup>4</sup> (SOSCA) scores at the end of S2. One of the measures from SOSCA shows whether a pupil has improved or not in Mathematics, Reading and Science.

The average improvement for the whole of S2 is calculated and expressed as a Standardised Residual<sup>5</sup>. The same calculation has been made for the group of pupils who participated in the SkillForce / Outward Bound programme. The figures indicate that the pupils who participated in the programme have made greater progress in their Mathematics, Reading and Science than their peers.

The table below shows the average improvement for the entire S2 compared with the SkillForce / Outward Bound group.

			
ENTIRE S2 COHORT	+0.6	+0.1	-0.2
SKILLFORCE / OUTWARD BOUND COHORT	+0.89	+0.247	+0.0085

\*<sup>1</sup> SkillForce is an organisation whose mission is to empower children and young people to make positive choices and feel ‘comfortable in their own skin’, building confidence, resilience and good character using the skills and experience of ex-Services personnel. For more information visit: [www.skillforce.org/](http://www.skillforce.org/)

\*<sup>2</sup> MidYIS is a baseline assessment for secondary schools for students aged 11–14, designed to measure student aptitude for, and attitude to, learning. [www.cem.org/midyis](http://www.cem.org/midyis)

\*<sup>3</sup> Fixed and Growth Mindsets describe the underlying beliefs that people have about learning and intelligence, and are terms developed by Dr. Carol Dweck. For more information visit: [mindsetonline.com/](http://mindsetonline.com/)

\*<sup>4</sup> SOSCA is a computer delivered, curriculum-based monitoring and assessment tool for schools.

\*<sup>5</sup> This is the difference between the observed score and the expected score.

\*Note that the study involved an outdoor learning programme that was not delivered by The Outward Bound Trust.