

Natural Connections Demonstration Project



Funded by UK Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,
Natural England and English Heritage

**Tools to support schools in
addressing priorities through
learning outside the classroom in
the natural environment (LINE)**

**European Outdoor Education conference, GIH, Stockholm,
5-9 June 2013**

**EDUCATION
RESEARCH
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**

**Sue Waite and Dr Rowena Passy
Plymouth University**

Context

The UK government White Paper *The Natural Choice* (2011) pledges to **'remove barriers to learning outdoors and increase schools' abilities to teach outdoors when they wish to do so'** (p.4). The three-year Natural Connections Demonstration Project aims to increase the number of school-aged children experiencing the full range of benefits that come from school-based learning in their local natural environments.

A key feature of the project is its capacity for ***replication*** and ***amplification*** in other parts of the country

The project's objectives are to ...

- Stimulate the **demand** from schools and teachers for learning in the natural environment (LINE) in areas of high multiple deprivation
- **Support** schools in building LINE into their planning and practices
- Stimulate the **supply** of LINE services for schools and teachers



Picture courtesy of Learning through Landscapes

Delivered through the four elements of:

- independent **brokerage**
- **volunteer** development programme
- participatory **web service**
- robust **evaluation**

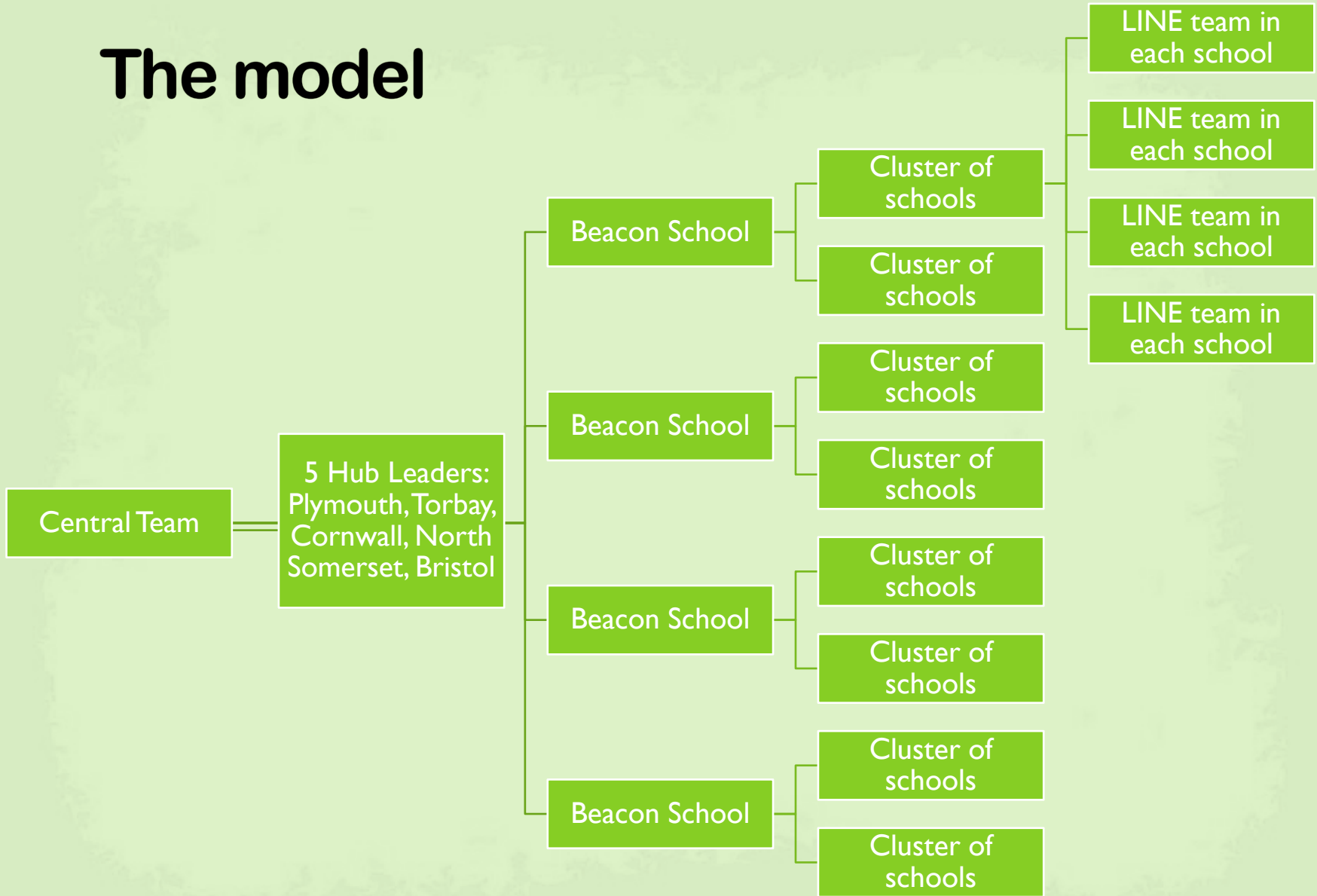
The practical aims are to ...

- Involve a total of 200 schools in the five hubs (primary, secondary and special)
- Involve between 200 – 500 volunteers in supporting LINE
- Develop sustainable models of financing LINE in schools
- Develop sustainable ways of embedding LINE in school planning and practice



Picture courtesy of Learning through Landscapes

The model



Encouraging the use of LINE ...

NCDP is supporting project schools in:

- Identifying their priorities
 - located in catchment areas with multiple challenges in the home and community life of their students
 - primary, secondary, special (age range 4 - 16)
 - mix of urban and rural, small and large; range of available natural spaces
 - generally not ethnically diverse
- Designing LINE activities that will help them to address those priorities
 - complex mix of differing priorities, aims and methods
- Assessing impact of LINE activities
 - schools need to know how intervention is 'working'
 - researchers need comparable data across the project

Tools for schools

- Each of the 200 schools faces unique and multiple challenges in the home and community life of their students
- There is no blueprint for intervention
- Development of tools that will enable a tailored response

... through the use of PAT

- Priorities Assessment Tool is an **seven-step process** designed to:
 - encourage different stakeholders to express their priorities for the school
 - support the school in developing a shared vision from/through these different priorities
 - enable schools to develop a framework for achieving specific priorities that includes stakeholders' diversity of views
 - enable schools to combine quantitative and qualitative assessment of their relative success in achieving the selected priorities
 - enable researchers to measure the success of schools' use of LINE across the project (quantitative) and illustrate the ways in which this has been done (qualitative)

Seven simple steps

- 1) **Select** up to five priorities that will be supported through using LINE
- 2) **Identify** the most significant barrier to achieving each of the desired outcomes
- 3) **Score** each priority from 5-1 (5 for most important to 1 for least important)
- 4) **Assess** the barrier to determine how likely each of these is to be achieved (5 for very likely to 1 for not very likely)
- 5) **Discuss** differing priorities and devise action plan(s) to overcome barriers
- 6) **Implement** the action plan(s) with date for review
- 7) **Revisit** the PAT form to assess how far these outcomes have been achieved and how much is due to the actions taken

Early indications...

- Schools are using their school development plans to select existing priorities that can be helped by better engagement with local natural areas
- Activities are being developed by LINE providers who will skill share with teachers, co-constructing methods for educational and personal social and health outcomes.

And some questions for you...

- What commonalities and differences are there in social inclusion, attainment and other school priorities and the challenges that predominate in urban areas of deprivation?
- How do different countries support schools to address these challenges through local access to nature?
- Any other thoughts and questions for us...?

To receive our Natural Connections Demonstration Project monthly newsletter, please email NaturalConnections@plymouth.ac.uk

For further information, please contact

Rowena.Passy@plymouth.ac.uk or Sue.Waite@plymouth.ac.uk