Adventure Learning

Year 9 students will engage in one of two different adventure learning programmes: Outward Bound® or Commando Joe’s.

In the Outward Bound group, students will participate in challenging, adventurous activities such as kayaking, mountaineering and wild camping, in an intensive 5-day residential course that aims to improve non-cognitive skills and attainment. Instruction will be delivered in wild settings by trained outdoor learning instructors, in collaboration with accompanying teachers. Learning strategies such as growth mindset theory, feedback and goal-setting for transfer of leaning will be used by instructors during the course to enhance and embed learning.

Students in the Commando Joe’s group will similarly combine challenging physical activity with the use of metacognitive skills and instructor-facilitated reflection sessions to try to improve non-cognitive outcomes and attainment. Commando Joe’s trained instructors are military veterans, and this programme will be delivered over 5 consecutive days on the school site.

Why are we funding it?

Outdoor adventure learning is rated highly on the EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit (+4 months) and is also a popular approach in schools. While the evidence behind the toolkit entry is moderately strong, an unbiased large-scale study would contribute significantly to the work in this area.

The literature is vague about how outdoor adventure learning programmes affect non-cognitive and academic outcomes. This research could help to unpick the elements that are most important (intense, week-long experience; challenging adventure; engagement with environment; residential), and how the outcomes associated with these programmes (self-efficacy and resilience; relationships in school; behaviour and attitudes in the classroom) link to improved attainment. This study will be unique in measuring non-cognitive and attainment outcomes on a large scale over time, and seeking to understand the relationship between them.

How are we evaluating it?

Professor Tim Jay will lead a team from Sheffield Hallam University to evaluate this trial. This will be an efficacy trial, which means it will test the programmes under developer-led conditions. In each school, a group of 24 pupils will be randomly assigned one of three groups: the Outward Bound group, the Commando Joe’s group or a control group, who will not participate in either programme but whose schools will receive some funding to spend on different support for these students. We will measure the student outcomes in self-regulation and maths, as well as their relationships in school and behaviour in the classroom.

For more information and to sign up, please visit the project’s recruitment page here.

When will the evaluation report be due?

The evaluation report will be published in Autumn 2021.