

Tēnā koutou

Luke & Hilary Kirner here. We are the Owners / Operators of 'Safe Outdoors NZ Ltd'. The information below introduces our 'Nature'sCool' programme - which offers children aged five and up an outdoor based alternative learning environment for one day per week during the school term. It is our hope that by pre-empting an understanding within schools, we will help to open lines of communication in order to support a mutually beneficial relationship with the interests of the children at the forefront.

'Nature'sCool offers child-led, play-based experiences in rich outdoor environments which are designed & facilitated by experts in education, science and outdoor competency to enhance participant and social well-being'.

"One Day" - Nature School / Forest School

The Nature'sCool (Forest School) concept is well established overseas (Finland / Bali etc) and is gaining traction in NZ with similar programmes (The Forest School / Conscious Kids / Nature School NZ) in operation for a number of years now. Essentially, our aim is to:

"Provide children with consistent, exceptional learning and growth experiences in a stimulating, supportive nature setting within a predominantly child-led, free play format".

We have settled on each aspect of this pedagogy as a result of our experience (over 25 combined years) of teaching young people both in early childhood and outdoor settings. This in turn, is supported by a recent cascade of succinct research in the neuroscience and 'green space' fields.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305/full>

Through parenting (& home-schooling) our three kids, we have also gained an appreciation for the practical application of this learning. It is our opinion that in today's social climate, it is absolutely essential that young people are given more time to develop their sense of self-worth and associated wellbeing, and that this balance is recognised alongside academic outcomes.

Nature'sCool offers participants the space to become a part of a small 'Tribe', which allow these processes to take place naturally and effectively. Following the interests of the children, allows personalised inquiry to be the driving force of each child's learning. This is then documented via the 'Storypark' online learning stories platform and aligned to aspects of the NZ Curriculum / Te Wharaki and our own philosophy / learning outcomes. These 'stories' are shared with their whānau members who are encouraged to share these with the child's teacher. These 'stories' allow the Nature'sCool facilitators to follow the interests of the individual and group to ensure appropriate content is delivered pertaining to their growing interests and personal advancements.

"Release from School"

For the majority of children interested in Nature'sCool, their ability to take part in the programme will depend largely on the extent of their school's support. Given the duty of care / liability held by schools, as well as the lack of precedent in our region, it is understandable that schools are thorough in their assessment of whether to support Nature'sCool. Many of the schools we have talked to agree in the benefits of such a programme, but just aren't sure how it will work practically (i.e. ability to 'endorse', work missed in class / re-integration

afterwards etc). Safe Outdoors NZ is aware of these legitimate concerns but also maintains a 'child-centred / solution based' approach which focusses on how we can make it work, rather than why it can't. Below are some of our findings in these key question areas:

1/. MOE endorsement / External Audit

We are not currently aware of any existing process for Nature'sCool to be 'endorsed' by the MOE as an 'alternative provider'. If there was a process, then Safe Outdoors NZ Ltd would happily enter into it. As Safe Outdoors NZ does not offer 'Adventure activities' (as classified by Worksafe), it seems there is no legislation which requires the H & S aspects of our operation to be externally audited. We would however like to make it clear that Safe Outdoors NZ does value the external audit process and are happy to provide schools with our (SOP) document, including Health & Safety practices / Risk management and child protection policies upon request.

2/. School's ability to support Nature'sCool

"Present" - Section 71

The MOE has clarified that BOT should refer to Section 71 "Courses, Work experience, and visits outside the school premises" (and not Section 25b "Release from School") when considering marking a student as "Present" whilst attending Nature'sCool.

Section 71 requires the BOT (and not just the principal) to give permission based on their assessment of both the Health & Safety (a), as well as the Educational outcomes (b) of the programme.

Safe Outdoors NZ can now provide schools with the following:

- a): A comprehensive H & S system (SOP document) that has been approved by the Huanui College BOT.
- b): The ability to identify, document and share (with teachers also - if agreed to by parents) individualised & group learning outcomes via 'Storypark' profiles for each participant.

"Explained absence"

There was no mention in the MOE release as to whether schools are obliged to enter into the processes of Section 71

If indeed the student is asking to be marked as an "Explained Absence" rather than "Present". I am still in discussion

with the MOE regarding this question, however, the following email from a senior Education Adviser at the MOE has provided the following clarification:

"If a school has to accommodate parents accessing programmes or activities independent of their school programmes, the matter of attendance will be reliant on the respective schools attendance rules and policy. This raises interest in what form the supportive schools express their support? If it is by way of marking their absence down as "explained absence", that is still absent. "Explained absence" simply means truancy protocol is not invoked by the school".

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes of 'Nature'sCool' are entirely specific to each child. The following offers a brief description of some specific activities that occur regularly at Nature'sCool and a generalization of the learning outcomes for each:

- Problem solving / Inquiry based learning.
 - Making swings: design & location, risk assessment, trial & error, job delegation, knot tying, bravery.
 - Koura / Tuna catch (& release): team work, strategy, empathy, environmental science, sustainability.
 - Baking & cooking (on fire): experimentation, math & science concepts, life skills / self-reliance, tikanga, determination, safety, hospitality.

- Imaginary play requiring complex brain function.
 - The creation of 'fictional worlds / bases' among the trees.
 - The acting out of both fictional & non-fictional characters above and below the water (creek).
 - Developing a deeper understanding of their interests and of their peers.

- Social competence / leadership / Tuakana teina.
 - Older kids helping younger ones - an opportunity to have (and be) a great role model.
 - Facilitators encouraging kids to take ownership in regards to the resolution of disagreements.
 - The fair sharing of resources and 'turn taking' on rope bridges / swings, resources etc.
 - Emotional competence when engaging in activities within a small group.
 - Time allocated towards achieving within personalized interest areas.

- Environmental Care
 - Examining the impact of farm practices surrounding the stream & techniques for improving.
 - Techniques to lessen our impact on the native bush & stream environments.
 - Trapping / predator and invasive plant controls.
 - A scientific understanding of flora & fauna (provided by our facilitator with a "Masters in Science").

Outcome Monitoring / Documentation

The depth of pre-programme goal setting and the corresponding monitoring / documentation regarding each child's progression will be a matter negotiated between the School, Parents and Safe Outdoors NZ. The extent of this correspondence and resulting documentation may be governed by the attendance entry coding for each student and the associated policies of individual schools. As mentioned above – Storypark will be the medium used to document and share learning via individual profiles. <https://www.storypark.com/nz/>

Relationship with Huanui College

Huanui College have been instrumental in providing some fundamental infrastructure for the Nature'sCool programme. Nature'sCool is not facilitated by Huanui College, rather Safe Outdoors NZ has secured the rights to operate some aspects of the programme on land leased by the school. Examples of this include: the use of the toilet block and farm yard, as well as an area allocated for pick up / drop off purposes. In addition, we have permission to cross school property in order to access the private land 'down the back' which includes farmland, bush and streams etc. As co-owner of Safe Outdoors NZ, as well as a Fully Registered Teacher (secondary), Luke has an ongoing professional relationship with the College. This includes the design and teaching of an Outdoor programme focused on Well-being.

More details

Further details are available on our Website: www.safeoutdoors.co.nz We are also happy to answer any questions via email, phone conversation or in person at the school's request.

Thank you for your time!

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