

Tēnā koutou

My name is Luke Kirner and I am the Owner / Operator of 'Safe Outdoors NZ Ltd'. The purpose of this email is to inform teachers / principals and schools in the wider Whangārei area of our new venture 'Nature'sCool' which is a "One Day Nature School" based on the Huanui College property in Glenbervie / Whangārei. It is my hope that by pre-empting an understanding within schools, that this will help to open lines of communication in order to support a mutually beneficial relationship with the interests of the children at the forefront.

"One Day" - Nature School / Forest School

The Nature'sCool (Forest School) concept is well established overseas (originating in Scandinavia) 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 a series of exceptional learning and growth experiences in a stimulating nature setting within a predominantly child-led, free play format".

We have settled on each aspect of this pedagogy as a result of our experiences (over 20 combined years) of teaching young people both in early childhood and outdoor settings. This is in turn, 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> Parenting (& home-schooling) three kids has also helped to give us 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 time is recognised as equally important as academic outcomes.

"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

There is currently no 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. I would however like to make it clear that Safe Outdoors NZ does value the external audit process. The Huanui College Board of Trustees have reviewed the SOP upon our request, with the intention of preparing for a more comprehensive external audit in the near future.

We are happy to provide schools and parents with our Standard Operating Procedures (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

A recent release from 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 is working towards improving the Nature'sCool processes by:

- a): Preparing for an external H & S audit process in the near future.
- b): Engaging in the 'Storypark' system to create (share-able) learning profiles of each student.

"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 individual child. There are some really compelling stories coming through already from our Nature'sCool community. So far we have identified the following categories:

- Problem solving / Inquiry based learning.
 - Making swings: Design & location, risk assessment, trial and error, job delegation, knot tying, bravery.
 - Koura catching: Team work, strategy, empathy, environmental science, sustainability.
 - Baking & cooking (on fire): Experimentation, math & science concepts, life skills / self-reliance, 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.
- Well-being / Social competence / leadership / Tuakana teina.
 - Older kids helping younger ones across fallen log 'bridges'.
 - 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 their 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.

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 owner of Safe Outdoors NZ Ltd as well as a Fully Registered Teacher (secondary), I have an ongoing professional relationship with the College. This includes the current design (and eventual teaching of) an Outdoor programme focusing on Well-being to commence in 2020.

Cost & Ratio

The cost for this programme is \$60 / day per child with the expectation that Participants will commit to the entire programme on a 'Term by Term' basis. We operate under a 1:8 ratio, with standard practice involving two highly experienced & highly qualified (in either Education or Environmental studies) 'Facilitators' operating at any one time.

Key dates & times

Nature'sCool commenced on Wednesday 7th August 2019, and runs 8.45am - 3.15pm every Wednesday during Term 3. It is our hope to continue every term after this and eventually expand into additional days during the week. If you have any thoughts on what days would suit best, please let us know.

More details

Further details are available on our Website: www.safeoutdoors.co.nz I am 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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