

A GUIDE TO SPORT SANCTUARIES



A place or activity intentionally designed to use physical movement as a way of calming, replenishing or awakening the senses, generating positive engagement and wellbeing



The intent of this mini-guide is to explore further the innovation of 'sport sanctuaries' following on from the Think Piece '[Sport Sanctuaries, does your school have one?](#)' published in November 2020. The piece has inspired schools to come forward and share their thinking around the concept, and the impact they have for children and young people.

The guide showcases examples of outstanding practice when it comes to sport sanctuaries, and it is hoped they provide a useful starting point for other educators and interested parties.

Why Sport Sanctuaries?

Every child and young person will have had their own unique, personal, lived-in experience during the Covid-19 pandemic. All will have experienced losses to their routines, structures, friendships, opportunities and freedoms. The result is that as pupils return to schools, they may arrive not feeling safe or secure. 'An anxious child 'is not in a place to learn effectively' (Carpenter 2020).

Ofsted [published evidence](#) highlighted the 'mental distress' and erosion of mental health in our children and young people. We therefore have to find ways that enable children and young people themselves to self-regulate their mood and re-build their resilience. Physical activity, for all of its well-known benefits, offers this at all levels for all learners.

As pupils adjust to being back in school following the Covid-19 pandemic, educators may need to provide additional support for their pupils not least more opportunities to be active, outdoors, reconnecting and rebuilding their learning confidence.

Through the co-construction of a sanctuary within school between pupil and educator, effective strategies focusing on activities and sensory processing can be designed. This will result in happier, healthier young people who are engaged and ready to learn.



Physical activity is crucial to the way we think and feel... it can be the cue for the building blocks of learning in the brain, it affects mood, anxiety and attention, and guards against stress

JOHN J RATEY
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



What is a Sports Sanctuary?



The Oxford Dictionary provides the definition of a sanctuary as 'a safe space'. When we consider this against the biophilia hypothesis, and how biophilic experiences can reduce stress, improve cognitive function, and enhance mood and creativity, we can start to see how spaces of sanctuary, or indeed exploring this through the lens of sport and physical activity, we can increase our overall health and wellbeing, as well as productivity.

Overlay this with the outcomes that sport provides and the association between being physically active and academic attainment and attention, and there is something here for schools to consider.

Schools that have explored the concept of Sport Sanctuaries in their school shared theirs and their pupil's thoughts around the question 'what does the word sanctuary mean to you?' From the responses highlighted (below) these demonstrate the importance of adopting an individualized approach, whereby young people can identify what would make their sanctuary unique for them.

This may be in the form of a physical space, or indeed an actual activity that creates the sorts of feelings they need for their own wellbeing, engagement and readiness to learn.


It is vital that educators consider the school environment when rebuilding young people's confidence as learners.

Haven Safe
Recovery
Routine Nature
Freedom Calm Peaceful
Calm Safety
Happy

Simply defined, Sport Sanctuaries are places or activities that are intentionally designed to use physical movement as a way of calming, replenishing or reawakening the senses, generating positive engagement and wellbeing. As educators you will be interested in the question 'how does this child learn?' and Sport Sanctuaries are a fantastic way of providing safe spaces, intentional movement activities and an approach to consider when stimulating or retaining pupil engagement in your lessons.

Sport Sanctuary Specification

For a Sport Sanctuary to be introduced it is recommended it includes the following:

1. Pupil Engagement	<p>Identify the young people you would like to target through Sport Sanctuaries.</p> <p>This can be done through your own reflection, liaison with colleagues, or through evidence such as progress/engagement reports/EHCPs/behaviour logs.</p>
2. Pupil Voice	<p>Seek and understand pupil voice- help them identify what their sanctuary is.</p> <p>Consider the following: Is their sanctuary a physical place? Is it an activity? Is it a feeling?</p> <p>Retain this information to guide future practice and build in opportunities for pupils to share thoughts and feelings throughout the school year.</p>
3. School Audit	<p>Undertake an audit of your school environment (with pupils). This could include a sensory audit and reflect on the following areas (considering indoor and outdoor space):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch • Taste • Proprioception & Vestibular • Smell • Sound • Vision <p>This audit can be completed both for a physical environment, but also for a specific movement activity.</p>
4. Identify with pupils where, or what their Sport Sanctuary is	<p>Ensure pupils and staff know where their sanctuary is in school, or the activity that they need to calm or alert their senses.</p> <p>This may require testing several areas around the school or sharing a range of activities that stimulate different responses.</p> <p>Consider a 'pupil passport', designed so pupils can share with staff in different lessons if they feel overwhelmed or anxious, or even at stages of transition into different schools or year groups.</p>
5. Provide choice and Practice	<p>The most effective Sport Sanctuaries in schools are ones where pupils have choice. This may be choice of an activity, or choice of a space that offers the sanctuary experience.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for young people to practice, rehearse, discuss, plan and reflect on their Sport/Sensory Sanctuary.</p>
6. Apply with support	<p>Provide opportunities for young people to apply skills of seeking a Sports Sanctuary with support from you (scaffolding learning)</p>
7. Encourage independent use	<p></p> <p>EQUIP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE TO SELF-PACE AND SELF-REGULATE. WHOSE SANCTUARY IS IT ANYWAY?</p>

The following section provides examples of school-based innovation based on considering both Sport, but also Sensory Sanctuaries:

RIVERSIDE SCHOOL, CO. ANTRIM, NORTHERN IRELAND (SPECIAL)

Are working with pupils to co-create sanctuaries in school. Focusing on creating a sports sanctuary outside and a sensory sanctuary inside, they are designing activities that either calm or alert pupils. Their sports sanctuary has green space, trees and the relaxing sounds of nature and encompasses individual and group activities with opportunities to learn new skills. There is a focus on pupil led activities and physical exercise.

CLARE MOUNT SPECIALIST SPORTS COLLEGE, WIRRAL, MERSEYSIDE

Have developed a menu of activities designed to be undertaken in 5-minute bursts and chosen by their pupils that stimulate vestibular or proprioceptive senses. These include:

- **Linear vestibular:** rowing machines, trampoline, football passing and basketball dribbling activities with a teaching assistant, a walk on the field out to the Forest School site, throwing a Vortex howler on the field or bowling at a playground target, using the playground gym equipment, the playground swing or the indoor sensory room.
- **Proprioceptive:** Cycling, in-line skating, scootering, therapy ball activities, scoot boarding and using Forest School as a movement break e.g. joining in with some wood-chopping or fence removal.

SANDBACH SCHOOL (ALTERNATIVE PROVISION), SOUTH CHESHIRE

Focus on outdoor education and climbing spaces to support pupils with letting off steam by being outside and physically exerting themselves.

LAWNSWOOD CAMPUS (ALTERNATIVE PROVISION), WOLVERHAMPTON

Have created dedicated sport sanctuaries drawing upon pupils' interests, such as boxing. Pads are provided that enable pupils to visit the sanctuary if they need to 'take 5' before returning back to class engaged and ready to learn.

ALFRISTON SCHOOL, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Created wellbeing walks that pupils know they can participate in at break and lunchtimes, designed to boost mood and overall wellbeing through activity.

FOXFIELD SCHOOL, BIRKENHEAD (SPECIAL)

Use the pool as their sport sanctuary. Pupils share that swimming can provide a sense of freedom in a different environment not found elsewhere.

BAXTER COLLEGE, WORCESTERSHIRE (SECONDARY MAINSTREAM)

Lunch 'astro time' creates the space for pupils to be physically active in an outdoor space that provides opportunity for positive relationships to be established between staff and students.

WHITFIELD ASPEN SCHOOL, DOVER

Recognised that whilst they have sensory spaces in school, there was a need to create a sanctuary for pupils who just want and need to move. This has been established outdoors in the school grounds.

Other examples shared by schools include:

- Setting pupils a physical skills target alongside a sensory/behaviour target. For example, a target may be 'to improve balance and reduce calling out in class'.
- Creating a sports sanctuary in the corner of a classroom- for example four activities that could be followed in sequences, with pupils encouraged to complete two before returning to their desks.
- Designing an outdoor sport sanctuary around trees on the playing field. Each tree to have a 'Power Up' poster (drawn as a target circle) that children are encouraged to run around and 'tap' - providing a boost of energy before lessons.

Sensory Sanctuaries

The concept of a sensory sanctuary is one that schools are aligning to sports sanctuaries. Riverside school in Northern Ireland have developed this concept and are now developing alongside their Sports Sanctuary. Schools are considering how this approach to a sanctuary could aid pupil readjustment back to the busy school environment and how it can avoid sensory overload.

For example, the design of simple sensory circuits completed in a dedicated safe space can support pupils follow a sequence of:

- Alerting activities - providing opportunities for skipping, bouncing on mini trampettes, jumping
- Organising activities - equipment such as a balance beam, throwing beanbags in a target, bending a rope in different shapes, walking along ropes or jumping over/side to side
- Calming activities - through weighted blankets, press ups on a wall, massage - such as hands.

The following are examples of Sensory Sanctuaries:

PARKSIDE SCHOOL, NORFOLK

Create sensory circuits at the start of a school day, using to energize and settle children and young people, particularly after long bus journeys into school. These are also shared online for when pupils are self-isolating or bubble closures.

 Click to watch

WAVE ACADEMY TRUST, CORNWALL

Recognise when pupils need sensory experiences and will empower young people to go outside and experience the sense of grounding near trees and feeling wind against their face near the coast. Routed in the biophilia hypothesis, these experiences can reduce stress, improve cognitive function, and enhance mood and creativity for their pupils.

CHADSGROVE SPECIAL SCHOOL, WORCESTERSHIRE

Have evolved their current sensory room and designed targeted activities to stimulate senses through activity within the environment. Adopting the use of the Youth Sport Trust Elements programme they explore earth, air, fire and water experiences to both calm and engage pupils.

SLATED ROW SCHOOL, MILTON KEYNES

Have designed outdoor sensory pathways, and empowered young people to self-regulate their emotions; so when feeling overwhelmed they can leave class, undertake a 5 minute sensory circuit before returning feeling ready to engage.

DOROTHY GOODMAN SCHOOL, LEICESTERSHIRE

Designed their sensory sanctuary outdoors, providing a wonderful safe and calming space for pupils to participate in sensory orienteering, designed to stimulate a range of senses before returning to class.

Other schools have also created the concept of 'Portable' sanctuaries, so wherever their pupils are, and at times when pupils need to have that safe space or activity to retreat to, they can. Indeed, one secondary student attending a high school in Kent shared how he uses rugby to improve his engagement to learning. Through intentionally using his mind to take him to positive experiences felt while on the pitch, he could transfer this sense of safety to the present moment, resulting in happier and healthier approaches to his learning. Clarendon Special School, Merseyside also provided sensory kitbags to pupils to support with creating sensory sanctuaries at home, and shared learning experiences with families.

CHADDESLEY CORBETT ENDOWED PRIMARY SCHOOL, WORCESTERSHIRE

Also shared how the simple act of a hand massage prior to a creative handwriting session in class provided a space for pupils to be calm and engaged ready for the task ahead.



Summary

Through all the above examples of practice and school-led approaches, it is clear that by identifying a sanctuary, whether that be through creating sport or sensory experiences, it can help children and young people learn to control their emotions and channel negative feelings in a positive way.

It is important that educators consider which of their pupils this concept may be most beneficial for, but there are also wonderful considerations for whole class-based approaches which can benefit all children.



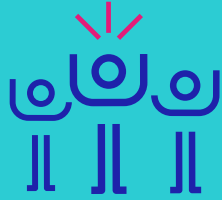
Our sensory sanctuary is in a space positioned in the centre of our school, which is easily accessible for all. It is filled with natural light and has both outdoor and indoor elements. It will be filled with restorative sensory experiences that aim to promote inner peace and calm in our young people, enabling emotional self-regulation. For those learners who find it more difficult to transition to the area, the sanctuary will be accessible to them in their classrooms through sensory boxes replicating activities in the sensory sanctuary.



A place of restorative sensory experiences, that generates inner peace, calm and wellbeing

PROFESSOR BARRY CARPENTER

SHONA MCCANN
RIVERSIDE SCHOOL



We need to emotionally regulate to educate, and this concept is ideal for bringing that to child centred reality

PROFESSOR BARRY CARPENTER



THE LINK BETWEEN PUPIL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND ATTAINMENT

Final thoughts...

When considering the concept of Sport Sanctuaries; reflect upon the response you may give if a pupil asked you this question:

'Where is our (sport) sanctuary in school?'