

School Information Sheet

About the Project

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has commissioned the University of York to evaluate The Outward Bound Trust's Adventure and Challenge Programme. The study is designed to understand whether structured, adventure-based learning delivered during a residential programme can improve Year 9 pupils' self-regulation, resilience, wellbeing, and learning, particularly for those at risk of disengagement.

What is The Outward Bound Trust's Adventure Challenge Programme?

The Outward Bound Trust Adventure Challenge programme provides immersive outdoor residential experiences. The programme aims to help young people develop resilience, confidence, teamwork, and self-regulation by challenging them in unfamiliar, outdoor environments supported by experienced instructors. Each participating school will identify a group of 24 pupils who would be suitable for the study. Pupils from half of the schools will attend a five-day residential programme at an Outward Bound centre, accompanied by two members of school staff during the academic year 2026-2027. The residential will include physical challenges, teamwork activities, reflection sessions, and guided goal setting. Schools will also deliver a structured set of preparatory and follow-up sessions in school, using materials provided by OBT.

The Evaluation

This is a two-arm Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) to robustly measure the impact of The Outward Bound Trust's programme on pupils:

- We're looking for 66 schools to participate in the trial
- Schools will be randomly allocated to either the intervention group (allocated to receive an Outward Bound residential 5-day course) or the control group.
- Randomisation ensures fair and unbiased comparison of outcomes across schools. Schools have a 50/50 chance of being randomly assigned to either group
- Schools in the control group will not participate in the Outward Bound Trust's Adventure Challenge residential programme; instead, they will be asked to continue with 'business as usual' to act as a comparison group. It is essential, however, that schools allocated to the control group continue to engage in the evaluation activities. Schools in both groups play an important role in contributing to the evidence base of what works well to improve the intended outcomes for young people through a programme that uses an adventure learning and character development approach.

- The evaluation will also look at how the intervention is working in schools. This includes understanding delivery quality, staff and pupil experiences, and school context. This will involve focus groups with staff and short interviews with pupils in a small number of schools.

What Will Taking Part Involve?

Schools that agree to take part will either be allocated to be an intervention school or a control school. Below, we explain what participation will involve for all schools, as well as what this will involve for intervention schools specifically.

All schools will need to:

- Read and sign a Memorandum of Understanding confirming your commitment to taking part in the evaluation.
- Read and sign the school consent form.
- Select 24 pupils in currently in Year 8 (who will be in Year 9 for delivery in the academic year 26/27) using the pupil selection criteria. These include indicators such as academic underperformance and at least one additional risk factor (e.g., low attendance, behaviour concerns, or wellbeing challenges; full criteria and guidance are provided in the FAQs).
- Identify key school staff to lead and manage the project and accompany the pupils on the residential.
- Support evaluation activities, including:
- Administer short online pupil questionnaires in two, 20-minute sessions at three time points: May/June 2026, June 2027, and October 2027. Teachers/school staff will receive training to deliver these questionnaires.
- Re-administer a very short questionnaire (10 minutes) twice more between November 2026 and May 2027. Teachers/school staff will be trained to deliver these assessments.
- Provide school-level data, including pupil identifiers (name, date of birth, gender, UPN, and postcode) for matching with the National Pupil Database (NPD).
- Complete school survey on adventure learning.
- Some schools will be asked to support further evaluation activities by releasing staff for two focus groups online (30 minutes per session) and pupil interviews (30 – 45 minutes per pupil).
- Agree to not complete any additional adventure learning activities (as defined in the FAQs) with the pupils selected to take part in the trial until after they complete their GCSEs in 2029.

In addition to the above, schools in the intervention group will need to:

- Facilitate the Outward Bound programme, which will be provided to the school at a subsidised cost. Facilitation will include:
- Work with The Outward Bound Trust to organise the residential logistics, including parental consent, travel, and staffing for the 5-day residential.
- Complete a 5-day outdoor residential at an Outward Bound Centre at dates agreed but within the period Nov 26 – May 27.
- Releasing two teachers to attend the Adventure and Challenge 5-day outdoor residential.

Eligibility

Schools taking part must:

- Be state-funded mainstream secondary schools in England with more than 24 Year 8 pupils in the academic year 25/26.
- Have not taken part in Outward Bound Trust residential activities in the past two academic years (24/25 and 25/26). Please note that schools taking part in Outward Bound Trust residential activities during the academic year 26/27 with a year group other than Year 9 are still welcome to take part in this project.
- Have not taken part in any whole-school programmes run by Commando Joe's in the past two school years (since the academic year 24/25).
- Have not used any Commando Joe's programmes with the current Year 8 pupils.
- Priority will be given to schools where more than 24% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

Pupils taking part must:

- Be in Year 8 in the academic year 25/26
- Be underperforming academically (Category 1) and at least one of the other criteria (Categories 2–4) described in the table in the FAQs.

Financial Support

- Schools in the intervention group will receive the Outward Bound programme at a heavily subsidised rate (schools will only be asked to support 17% of the usual programme delivery costs at £2,920 per school for 24 pupils). This is to recognise your efforts in participating in delivery and data collection activities.
- For intervention schools a travel support bursary of up to £114 per pupil is available.
- Schools in the control group will receive a £1,500 payment for their continuous participation in the trial evaluation activities. This will be paid in three instalments linked to completion of baseline and randomisation, endline, and follow-up data collection. This funding should be used for enrichment opportunities for the identified pupils (excluding adventure learning activities as defined in the FAQs).

Timeline

Timeframe	Activity
May - June 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select 24 pupils using the criteria set out in the FAQs• Complete baseline questionnaires
June - July 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete baseline questionnaires for all pupils
August 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Receive confirmation of random allocation to intervention or control group.
November 26 - May 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete the 5-day residential (Intervention schools only).• Pupils complete a short (10-minute) questionnaire twice more• Small number of school staff complete focus group (approximately 60 minutes).
June 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All pupils complete endline questionnaires• Small number of school staff complete focus group (approximately 60 minutes).• Small number of pupils will complete interviews (approximately 45 minutes).•
October 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All pupils complete follow-up questionnaires

How Will Data Be Used and Protected?

All data will be processed under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Data Protection Act (2018), and the University of York's data management policy and The Outward Bound Trust's data management policy.

- Identifiable data (e.g., pupil names, UPNs) will be pseudonymised for analysis and deleted within six months of project completion.
- Only fully anonymised data will be stored and accessed by the EEF's Evaluation Data Archive.
- No individual pupils, staff, or schools will be named in reports.
- Some pupil level data is required by The Outward Bound Trust for monitoring and tailoring programme delivery. Any data that is solely for the purpose of delivery and does not relate to the evaluation will not be shared with the University of York.

For more details, please refer to the separate School Privacy Notice and all data collection and processing requirements will be outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding for any schools wishing to sign-up to the trial.

What If My School Wishes to Withdraw?

Schools and staff may withdraw from the project or request that data already collected not be used, until data has been fully anonymised. After this time, it will be impossible to identify and remove the data. Withdrawal will not affect any other relationship with the University of York, EEF, or The Outward Bound Trust.

How Will the Findings Be Used?

Findings from this evaluation will be published as an independent EEF evaluation report and made freely available on the EEF website. Participating schools will receive a plain-language summary of results. The results will contribute to the wider evidence base of adventure learning on effective strategies for improving pupil engagement, resilience, and attainment.

Who Can I Contact for More Information?

The Outward Bound Trust

Email: enquiries@outwardbound.org.uk

We will be happy to share with you full details of the programme and will be able to invite you to webinars aimed at schools seeking more information. If you would like to have a face to face meeting or online call please do ask and we will be more than happy to oblige.

Places for this amazing project are strictly limited and on a first come first served basis so please do contact us immediately for a non obligational discussion. We will be holding a waiting list for all schools who miss the initial places. All places are only confirmed upon receipt of a signed MOU.

Department of Education, University of York (Evaluation Team)

Email: adventure-learning-education-project@york.ac.uk

For questions about ethical approval or data protection:

- Education Ethics Committee: education-ethics@york.ac.uk
- Data Protection Officer, University of York: dataprotection@york.ac.uk

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is adventure learning and what other activities count as adventure learning?

For this project, we define adventure learning as: A group-based intervention programme that involves purposeful experiential learning outcomes in real-world and/or simulated contexts, with components that require physical and emotional challenge, and an element of managed risk and/or uncertainty, which facilitates reflective and collaborative learning.

Below, we identify other school programmes and activities that we consider do and do not meet the definition of adventure learning.

<p>Is adventure learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outward Bound Trust• Commando Joe's• PGL Reach programme	<p>Is not adventure learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Duke of Edinburgh Awards• John Muir Award• Other PGL programmes• The Problem-solving Company
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What are the selection criteria for identifying the 24 pupils to take part?

You should select pupils if they meet the following criteria:

- They are in Year 8 in the academic year 25/26
- They are underperforming academically (Category 1) and at least one of the other criteria (Categories 2 – 4) described in the table below:

Category	Indicators
Category 1: Academic underperformance	Working below expected progress in English or maths (not meeting age-related expectations on KS3 assessments, or bottom 30% of cohort in school tracking).
Category 2: Behavioural concerns	Be in the top 33% of the year group for behaviour concerns (e.g., frequently causing low level disruption, frequently removed from class due to poor behaviour, altercations at school involving other pupils, pupil's whose behaviour has not improved in response to behaviour strategies or suspensions)
Category 3: Attendance/ engagement risk	0-95% attendance (i.e., "at risk of persistent absence") in the current school year (N.B., Case-by-case basis: Pupils with attendance < 90% can take part if the teacher thinks the pupil can engage)

Category 4: Wellbeing/ social-emotional needs	Teacher ratings of low confidence, resilience, or belonging (e.g., bottom third of cohort on pastoral survey data, if available). Identified by staff as struggling with peer relationships.
Eligibility for free school meals	We ask that you prioritise pupils eligible for free school meals and ensure that at least 9 of the 24 selected pupils are eligible. (This is not a selection criterion on its own, but a request to support sampling.)

Pupil conduct should be of a standard that they are able to manage in a community, residential setting with other young people of different ages from all over the UK (please note during residential courses other visiting groups will also be at the same Outward Bound Centre). The accompanying teachers should be comfortable in taking any participating student into this setting. Pupils will be placed into working groups of 12.

Are there any exclusion criteria for pupils?

Pupils should not be selected for the programme if they:

- Are unable to reasonably engage in or sustain participation in a structured session lasting approximately 60 minutes (e.g. due to significant behavioural, emotional, or medical needs that would prevent safe and meaningful participation).
- Have recent involvement with the criminal justice system (e.g. currently subject to youth offending orders or other ongoing legal proceedings).
- Have specific safeguarding circumstances that would make participation in group-based activities inappropriate at this time (e.g. a current safeguarding plan restricting such participation).

What are you assessing in the pupil questionnaires?

The pupil questionnaires will measure the following:

- Self-regulation and meta cognition (same questionnaire)
- Student-teacher relationships
- Resilience
- Peer-relations
- Mental wellbeing

What information will be given to parents/guardians?

Parents and guardians will be required to complete a Participant Information Form which has details of medical and personal data which is used by The Outward Bound Trust to ensure they prepare and support the pupils from the time of arrival. It also looks at dietary and behavioural issues. This form must be completed at least six weeks in advance of the residential course starting.

Parents and Guardians will also be provided with information and a presentation on the experience and schools will be required to share this with them.

Once the Participant Information Form is completed, The Outward Bound Trust reserves the right to refuse access to a pupil should the Trust feel the pupil is unsuitable or has needs beyond the realms of The Trust's residential centres.

What information will you take from the National Pupil Database?

We will primarily access data relating to your pupils background (FSM eligibility and SEN status), attendance, and attainment (Key Stage 2 English and Maths scores and GCSE Attainment scores).

What is the anticipated total staff time on this project?

We anticipate staff time to be 7.5 days per teacher or pastoral school staff member, and two members of staff will be necessary for planning and supporting the 5 day residential and the pre- and post-residential activities. It is the expectation of the programme that teachers accompany pupils on the residential and participate throughout. During the Outward Bound course, teachers will be requested to engage in a daily learning meeting with the Course Director and Group Instructor. This will help review and develop personalised learning for the group and enable the teachers to better be able to develop strategies to embed the transfer of learning back to school. Accompanying teachers should be experienced and in regular contact with the cohort. They should be able to hold the students to account as well as motivating and encouraging them to progress.