

A group of young people are gathered in a large, grassy field. In the foreground, a young woman in a plaid shirt and a young man in a blue t-shirt are standing near a table with a large metal pot. To the right, another young man is sitting on a stool. In the background, several white tents are set up on the grass. The scene is set outdoors with trees in the distance and a bright sky.

LEARNING

AWAY

Brilliant residentials and their
impact on children, young people
and schools

*Making the case for high-quality
residential learning*

Contents

“Learning Away has shown that a residential learning experience provides opportunities and benefits/impacts that cannot be achieved in any other educational context or setting. The impact is greater when residential are fully integrated with a school’s curriculum and ethos.”

Learning Away Final Evaluation Report, York Consulting 2015

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Foreword

I have always argued passionately for the benefits of residential trips for all young people who attend state schools.



of learning. I call it - quite wrongly, but to make the point - ‘traumatic’ learning. Residential are examples of such high-impact events.

These two prejudices - for that is what they are - have always been confirmed for me by talking with teachers and experts who have vast experience of residential trips. I have visited more than one school when, on a Friday following a residential, teachers accompanying that week’s trip have collapsed in the staff room, agreeing that despite their exhaustion they ‘wouldn’t have missed it for the world’. Time and again they then regale the rest with stories about children whom they have seen in a new and better light. Part of the currency and ethos of such schools lies in these shared residential experiences.

The unanswered questions, however, crowd in. How do we optimise follow-up? Is there a good time of the year to go? Is it possible to combine one overt primary purpose with others; for example a field trip for history with subtexts for creative writing and practical maths skills? How do we organise the school timetable so that residential aren’t seen as disruptive? How do we get the hard evidence to persuade more headteachers to provide these experiences for all students? How do we get young teachers to make residential part of their professional DNA?

These are some of the questions that Learning Away has sought to explore. I could go on (there are many more), and I do not pretend that you will find ‘beyond doubt’ answers in what follows. But you will not finish your reading without having cause to think.

The staff who have led this programme have shone a bright light on a much neglected area of schools’ work; one which is vital in improving the chances of young people growing up to be fulfilled, and best able to contribute to the fulfilment of others.

Sir Tim Brighouse

Former London Schools Commissioner and Visiting Professor at the Institute of Education
June 2015

In the past I have even resorted to all sorts of tactics and strategies (which wouldn’t have borne close scrutiny) as from time to time I have sought to defend the very existence of residential centres in the face of public spending reviews, first in Oxfordshire and then in Birmingham when I was Education Officer in those places in the late ‘70s and early 2000s. So you can imagine my delight when the Paul Hamlyn Foundation decided to set up and give considerable funds over five years to Learning Away.

My arguments for the value of residential education have always rested more on intuition and personal observations than on data-backed research. Over their first 16 years children are in school for about 15-20% of their waking time, with the enormous balance in their homes or the community. That’s why home background and good parenting are so important - but it’s also why time spent in school matters, and why we need to make the most of it. Having a residential at once raises the time available for influencing the child to 100%, at least for the duration of the trip. Secondly I have always thought that there are events so keenly anticipated by students and so out of the ordinary that they heighten the chance

Introduction to Learning Away

Since 2009 Learning Away has been working closely with sixty primary, secondary and special schools to demonstrate the positive impact that high-quality residential learning can have on learner engagement and achievement, on peer and teacher-student relationships, and on the powerful professional development opportunities it can provide for staff.



During the initiative, our partner schools have developed and tested a huge range of new and exciting residential programmes, for example working to boost GCSE attainment, support transition, or inspire KS2 writers, with experiences ranging from camping in school grounds to a four-night stay at Hampton Court Palace. It has been a privilege to work with them, draw together their learning and support them to share it with others.

The Learning Away website now hosts over seventy good practice case studies, alongside material to help 'make the case' for residential experiences to school leaders, governors, parents and Ofsted. Writers from our partner schools have helped us to produce a series of practical resources for teachers and visit leaders, including planning information, activity ideas, downloadable templates, presentations and films. These materials are being shared and recommended by peers - via the website, locally and via social media - and their influence on schools and residential providers can already be seen.

The current phase of Learning Away ends in September 2015. The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom and a growing group of like-minded partners are working with us to build on the learning and help us ensure that the policy and practice recommendations emerging from this initiative are taken up by schools and providers nationwide.

Peter Carne OBE
Project Leader, Learning Away
June 2015

The impact of Learning Away has been evaluated throughout the initiative, using survey and focus group data and testing hypotheses that emerged from the first two years of action research carried out with the schools. In June 2015 York Consulting published its final independent evaluation of Learning Away residentials, identifying their impacts as well as what it is about the overnight stay that brings about such powerful positive outcomes for young people long after their return to school.

This publication summarises York Consulting's key findings and our recommendations - for schools, residential providers and policymakers - developed with our partner schools as a result of our shared experience.

Learning Away and brilliant residentials

As a result of working over five years with our partner schools we have begun to understand what we mean by high-quality residential learning, and have coined the phrase 'brilliant residentials' to describe these experiences.

Brilliant residentials are school trips with at least one overnight stay, which are:

- led by teachers (and, where appropriate, students)
- co-designed with students
- fully integrated with the school curriculum and ethos
- inclusive and affordable for all students
- deliberately planned to meet students' specific learning needs
- part of a progressive programme of experiences
- designed to include a wide range of new and memorable experiences

- designed to allow space for students to develop collaborative relationships with both peers and staff
- evaluated rigorously
- planned so that learning is embedded and reinforced back in school
- supported by senior leadership.

In their final evaluation report, our independent evaluators have provided evidence confirming that, by working in this way, schools can achieve significant breakthroughs in learner engagement and progress, while achieving positive outcomes for teachers and the school as a whole.



Why brilliant residentials?

Residentials provide the opportunity and experience of living with others.

This transforms relationships and develops a strong sense of community and belonging between staff and students involved. Our evaluators found that this sense of community supports a wide range of positive social and learning outcomes long after the return to school.

So what is it about the residential that uniquely builds this lasting and impactful sense of community? And how does this experience translate into short, medium and long-term outcomes for students?

This diagram sets out our theory about the changes that happen to learning through brilliant residential experiences.

Residentials bring:

The overnight stay and an intensity of experience

- Extended time away from home
- A new environment and routines
- Fewer distractions
- Opportunities to work intensively and be immersed in learning
- A collaborative community environment
- Unstructured time

A new context for relationships

- Opportunities to break down existing barriers, hierarchies and power relationships
- Students and teachers work more collaboratively in unfamiliar surroundings on unfamiliar tasks
- The teacher is not automatically the expert
- Residentials are a leveller for students and staff
- Opportunities to develop and practise key social skills

Different and varied opportunities to experience success

- A wide range of practical and physical challenges
- Opportunities for everyone to be successful at something
- Opportunities to overcome fears
- Immediate opportunities to revisit and build on learning experiences

New ways of learning

- A safe space to explore new ways of teaching and learning
- Focus on real-life activities and experiences
- Increased levels of student responsibility

Which in the short and medium term lead to:

Enhanced relationships

- Students and staff trust each other
- Students feel more able to ask staff for help
- Students feel more comfortable with each other
- Students are more able to empathise
- The sense of community is sustained

Improved engagement and confidence in learning

- Increased motivation and engagement
- Improved behaviour and attendance
- Increased participation in lessons
- More enjoyment of learning
- Enhanced confidence, resilience and wellbeing
- Increased ability to overcome challenges and try new activities

New and developing skills and understanding

- New learning continues to develop, including skills in: independent learning; study and research; self management; communication; team working and problem solving
- Deeper and better understanding of specific subjects/topics
- Developing vocabulary
- Improving creativity
- Meaningful opportunities to develop and practise leadership skills
- Increased ability to apply learning and skills in new contexts

Which in the longer term lead to:

- Improved achievement, progress and attainment
- Improved knowledge, skills and understanding
- Improved relationships
- Improved engagement
- Improved behaviour and attendance
- More successful transition experiences (at all key stages)
- Raised aspirations
- Greater cohesion and a sense of belonging
- Enhanced trajectories to work, sixth form, further and higher studies



Impacts and benefits

Five years of independent evaluation have produced strong evidence about the numerous positive impacts of Learning Away for participating students, staff and the wider school community. This evidence shows that Learning Away residential:

Improve students' engagement with learning

The different learning environment and deeper relationships on residential contributed to improved engagement with learning, including positive changes in behaviour and attendance.

"Before going on the trip I hated school, but now I just love it. I love to learn about maths, literacy and science."

(Primary Student Focus Group)

"They're not only engaging in the actual learning, but they're engaging in assessing themselves, working out their weaknesses and then progressing. They're taking ownership of their own learning."

(Staff Focus Group)

79% of secondary students indicated that the residential had made them realise that what they learn at school is important to them.

Improve students' knowledge, skills and understanding

Staff and students felt that residential supported their knowledge, skills and understanding in a variety of ways.

"It showed me how to study, what's effective. Now I know what's best for me."

(Secondary Student Focus Group)

"It was a lot easier to understand stuff there, so I think my understanding back in school is going to be better. You can reflect back to stuff you've seen, so I think I can use it again and again."

(Secondary Student Focus Group)

In long-term follow-up surveys, 82% of KS2 pupils said their teachers and lessons on the residential helped them learn; 60% of secondary students felt they had a better understanding of what they were trying to learn.



Support students' achievement

Teachers saw the impact of residential on achievement in school through:

- increased progress in learning
- improved confidence and motivation
- students having a better awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and knowing what to do to improve
- a more collaborative approach to learning.

61% of students who attended Calderglen's Drama residential achieved higher than their predicted grade, compared to 21% who did not attend.

"The sense of being 'in it together' and mutual encouragement went a long way towards supporting weaker performances and producing a higher attainment for some of the less confident or able candidates. This was something which could almost certainly not have been generated in a school setting."

(Staff Focus Group)



Foster deeper relationships

Students developed social skills and skills to form new relationships on residential and these skills and the relationships they supported were sustained back in school.

In long-term follow-up surveys, 79% of KS2 pupils said, because of the trip, they knew teachers better; 65% of secondary students said their teachers had a better understanding of how they liked to learn.

"I think it probably helped the quiet ones. You can see them building relationships with other students and feeling more comfortable with them. They wouldn't have done this in school."

(Staff Focus Group)

Relationships between staff and students became more trusting and respectful. Students got to know teachers as individuals; staff gained a better understanding of their students and how best to respond to them.

In long-term follow-up surveys, 84% of secondary students and 71% of KS2 pupils said that because of the residential, they get on better with the other pupils in the class.

"The student-teacher relationship built in a week on residential is similar to that of a relationship built over an entire year in a normal class situation."

(Staff Survey)

"In school you see teachers as scary and strict but on the residential trip they're so much nicer. You see them as normal human beings."

(Secondary Student Focus Group)

Improve students' resilience, self-confidence and well-being

Increased confidence was the most common outcome of residential identified by students and staff. Students were more willing to ask for help, try something new including 'scary things', push themselves and participate in class; they also had more self-belief.

78% of KS2 pupils and 87% of secondary students felt more confident to try new things they would not have done before the residential.

"Their confidence has increased. They hold themselves in higher esteem. We're very good in schools at judging on levels and recording achievement based on targets. Camp showed them that we're able to value them in different ways."

(Staff Focus Group)



Boost cohesion and a sense of belonging

The sense of community and the memorability of experiences on residential helped boost cohesion and a sense of belonging amongst participants both on and after them. Staff and students put this down to teamwork, stronger relationships and getting to know people with whom they did not normally work.

"You feel more part of the school now you know more people."

(Secondary Student Focus Group)

82% of secondary and 75% of KS2 students said that their residential experience helped them realise they could get on with people from other classes or schools.

Provide opportunities for student leadership, co-design and facilitation

Residential experiences were enhanced through student involvement in their design, planning and delivery. Impacts were particularly notable for student leaders, who said leadership experiences improved their organisational, presentation, communication and listening skills, and their independence and maturity.

"I think it's made me more organised. When I'm doing a session now I know what I need to do, how I need to do it, how long I've got. Whereas, when I started I just did it until I was told to stop. I think I've become my own type of boss. I work independently without any advice."

(Student Leader Focus Group)

Their peers also valued student-led aspects of residential in terms of developing their understanding, confidence to ask questions and clarify understanding, as well as their levels of enjoyment.

"We were getting taught by students so it was kind of fun. It was better because you didn't have as much pressure as you would with the teacher. You understand each other."

(Secondary Student Focus Group)

Prior to the residential only 40% of secondary students felt that they could be role models to others; after the residential this figure rose to 67%.

Smooth students' transition experiences

In partnerships focussing on primary-secondary transition, staff from both phases stated that a residential was "worth half a term" in terms of gains students made in acquiring skills and relationships helpful for the secondary school environment. Secondary teachers benefited from getting to know new students in a relaxed environment and developed a better understanding of their needs prior to transition.

"The fact he's come to high school knowing staff he can really trust has had a big effect on him."

(Secondary Staff Focus Group)

Post residential, 67% of KS2 pupils said they found it easier to make new friends because of the residential.



Widen and develop teachers' pedagogical skills

Teachers said residential gave them time to reflect on their practice and their teaching became more experimental and flexible; they were more willing and confident to take risks and try new methods. They were also more trusting of their students and linked this to the improved relationships developed on residential.

"My teaching is much more kinaesthetic, more practical, more moving around, it's trusting the kids a little bit more. Before the residential, I was probably a little bit afraid about doing that sort of thing, whereas now I know I can handle it, it's fine and I'm getting much more positive results from it."

(Staff Focus Group)

Residential impacted on curriculum delivery, particularly the development of integrated and thematic approaches, and provided opportunities for staff to share practice and increase their awareness of cross-curricular learning opportunities.

Residential also offered important professional development opportunities, and supported staff to gain a better understanding of their students' skills and needs.

78% of staff involved felt that Learning Away had a 'significant' or 'transformative' impact on their understanding of their students' strengths and limitations.

Visit www.learningaway.org.uk for more detailed information about the impacts of Learning Away and to download the full evaluation report.

Developing brilliant residentials

Everything schools and providers need to make the case for, plan, deliver and evaluate the impact of brilliant residentials is available on the Learning Away website.

Do you need persuading, or need to persuade others? Explore our 'Brilliant residentials' and 'Impacts' sections to find evidence about the differences residentials make, and our thinking about what makes them brilliant.

Are you looking for inspiration? Browse our 70 case studies written by staff from the school partnerships covering primary, secondary and special school residentials.

Do you need some detailed help with planning and delivering brilliant residentials? Take a look at our 'Getting Started' and 'Resources' sections. Written by teachers and school leaders, the resources provide guidance, practical tips, and downloadable templates to support residentials with a wide range of aims, experiences, and age groups.

Find out how to:

- integrate your residential programme with the curriculum
- plan your residential to meet specific learning outcomes
- plan and deliver lower-cost residentials that also offer more opportunities for more students to participate
- work with students to co-construct residential learning
- foster student leadership on residentials and build on these benefits back in school
- provide residentials specifically for Early Years and Key Stage 1 children
- provide residentials for young people with special educational needs
- use residentials with families to support young people struggling in school.



Visit www.learningaway.org.uk to discover more about how to develop your brilliant residentials.

Recommendations

The independent evaluation of Learning Away in our partnership schools shows powerful, cumulative, positive impacts from high-quality residential learning, particularly when this learning is fully integrated with the school's curriculum and ethos. The strength of the evaluation evidence suggests that high-quality residential learning provides opportunities, impacts and benefits that are very hard to achieve in any other educational context.

Given its potential, it is clear that we need to make a cultural shift away from viewing high-quality residential learning as an enrichment activity to a position where it is firmly embedded as part of each young person's entitlement. Therefore, Learning Away makes the following recommendations, which we are convinced will not only support the development of high-quality residential learning, but also encourage the shift from enrichment to entitlement.

In order to provide brilliant residential learning, schools should:

1. Provide a range of inclusive residential experiences that progress throughout each phase of education and are integrated with class-based and learning outside the classroom (LOT) activities. The learning on residential should be planned:
 - with clear learning objectives based on students' needs
 - collaboratively by school staff, venue staff and students
 - so that the experiences are embedded and reinforced once back in school.
2. Work closely with residential providers during the planning process to ensure the right mix of activities and delivery – both logistically and in terms of different approaches – and feel confident to ask them for flexibility.
3. Recognise and plan for the value of informal social time during residential – the transformed relationships that happen during this time are crucial to residential's sustained impact.
4. Plan for rigorous evaluation as an essential part of the residential programme using both quantitative and qualitative methods that enable staff to understand, develop and confirm the value of their practice.
5. Develop a climate that supports healthy risk-taking around learning and teaching that will encourage helpful changes to pedagogy both on residential and back in school.
6. Develop staffing and support structures, and CPD, to assist teachers running residential. The commitment of headteachers and senior management teams is key to effective and sustainable residential programmes, and a critical factor in successfully embedding the learning.
7. Look across the wider school community for residential expertise and, when appropriate, for volunteer adults and/or student leaders.
8. Work in partnerships with other schools to plan and deliver residential programmes, provide support and training, develop creative solutions, share equipment and resources, combine purchasing power and share findings and practice.
9. Develop inclusive residential programmes by investigating lower-cost residential and using Pupil Premium to support students who would not otherwise be able to attend.
10. Seek opportunities to use residential to support students through key transition points.

In order to promote and support brilliant residential learning, providers should:

1. Draw on the findings from Learning Away to inform their residential offer and approach to working with schools.
2. Publicise the benefits of residential experiences for young people of all ages, and the range of opportunities they offer, to a wide audience using local and national networks.
3. Direct schools and policymakers to the Learning Away research evidence and website.
4. Publicise the unique nature of the overnight stay and the opportunities this offers for learning, teaching and relationship-building.
5. Promote and support the development of curriculum-integrated, inclusive and progressive residential programmes, encouraging schools to recognise that residential should be an entitlement rather than an enrichment activity.
6. Work collaboratively with teachers and students to both plan and deliver high-quality residential learning programmes, ensuring they are tailored to the needs of students and schools.
7. Support schools to include and make good use of informal social time as part of their programme by being clear about its benefits to relationship building.
8. Evaluate the impact of their residential programmes rigorously, working in partnership with schools to do so and sharing evidence with them.
9. Support lower-cost residential models by, for example, offering:
 - camping opportunities (sites, equipment, support)
 - shorter residential
 - more opportunities for teacher-led activities.
10. Draw schools' attention to the use of Pupil Premium and other funding opportunities for residential, and help schools evaluate the impact of this funding.

In order to facilitate and support the development of brilliant residential learning, we encourage policymakers to:

1. Recognise and promote the ways in which residential learning can impact on curriculum reviews, and their design and delivery in schools, across the UK.
2. Promote the clear links between the impact of residential on resilience, confidence, and 'grit', and the current focus on character education in schools.
3. Recognise the opportunities that residential experiences provide to support the current focus on promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing.
4. Promote the impact of residential on families as demonstrated by Learning Away, linking these to the family support agenda.
5. Publicise the findings of the Learning Away programme to the informal education sector; the findings of Learning Away have implications for children and young people beyond their lives in school.

In order to further understand brilliant residential learning and their impact, we have identified the following areas that would benefit from further research:

1. The impact of residential experiences on attainment.
2. The longer-term impacts of residential experiences.
3. The impact of residential experiences on students' emotional health and wellbeing.
4. Effective strategies for reinforcing and embedding residential learning.
5. The benefits of residential experiences in the non-formal youth sector.

Acknowledgements

This publication was compiled by Siân Williams (Learning Away Schools Advisor) and Peter Carne (Learning Away Project Leader). It also incorporates contributions from Kirsty Gillan-Thomas, Abigail Knipe and Dr Chris Loynes, and draws heavily on the final evaluation report by Sally Kendall and John Rodger from York Consulting.

We are indebted to the Learning Away coordinators and participating staff at all schools engaged in the initiative. Their continued commitment to extending and developing their residential offers, engaging with the evaluation, and sharing what they learned through a period of significant national change has been inspiring. Thanks are also due to the two Learning Away evaluation teams: CUREE (Centre for the Use of Research & Evidence in Education) and York Consulting.

We are grateful to all members of the Learning Away Steering Group over the years, with particular thanks to current members Peter Wilson-Smith, Sir Tim Brighouse, Mike Tones, Gwynne Kynaston, Professor David Hopkins, Neil Wilson, and Régis Cochefert, and to the project's initiator Denise Barrows. Commissioned photography by Emile Holba www.emileholba.co.uk.



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Published by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, July 2015

www.learningaway.org.uk

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Find out more at **www.phf.org.uk**

Participating school partnerships

"Before going on the trip I had hated school but now I just love it. I love to learn about maths, literacy and science. I think it's just changed me basically, changed my abilities."

Year 4 pupil, The Pilot Partnership (East EAZ)



“Learning Away confirms, adds to and deepens the existing research base by its specific focus on the residential experience. Most important is its articulation of a ‘theory of change’ that explains how learning is enhanced through the residential experience. This proposition makes it abundantly clear that in education residentials are, almost without exception, the gift that keeps on giving.”

Professor David Hopkins, Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Education, Executive Director of Adventure Learning Schools



“When I was at Hampton Court there was just loads of stuff to inspire me. I probably did more hours of work in that one week than I did in the whole term, I just had so much inspiration from it.”

Year 10 student, Canterbury Academy

Since 2009 Learning Away has worked with 60 schools across the UK to develop, test and evaluate what we now describe as ‘brilliant residentials’. Residential learning is ‘brilliant’ when it is led by teachers, co-designed with students, and fully integrated into the curriculum. Our independent evaluators have found that, by working in this way, schools can achieve significant breakthroughs in learner engagement and progress, while achieving positive outcomes for teachers and the school as a whole.

Supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, this publication shares key recommendations for teachers and school leaders, residential providers and education policymakers.

The Learning Away website hosts more than 70 inspiring good practice case studies, plus material to help make the case for residential learning to school leaders, governors and Ofsted. Our free resource packs, written by teachers and school leaders, share guidance, practical tips and downloadable templates, and are designed to help schools plan and deliver their own brilliant residentials.

Download the resources at www.learningaway.org.uk

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