

# ‘Our son loves it. It is always the first thing he mentions after school.’

A case study of embedding regular adventurous play and learning outdoors in an Irish primary school

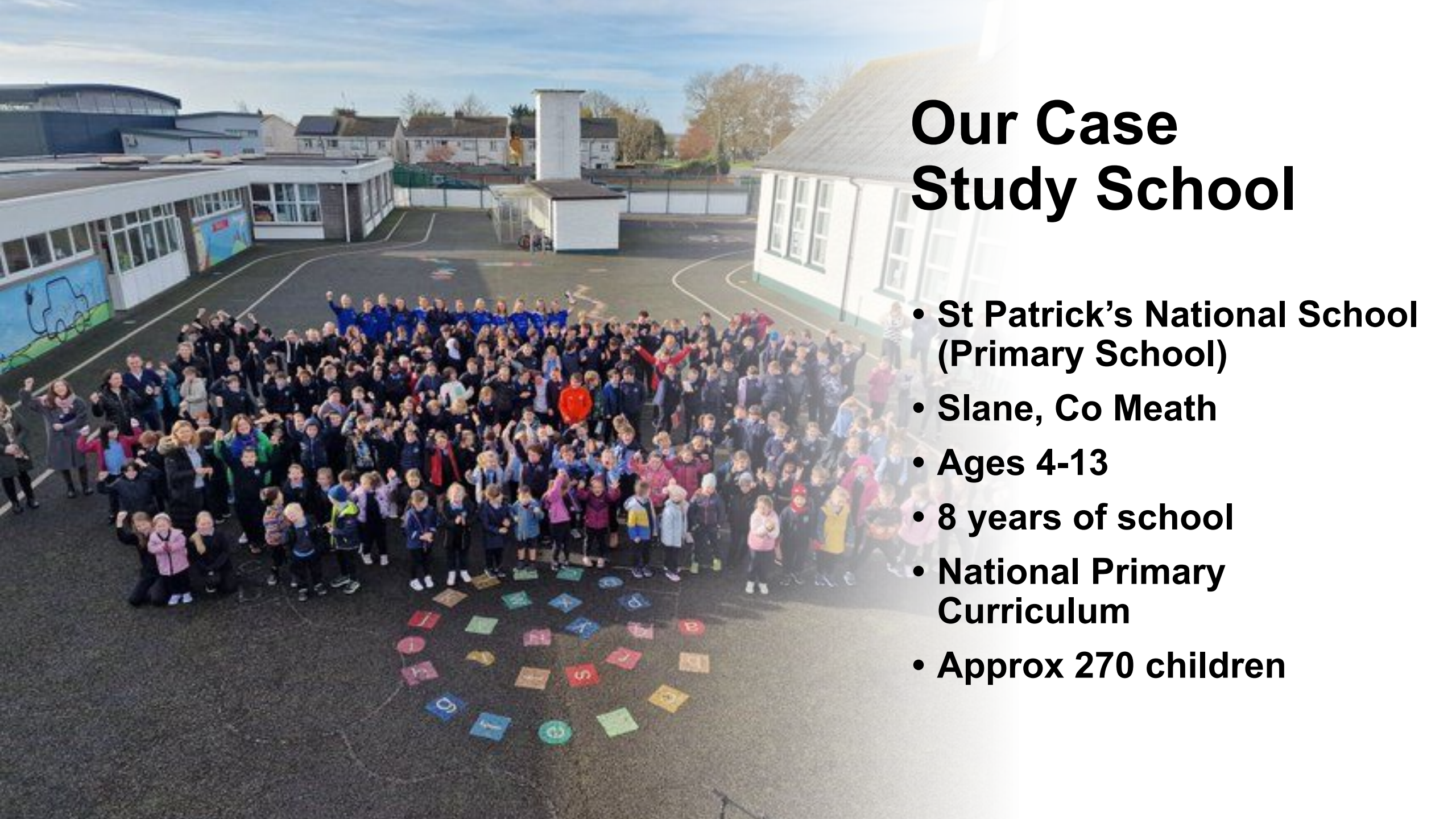
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# Our Case Study School

- St Patrick's National School (Primary School)
- Slane, Co Meath
- Ages 4-13
- 8 years of school
- National Primary Curriculum
- Approx 270 children



# Project Overview

## 2022-2023

- 2 teachers using outdoor adventurous play pedagogy with their classes
  - 22 Junior Infants (Age 4-5)
  - 23 Senior Infants (Age 5-6)
- At least one lesson outdoors every week
- Teachers also facilitating
  - 35 3<sup>rd</sup> Class (Age 8-9)
  - At least one outdoor lesson every week

## 2023-2024

- Same 2 teachers using outdoor adventurous play pedagogy with their classes
  - 22 Junior Infants (Age 4-5)
  - 17 Senior Infants (Age 5-6)
- At least one lesson outdoors every week
- School principal facilitated 35 4<sup>th</sup> class (Age 9-10) to do regular outdoor lessons as part of thematic work





# Study Methodology

## Start of the Project (January 2023)

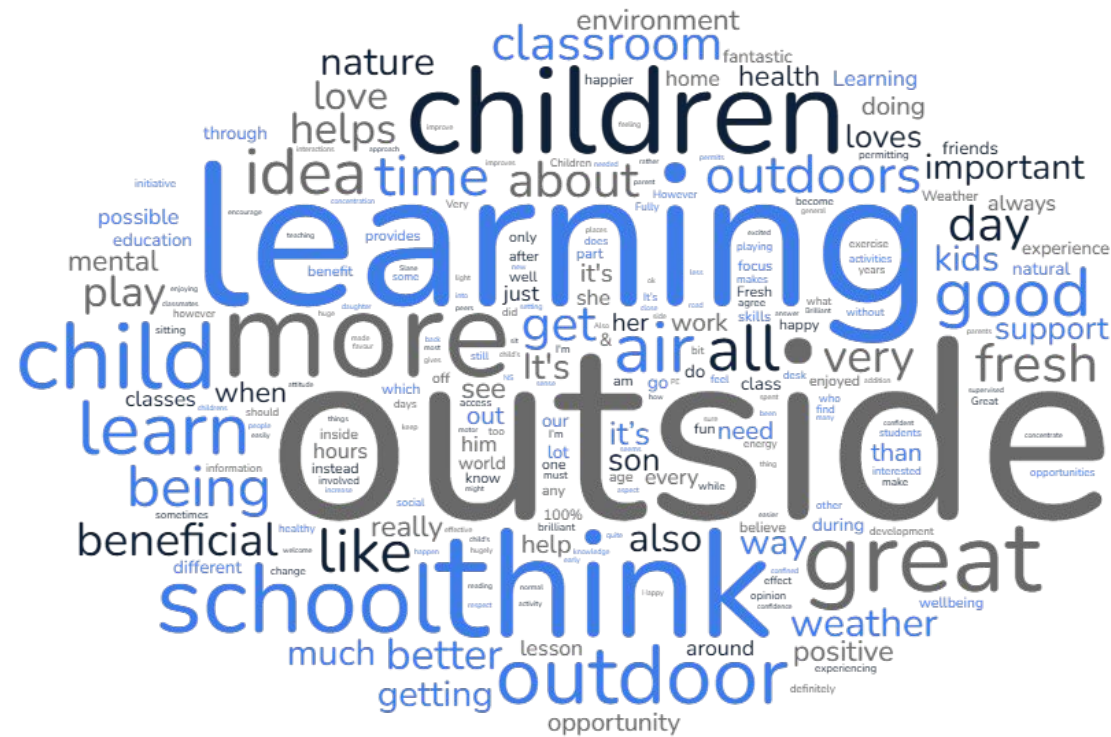
- Surveys with all parents (#116 responded), children (#61), teachers (#14) and principal (#1)
- Additional new parent & child survey in Dec 2023
- Initial interview with the principal

## End of the Project (Jun 24)

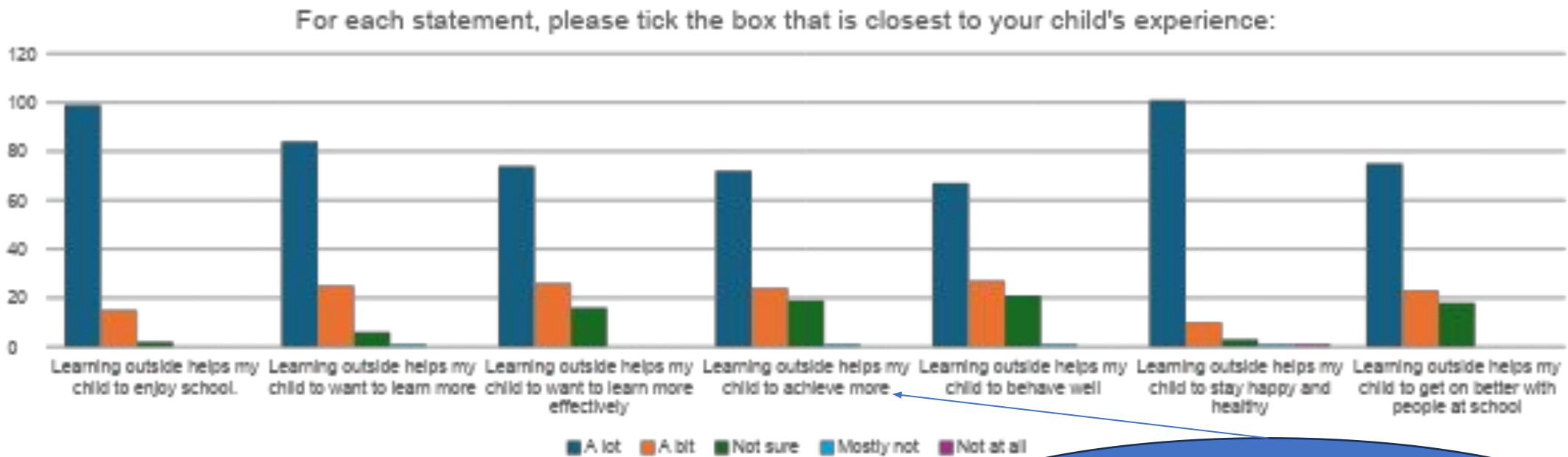
- Surveys with all parents (#39), all children (#85), all teachers (#14) and principal (#1)
- Ongoing reflections by the teachers
- Focus group discussions with the project researchers
- Observations of outdoor learning
- Final interview with the school principal





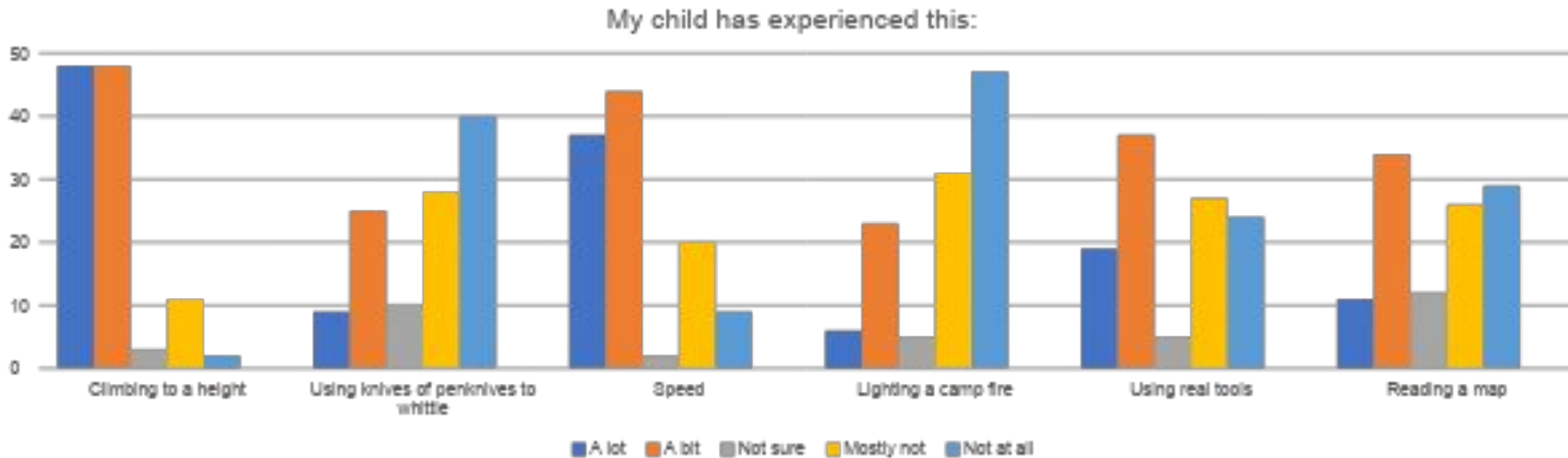


# Parental responses to statements about outdoors



Only one with any (90% confidence) difference across age ranges

# Parental responses to images of 6 categories of risky play (2009)





Great idea, in my opinion it should be part of curriculum for all ages / classes.

A brilliant idea, I just wish they did more...

Brilliant idea, more inclusive, fun and engaging for children

I love the idea of learning outside. The children will be more interested and will be actively involved in the lesson instead of passive engagement. They will learn through doing & experiencing and will remember more.

Our son loves it. It is always the first thing he mentions after school. He can be quite a cautious child but he is definitely more confident.

My child is most excited for outdoor learning day. **As she can be quite nervous about physical activities it improves here bravery as she is doing it will all her classmates.**

I love outdoor learning. My son wakes with an extra enthusiasm on the days he does outdoor learning and PE which enables him to have more energy for the things he isn't too keen on.

It sounds great and my daughter seems to really like it. I think it must be a great way to toughen them up a bit too!!



## Not all positive!

Depending on the topic I think it will help a lot eg not so sure about maths. Also the children can be a bit boisterous and sometimes being outside might encourage this behaviour. So as long as it is still structured and well supervised then I would be happy.

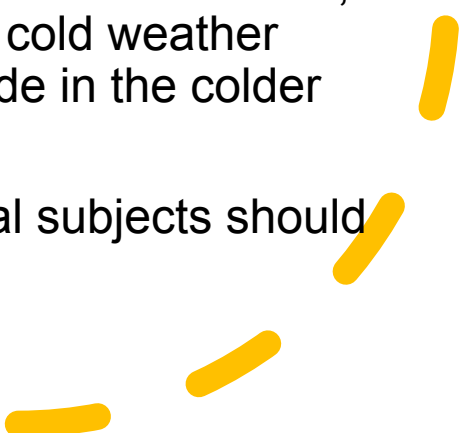
Where necessary

It's good to get outdoors and healthy if planned and organised. Just putting people outdoors as a response to covid was not a policy that made sense. However I know that educators were doing their best at the time with the limited information they had.

If the weather is ok, I think it is very good for kids to play/learn outside. I don't think they should be sent outside if the weather is poor though. (and other similar comments about the weather)

I think this would be great for my child being outdoors with nature, however, I would not want him outside in really cold weather and to be dressed appropriately for being outside in the colder weather.

Time and place for learning outside. Fundamental subjects should be prioritised.

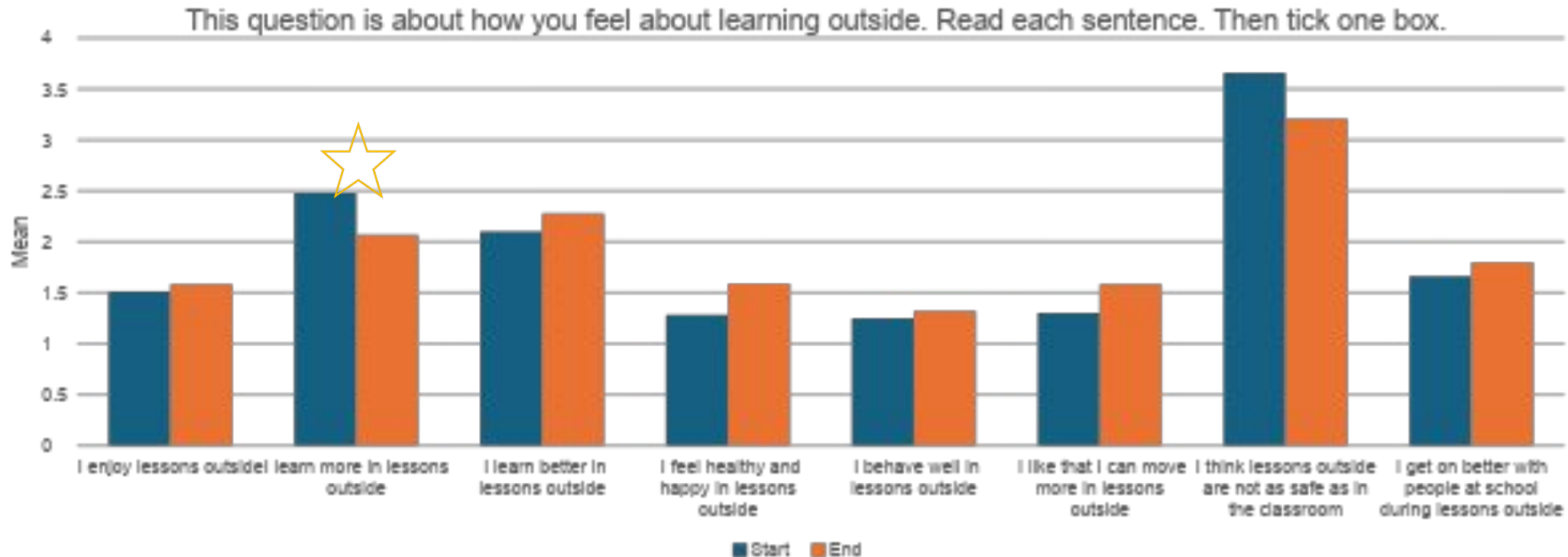




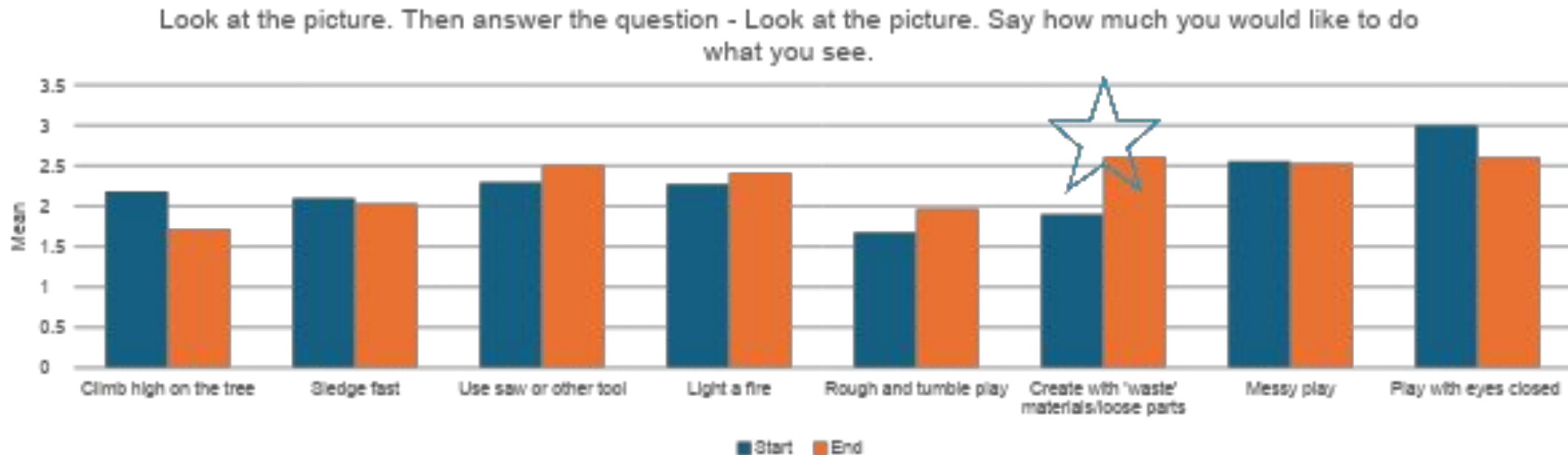




# These statements are drawn from the Learning in Natural Environments study (Waite et al. 2016)



# The children were presented with images related Sandseter's 6 categories of risky play (2009)



# When asked what they learned through learning outdoors

## Curriculum learning

- Maths
- PE
- Science
- Literacy
- Gaeilge
- History

## Skills and holistic learning

- How to be a good friend
- How to have fun
- Being kind to others
- Being kind to the environment
- Team work
- Risky play e.g. playing with tools, being at heights

**Teachers were generally positive before and after the study, however...**

| <b>Challenges<br/>(tick all that apply)</b> | <b>Start (#9)</b> | <b>End (#14)</b> |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Health & safety/Risk assessment             | 4                 | 4                |
| Access to resources/lesson plans            | 1                 | 5                |
| Need for additional adults                  | 2                 | 6                |
| Lack of confidence in working outdoors      | 6                 | 5                |
| Uncertain how to relate OL/AP to curriculum | 6                 | 7                |
| Unsuitable children clothing/footwear       | 2                 | 0                |
| Curriculum overload/other priorities        | 5                 | 6                |
| Lack of necessary equipment                 | 4                 | 3                |
| Outdoor learning not valued by staff        | 1                 | 0                |
| Lack of funding                             | 1                 | 1                |
| Lack of time                                | 1                 | 5                |
| None                                        | 0                 | 3                |



With special thanks to my colleagues:

- Maura and Joan in DCU
- Lorna, Ruth and Paul in Slane N.S.

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