

## **MEDIA RELEASE – Embargoed to 24/8/10**

### **Room with no view: why children need more space for play and learning**

Children are missing out on essential learning experiences and the chance to explore because of a lack of space, according to research published in the new issue of 'Children in Europe' magazine.

Despite access to outdoor spaces being increasingly recognised as vital for nurturing and developing young children's natural inquisitiveness and long-term wellbeing, as well as their creative and cognitive development, the research reveals that outdoor space standards in services for young children vary widely across Europe, with some countries, including the Republic of Ireland, France and Germany, having no national requirements specified.

Although Scotland does have a requirement for local authority nursery schools and classes for 3-4-year-olds to provide an area of 9.3m<sup>2</sup> per child – less than the size of the average bedroom – other services need only provide 'adequate and appropriate space' for the activities being undertaken. And, when compared to the 40m<sup>2</sup> for pre-school children in Croatia and 33m<sup>2</sup> per child allocated in Norway for under threes, there is clearly still work to be done here.

While parents have become increasingly concerned about their children's safety, and young people spend more time indoors, the risk of losing the benefits offered to young people's mental and physical wellbeing through outdoor activity is equally significant.

As Bronwen Cohen, Chief Executive of Children in Scotland, who published the findings, says: "The need for access to quality outdoor space extends beyond simply learning about nature, to learning *in* nature, which is good for mental and physical health, and which binds community and family in discovering and developing local resources."

"As outdoor play is increasingly encouraged, we must work, as a number of other European countries do, to allow children innovative and stimulating experiences, in safe but challenging outdoor settings, which can range from playgrounds and parks, to supervised visits to working farms. The important element is that children must be allowed to take the lead in their learning, discovering things for themselves, asking questions, and developing as citizens."

In looking for workable ways forward, the magazine includes key articles from Sweden and Denmark where innovative use of outdoor environments are a longstanding part of the education systems, as well as Catalonia where a lack of good outdoor space encouraged one school to working more closely with families and the community to "find nature in hidden corners...in the squares and the hidden corners of the nearby routes that we walk day in day out". Writing in the

magazine, teacher Carme Cols says: “When there are no good outdoor spaces a school must open its doors to allow children to escape its impoverished concrete surroundings.”

The focus is on improving children’s health and wellbeing in Sweden, where, according to environmental psychologist, Fredrika Mårtensson, “outdoor play in green, spacious and varied environments creates open and flexible play situations, allowing children to become more physically active, mentally agile, and better equipped to work and build trust with their classmates.”

In Denmark, ‘scrap playgrounds’ allow children to play with scrap items, giving them the chance to build and create, firing their imaginations, while utilising their physical energy. They also allow urban children the chance to experience a more rural, less technology-led environment, and to discover for themselves how to better balance safety and risk.

But it’s far from doom and gloom in Scotland, as an article from Fife outlines the authority’s commitment to making outdoor activities part of school life from day one, including nature kindergartens, outdoor classrooms, school allotments – even physical education lessons taking place outdoors.

### **Notes to Editors**

1. *Children in Europe* magazine is published twice yearly in 15 languages and 18 countries. The ‘Playing Outside’ issue – Issue 19 – will be published in September 2010.
2. The Children in Europe conference ‘Playing Outside’ takes place on 16 September 2010 at Balbirnie House Hotel, Markinch, Fife, with international speakers, including Fredrika Mårtensson, as well as Minister for Children and Early Years Adam Ingram.
3. **Children in Scotland** is the longstanding national agency for the whole of the children’s sector, reaching over 250,000 individuals through our extensive membership of more than 450 statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups. For further information visit [www.childreninscotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk).
4. ‘Making Space 2010’, is a year-long programme managed by Children in Scotland, which includes an international award and conference, to promote and support innovation, creativity and sustainability in design for children and young people aged 0-18, and to acknowledge the involvement of children and young people themselves in these processes. For more information on ‘Making Space 2010’ visit [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/makingspace](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/makingspace)

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