

Balancing Digital and Real-World Engagement

By Paul Jackson, Headteacher at Gorsefield Rural Studies and Outdoor Activity Centre

The recent [report by the UK Parliament](#) and [findings from the OECD](#) on the impacts of digital device usage among students highlight significant concerns about distraction, academic performance, and overall well-being. The extensive use of digital technologies, while beneficial in some educational contexts, often leads to increased distraction and lower academic performance, particularly in mathematics. Nearly one-third of students across OECD countries report being distracted by digital devices in class, with significant repercussions on their learning outcomes and sense of belonging in school.

At [Gorsefield Rural Studies and Outdoor Activity Centre](#), we have long recognised the importance of disconnecting from digital screens to enhance the well-being of our visitors. We encourage all our visitors, both children and adults, to turn off their electronic devices and fully engage with the natural environment. Our philosophy is rooted in the belief that real-world interactions and outdoor activities provide unparalleled benefits for mental and physical health.

Reducing Screen Time for Enhanced Well-being

The findings from the OECD report highlight the negative impact of excessive screen time on students' academic performance and social integration. Students who spend more than an hour on digital devices for leisure activities at school score lower in mathematics and report a diminished sense of belonging. By contrast, those who engage moderately with digital devices for learning purposes tend to perform better and feel more connected to their school community.

At Gorsefield, we have implemented programmes that emphasise the value of outdoor learning and physical activity. Our visitors participate in a variety of activities such as cycling, orienteering and archery, which not only provide a break from screens but also foster a deeper connection with nature and each other.

Promoting Outdoor Engagement

One of our core activities at Gorsefield is cycling, where we teach non-cyclists to ride and help experienced cyclists enhance their skills. Cycling, along with other outdoor activities, is designed to support physical fitness, improve mental health, and encourage a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors. This aligns with research showing that physical activities like cycling can reduce the risk of arthritis and knee pain while promoting overall longevity ([MPR News](#)) ([EverydayHealth.com](#)).



Innovate Create Educate

Creating a Balanced Digital Environment

We understand the importance of digital literacy and the benefits of technology in education. However, our approach at Gorsefield is to strike a balance. By limiting unnecessary screen time and promoting active, outdoor experiences, we aim to mitigate the distractions associated with digital devices and enhance our visitors' overall well-being.

The recent parliamentary report and OECD findings reinforce the need for structured and mindful use of digital technologies in educational settings. Schools and activity centres like ours play a crucial role in fostering environments where children can thrive without the constant presence of screens.

Gorsefield Rural Studies and Outdoor Activity Centre remains committed to promoting outdoor learning and reducing screen time. We believe that engaging with the natural environment is essential for the well-being and holistic development of all our visitors. For more information about our programmes and activities, please visit our website at [Gorsefield Rural Studies and Outdoor Activity Centre](https://www.gorsefield.org).

Please contact me at Pjackson@Gorsefield.org for more information, to arrange a visit and to explore our visits or training offer.

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