

Forest Explorers: Developing a learning culture:



The principal aims of the Forest Explorers' initiative are:

- **To motivate all types of learners;** contact with the outdoors is often limited for many children in our modern society, and the vital experience of using the outdoors and being comfortable in nature is being lost. The *Education Outside the Classroom Manifesto* highlights that education outside can motivate children and bring learning to life, by providing opportunities to achieve, and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment'.
- **To focus on 'wellbeing' and the 'whole child':** Forest explorers can contribute to four of the five outcomes that are part of the government framework, *Every child matters* (Chief Secretary to the Treasury, 2003), identified by children as key to well-being: 1. be healthy, 2. stay safe, 3. enjoy and achieve, 4. make a positive contribution.
- **To engage our parents in their own child's learning, so empowering both;** Parents are encouraged to participate as valued volunteers, on a regular basis, and learn 'on the job', alongside other adults and children. Many become motivated to visit these natural local areas, out of school time, with their families and friends, promoting health and wellbeing to the broader school community.
- **To allow for a flexible approach to learning;** A natural woodland setting is adaptable and accommodates a range of learning styles; kinaesthetic (learning by doing), linguistic, interpersonal, mathematical and visual. Forest Explorers is an initiative that enables practitioners to shape teaching methods to an individual's learning style. Research in America, (Taylor *et al.*, 1998; Fjortoft, 2004) has found that children who play in natural environments undertake more diverse, creative and imaginative play, forming an important part of a child's development.
- **To provide a useful formative evaluation tool for staff,** in understanding and assessing a child's skills and abilities, and in identifying how these change over time.

Below is a copy of a letter received from a past parent about her child's experiences at Forest Explorers:

"I am writing to thank you very much for the gorgeous portfolio that you sent home with E two weeks ago recording her time with you, Mrs Creasey and Mrs Bainbridge at Forest School. It will be kept as a special family treasure for a long time to come.

As a full time working parent, I particularly appreciate the portfolio because it offers me a small but significant window into E's world when she is "at school". It has been lovely to see photographs of her listening to the Ranger so intently and to read her words and ideas that have been recorded so authentically.

G speaks very enthusiastically about Forest School and there has clearly been such a lot of careful thought and planning to make this experience as magical as possible. Thank you.

It is also evident that E has gained a great deal from this lovely opportunity. Here are her replies to the questions I asked as I typed:

Mummy: "What did you do at Forest School E?"

E: "We made a den and we made a potion for the caterpillars and fairies to eat. And for the worms and spiders and stuff like that and we made one for ourselves and some days we had our snacks in our den."

Mummy: "Why did your teachers decide to take you to Forest School?"

E: "Because it would be fun."

Mummy: "What did you learn by going there do you think?"

E: "About the woods, and never go on your own and to be careful if there's some large monsters around."

Mummy: "Anything else?"

E: "No, not really."

Mummy: "What will you remember most?"

E: "All the spiders and trees, the woods, the grass, my friends – phew this is hard work!"

"Can you write, 'We had such a great time and thank you.'?"

And a huge thank you from me, too.

With very best wishes."

