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Key stages	EYFS- KS1
School type	LA maintained, primary
Themes	Outdoor learning

# Engaging pupils in outdoor learning using a Forest School

## Wormley C of E Primary School

### Context

Wormley C of E Primary School is a larger than average school situated in the Broxbourne district. Most pupils are from a white British background and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average.

### Brief description

In September 2014 Wormley Primary School launched its new Forest School, which is situated in a woodland area in the school grounds. The forest school project is led by Jennifer Tinsley, a trained Forest School leader. The aim of opening forest school was to allow children to understand and respect nature, grow in confidence, learn life skills and to help them develop their communication, learning and teamwork skills. In addition the Forest School aims to give children a sense of wonder and curiosity and allow them to feel successful and express themselves in any way they choose.

### How children use the forest school

Pupils from nursery, reception and year one have weekly lessons in the Forest School, an area used for an educational approach to outdoor learning. Forest School lessons are also arranged for an intervention group which includes children with special educational needs and those with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Lessons are designed to link closely with all areas of the national curriculum and Early Year's Development Matters. Each of these outdoor sessions are carefully planned to combine a mix of adult and child led activities incorporating the children's interests, personal and social skills and cross curricular links.

Before each lesson children walk on a nature trail built by staff, that goes around the school grounds and leads to the forest school. In the outdoor lessons children take part in activities such as den building, cooking on campfires, planting and growing fruit and vegetables, scavenger hunts, making ladybird homes and storytelling. Children often take turns to take part in the main activity set by Jennifer while those waiting are free to explore the rest of the outdoor area and keep themselves busy by making dens, digging and cooking in the Forest Cafe.

## Impact

### Confidence and resilience

This project has increased the confidence of pupils and has allowed them to have the freedom, time and space to learn and demonstrate independence. Taking part in regular outdoor lessons has made pupils more adventurous and confident about trying new things, with teachers noticing a particular change in children who were quiet. The project has also made children more resilient evident by the way children now cope with certain situations. At the beginning of the project many children used to cry when something they were building broke, but now they go ahead and just build it again. Children are also less concerned about getting their clothes dirty since the project began.

### Teamwork skills

This project has had a significant impact on teamwork and leadership skills of pupils, as many of the activities require them to work in teams or pairs. Children have improved their social skills and have started to cooperate a lot more with their peers. Teachers have noticed that they argue and disagree less than they did at the beginning and that they help each other a lot more, even in other lessons.

### Risk assessment and safety

An important aim of the forest school is to teach children outdoor survival skills and risk assessment. In Forest School lessons children are taught how to use tools such as knives safely and about fire safety. Children are now more aware of danger and have become responsible for themselves and others around them.

### Pupil wellbeing

Teachers have noticed that the forest school has had a huge impact on the emotional wellbeing of pupils. As part of her Teacher Led Development Work project with HertsCam Jennifer Tinsley has been observing how the Forest School has affected a few children with behavioural and special education needs. The combination of freedom and responsibility has proven to be particularly beneficial to pupils with challenging behaviour issues who are now more engaged in class.

Children on the autistic spectrum have also responded really well to the project. Jennifer has noticed that children who were very solitary are now starting to listen and respond to their peers and adults, as well as deal with situations in a more calm and controlled manner. This is because they take part in activities which they enjoy and can work at their own pace with less pressure. Many of them have now formed a close relationship with the natural environment where they can use a variety of senses to learn and become engaged.

### Classroom

The Forest School lessons are designed to make cross-curricular links which will help children in the classroom. Children often take part in outdoor science lessons, for example they have learnt how to judge how old trees are. Children also write about what they have done in the forest school in following lessons. The school has also linked Forest School activities to the 'mini beasts' topic taught in class. Teachers have noticed that the forest school has improved pupils' problem solving skills which helps them in subjects such as maths. In the classroom children have been observed as having more positive attitudes towards learning and those who were disengaged and disinterested are now more focused and less disruptive in class.

## Next Steps

After noticing the positive impact that the Forest School has had on reception and year 1 pupils, the school is soon hoping make forest school lessons available to all other year groups. The school is still working on further developing the Forest School area and trail by planting, growing and buying new resources.

Wormley has received positive feedback about the project from parents and is hoping to get parents involved as helpers during the lessons to get them even more engaged with their children's learning. There are also plans to train more teachers as Forest School practitioners and to start using the school minibuss to take the children out to a nearby forest to further extend their outdoor learning opportunities. The school will soon be taking parents and children on a trip to Broxbourne Woods as part of this initiative.

Contact	Jennifer Tinsley, Forest School Leader Tracy Gaiteri, Headteacher at Wormley School
Related documents and links	<a href="http://www.wormley.herts.sch.uk/">http://www.wormley.herts.sch.uk/</a> <a href="http://www.forestschoolassociation.org/">http://www.forestschoolassociation.org/</a> <a href="http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Development-Matters-FINAL-PRINT-AMENDED.pdf">http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Development-Matters-FINAL-PRINT-AMENDED.pdf</a>

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