

Lanark Primary

Woodland play

Local authority

South Lanarkshire

Roll and type

258 - nursery and primary

Timescale

1 year

“When children are playing together in the woods their behaviour is a lot better”





“Out here, with nothing added there is a whole wealth of opportunity... they use their imagination to bring it alive”. Pupils enjoy playing in the large mature woodland on the edge of the playground and staff see an improvement in behaviour - as “they are engaged, enjoy themselves, have things to do, work together as a team, are more motivated...” and have come up with creative ways to allow free play in the very large area.

After initial consultations with staff, pupils and parents the school created a vision for the woods. With a forest school trained teacher in the nursery and a supportive senior management team the play potential of the woods were recognised but questions regarding free access, supervision of such a large space, problems of fly tipping and questions over whether the older children would need more structured play (e.g. bushcraft) were raised.

Each class was observed in the woods both with and without resources to see where and how they played and how they regulated their behaviour. This led to a decision to zone the area - to distribute play, allowing areas to recover and led to a number of creative solutions

“They are more motivated”

Top tip
Keep moving the play to allow the wood to ‘rest’

Every class has access to the woodland on a rota and the playground supervisors are supported in monitoring this by a group of P6 children – the Wood Watch Rangers. These Rangers volunteer for up to 6 months and decide on their own role and responsibilities which include:

- Monitoring access to woods – a local woodworker helped define the entrance and boundaries and they position markers on trees to indicate the areas to be played in.
- Meeting at the start of lunch break to consult with a supervisor and decide whether to open the area. A green flag at the entrance signifies that the wood has been checked with their risk assessment, there are enough pupils on duty and it is not too windy. A red flag signifies the woods are closed.
- Ringing the bell at the end of break - all the rangers have a watch and an outdoor clock and bell have been installed by the entrance.
- Bringing the woodland resources from the building. No regular playground equipment is allowed in the woods but tarpaulins, ropes, mats are stored in school and transported by trolley.
- Monitoring litter – collecting it if pointed out by other children and ensuring everyone uses the newly bought bin.
- Facilitating play if other pupil's need it – being visible at all times with personalised high visibility jackets.

Top tip
pupils can be extra eyes and ears for the supervisors



These solutions have been designed by a playground group consisting of the Wood Watch Rangers, the Head of the school, nursery teacher, Depute head, the janitor and the lunchtime supervisors. This group keeps in touch with the rest of the school through assemblies and displays. An easily accessible leaflet is displayed at the entrance to the school with their play policy, risk assessments, experiences the children might participate in and inspirational quotes and poems such as this:

Every time I climb a tree – D McCord

I scrape a leg or skin a knee -
And every time I climb a tree
I find some ants
Or dodge a bee
And get the ants
All over me;
And every time I climb a tree
Where have you been?
They say to me -
But don't they know that I am free?
Every time I climb a tree.

“Our pupils acquire new skills, and appreciate and understand the natural environment”

