

# Longstone Primary

## Woodland play

Local authority

Edinburgh

Roll and type

223 - nursery and primary

Timescale

1 year

“children should benefit from experiencing and playing in such a wonderful natural environment”





The school is located next to a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and between them they share a strip of millennium woodland that runs along the edge of both of their grounds.

It provides a contrast to the large open spaces of the playground and to encourage this contrast they support children to engage with the special qualities of the space.

At the start of the project all staff, pupils and parents were consulted and a “woodland group” of staff and pupils was formed. They set out a vision that “the woodland is a fantastic resource and as a school we feel that the children should benefit from experiencing and playing in such a wonderful natural environment”.

Due to its size and its location on the periphery on the grounds next to a train line the school wanted to encourage quiet imaginative and independent free play.

“I like getting showers from the wet leaves”

**Top Tip:**  
Encourage every type of play in your grounds

To encourage imaginative play in the wood the school worked with artists and play rangers to make a number of physical changes to the woods.

Every class and member of staff took part in a Skogsmulle workshop in school and as part of teacher's CPD. The Skogsmulle approach is about making being in, caring for, and learning about nature in a playful way – using songs, stories and drama.

Resources to encourage den building such as tarpaulins, ropes and rugs provide structure to encourage all children to engage with the space.

Every class was involved with creating a design for a magical mystical sculpture that included fairies and dragons, woodland creatures, a skeleton of a dinosaur whose ribs could be used to play music and a colony of bats roosting in the trees. The winning design was passed to a local artist who created two thrones incorporating woodland creatures.

A bespoke story telling chair and log seating area in the woods provides enough seating for a whole class for regular storytelling sessions.

Play spaces are defined through signs around the border. They waited until children had had a chance to play in the woods before defining this and to keep with the magical feel these signs were created by an artist and have alternative messages such as “don't climb me” or “watch out bulbs below” chosen by the children.

“I like playing in and adding to dens other people have made”



The staff had initial concerns about not being able to see the children whilst in the woods so working with the head teacher and older children acting as helpers/monitors they took small groups into the area to play. This incremental approach meant that every child was able to experience the woodland, discuss the possible hazards (twigs at eye height, slips and falls and litter) and the older children enjoyed the responsibility. No major accidents or behavioural issues have been recorded as children split naturally into groups – those who want to play chase/hide and seek, those who want to build dens and structures and those who just enjoy a quiet, different place to be. The staff commented on how positive the children’s behavior was – as they were “very happy, very creative in their approaches, they cooperated well and acted responsibly”. Parents have also been supportive, despite “some very dirty clothes going home” but all involved can see that “over time the woodland will become a fantastic resource for pupils’ learning and play”.

“you fall over and get wet and dirty – but that is not too big a problem!”



Grounds  
for  
Learning

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