

# Redhall Primary

## Woodland play

Local authority

Edinburgh

Roll and type

80 - primary with moderate learning difficulties

Timescale

1 year

“Its  
an amazing  
resource -  
somewhere we  
can go without  
a bus!”





The school is located in the grounds of a mainstream primary school and shares the millennium woodland that runs along the edge of both playgrounds.

They use it for both learning and play throughout the day, to improve independence and to provide their pupils with experiences in an environment they might not otherwise access.

Unsupervised free play posed a number of challenges due to the high level of supervision that some children require. Staff were agreed however that these should not prevent them from experiencing the rich, multisensory environment of the woodland. Staff worked with outside agencies to think up some creative solutions to potential barriers including physical improvements and changes to lessons - linking play with their curriculum to ensure they have sufficient adult ratios. They use the woodland to practice skills learnt in class (e.g. looking after the natural environment and dressing appropriately), to experience nature, to be independent and for unstructured physical play.

**TOP TIP**  
Teach life skills through play

“all children deserve the same opportunities

Potential risks associated with the greater freedom of the woodland included children running away and eating unsuitable material. To overcome these they made a number of physical changes to the area and their curriculum to ensure all pupils access the woods at least once a week.

Signs and posts demarcate boundaries and fixed log seating and a storytelling chair provide structure for certain areas. A generic risk that incorporates playing together, keeping safe and boundaries can be adapted for specific classes/pupils.

An outdoor multisensory 'room' with hammocks looking up at the canopy creates a space for pupils to relax. These are clipped in to free standing posts so can be removed at night and do not require training to erect.

Learning how to dress for the weather has been linked to life skills classes - putting on outdoor clothing develops fine and gross motor skills and hand-eye coordination, working with others encourages communication, moving on uneven surface supports balance and coping with the unpredictability of the environment encourages curiosity and exploration.

Resources such as logs, ropes, tepees etc encourage imaginative and physical play by creating opportunities to swing, crawl, sit, climb and scramble.

Workshops making bird and bat boxes and habitat piles as well as litter picks and discussion support their Eco Project.

“the children ask more questions and make more observations.”



Although a number of the initial staff concerns about safety (children getting hurt or running off) still remain the school have not recorded any major incidents and have not needed to use a number of procedures such as high visibility jackets and walkie talkies. Many staff were apprehensive in taking children to the woods. This decreased with positive experiences being outdoors with the children. Using the woods as a way to deflect/redirect a pupil has improved behaviour, pupils communicate and cooperate well outside with increased imaginative play and the calm environment.

“given the chance, they’ll choose to play in the woods in any weather”



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