



Our South Downs Case study

Graffam Infant and Duncton CE Junior Schools, West Sussex

Getting to know the South Downs through the community

Graffham Infant and Duncton CE Junior Schools have undergone many changes in the last five years. Governors had previously recognised the opportunities offered by combining the schools into a federation. In doing so, a new headteacher was appointed to lead the schools – and in their latest Ofsted inspection headteacher Helen Martin and her staff achieved 'outstanding'. More recently Helen Martin has also been given a special commendation from the Royal Forestry Society for her forest schools work at the two schools.

Developing forest skills

Helen became aware of the potential offered by the local area during her first 18 months at the school. The school's governors introduced her to the local Leconfield Estate - and she was shown around and given time to explore the opportunities the estate offered. Helen then trained as a level 3 forest school practitioner with Sussex Wildlife Trust, enabling her to take each year group out for a six week block each academic year.

Her assistant head and nursery manager are also now trained forest school practitioners, and offer further sessions, all year round, to the nursery and reception children.

'Our forest school activities enable children to work collaboratively in a local piece of woodland where they learn to keep themselves safe, make fires and shelters and about the plants and animals in the forest. This in turn supports them in skills such as resilience, independence and friendship.'

Raising attainment

The school has seen increases in attainment in the classroom. Helen believes this is largely due to the feelings of success the children gain from their forest schooling, which has helped build their self-confidence. The forest school activities are carefully planned to enable a mixture of adult-led skills to be taught, but children have the choice to explore and design their own activities too. These have included extending their identification skills, making a seesaw and building a bridge across the stream in the forest.

Sharing the learning

This success has also had a positive affect on schools across the Rother Valley, 12 of which have received funding from the South Downs National Park sustainable communities fund to complete their level 3 forest school training.

The children work collaboratively in a local woodland



Getting to know the schools' wider community has been key to the schools' success – and Helen sees this as both a fun and rewarding part of her job as headteacher. She also strongly acknowledges the role of the schools' governors who include experienced professionals prepared to take some risk in supporting her vision.

Future plans

The schools are still looking to develop further, initially by training some of the class teachers to take the forest school sessions. The ethos of outdoor and forest schools will continue to enable children in this area to appreciate the beautiful area of the South Downs in which they live and learn.

Further information

If you are interested in funding training or learning outside the classroom, please visit the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom website (www.lotc.org.uk) and/or become a member of Learning through Landscapes (www.ltl.org.uk) which specialises in giving schools support and information to help them take learning and play outdoors.

For forest school training visit the Institute of Outdoor Learning www.outdoor-learning.org/Default.aspx?tabid=74 or the Forest Education Initiative at www.foresteducation.org/woodland_learning/forest_schools.

Each year group takes part in regular forest school activities

