

Dalmeny Primary Woodland play

Local authority

City of Edinburgh

Roll and type

155 - nursery and primary

Timescale

1 year

Woods allow
children
“to learn
adventurously”





“To learn adventurously” but also sustainably are part of the school’s aims – both supported by their use of a community woodland on their doorstep. Forest school activities and free play at lunch time foster a sense of connection to nature.

As the wood is not part of the school grounds they have built an impressive “bridge to infinity” up and over the perimeter fence to access it.

The bridge creates a magical entrance with a tower leading from their existing trim trail to an aerial walkway over the fence that ends with a bird hide at lower canopy level and steps into the wood. It was designed for free by a parent with expertise in the area and built by the Royal Engineers.

Every class has access to this Secret Garden but to reduce the impact on the woods and maintain an air of magic they are only allowed in small groups (8/9) and encouraged to play quietly - reading, talking, planting bulbs or making dens. Toys are not encouraged but trowels, binoculars and ropes and tarpaulins are.

Top tip
Risk assessments are everyone’s responsibility.

To overcome the additional challenges of the woodland not being part of the school they have created a number of additional measures.

Risk assessments are everyone's responsibility. A site inspection by staff and a discussion with children happens before every session. If safe (no heavy wind, dangerous litter, adequate number of adults) it is opened and all children look for 'Drop Bears' – bears who lurk in woods ready to drop on people who although are not real help the children notice loose branches that are and could fall. Dangerous trees are reported to the Estate and small scale maintenance is carried out by pupils trained in forest school techniques.

Teachers and playground supervisors receive a high level of training. At least 3 teachers are qualified forest school leaders and all supervisors are trained in outdoor risk management and the value of free play. All staff are basic first aid trained and forest school staff have full first aid for children in the outdoors, refreshed every 2 years. All volunteers and college students spend time in the woodland area.

There is a high ratio of supervision of 2 children to every adult in P1 and below or 10 children to every adult from P2 onwards. Senior pupils are trained as playground buddies/anchors to help with this and all staff and anchors have walkie talkies connected to the staff base and each other.

Everyone is given a coloured band – handed back if they leave to use the toilet otherwise children stay in the woods throughout playtime. In emergencies the supervisor blows a whistle and children leave and wait in the playground.

Top tip

Train all staff in first aid in the outdoors.



Pupils must show responsibility both within school and when in the woodlands to be allowed in the area. This includes sticking to agreed rules such as not running, climbing trees above head height, digging holes or lighting fires.

All children must have written agreement from their parents to be allowed in the woods and this is reviewed annually. Parents are very supportive of the project and some have volunteered to help supervise the area.

The woodland is a calm and tranquil place to learn and spend time during lunch break. The school are conscious of their impact on the space and actively work to reduce their impact. Working with a STEM ambassador they have demarcated their area using trees provided by the Woodland Trust - with boundaries of biodiverse rich hedges - one thick broadleaf and one to encourage butterflies. They have planted a wetland area, an orchid area, and a wildflower area. They plan to plant shrubs, further hedges, flowers trees, bird boxes, feeders, bat boxes and maybe a covered pond in the future to enhance the magical, calming nature of the area.

‘Play in the woodland will plant an attitude of care for the world’

