# Case Study

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment name:</th>
<th>Staghills Nursery School/Children's Centre</th>
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<td>Award granted:</td>
<td>Good Practice</td>
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<td>Project title:</td>
<td>'Developing children's self esteem and confidence, learning in the forest school'</td>
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## Project Summary

The aim of the project was to develop children's confidence and self esteem using the natural environment as a medium for learning; exploring the ethos of the forest school to support children to lead their own learning and exploration with the support of responsive adults. Children spend a full session every week in the woodland area which is part of the nursery grounds. The structure of the session is carefully planned to support the children. Sessions always begin in the base camp area, with a chance for the children to chat and reflect and to discuss the session. The children are encouraged to look after themselves and each other and are given a range of responsibilities from putting on their all in one suits and wellies to preparing the resources for the "hot chocolate & snack" at the end of the session. The size of the group (max 10 children) supports children to develop close relationships both with their peers and with the adults. The children are given a range of tasks that allow them to work independently and as a team and the collaborative aspects of the sessions have proved to be very successful.

### Aspect of Every Child Matters addressed:

- Be healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

### What were you hoping to achieve?

- To foster self-esteem and confidence in children, particularly the quieter and less articulate children.
- To develop a clear picture of children's learning styles and therefore support children more effectively.
- To establish a nurturing group to enhance the learning of all children and to foster positive relationships with practitioners.
- To improve attainment in personal and social development and communication and thinking skills.
- To involve parents through detailed documentation and involvement in the
sessions.

**How did you identify the need for this practice?**

- Audit of the outdoor provision highlighted the fact that the woodland area was rarely used as a learning resource. So while the outdoor learning area had been significantly enhanced, this area had really been overlooked.
- The project was developed as part of a project undertaken by one of the teaching staff "to develop an area of the outdoor provision."
- Analysis of value added scores showed that some groups of learners' progress in the area of social and personal development was significantly lower than other groups.
- We felt that we needed to review the way we supported children to develop their self-esteem and their confidence.
- Staff training and development reviews highlighted the need to develop staff skills and competence in using the outdoor areas to support children's personal social and emotional development.

**Briefly describe the main characteristics of the school**

- The school is situated in an area included in the top 20% DTER index of deprivation and although many children attend from the local ward, some travel a distance of up to 4 miles radius from the school.
- The wide catchment area means that children are from a wide range of socio economic groups. The school has a fully inclusive ethos and a philosophy of valuing every child. The admission of children with Special Educational Needs is a priority for the LA and we currently have 4 children on the SEN register. The needs of these children range from Global delay to speech and language needs.
- The majority of children on register are white British. There are currently 12 EAL children.
- The entry attainment varies each year, on entry assessments indicate a trend in many children having well-developed social skills.
- Skills and knowledge in some aspects of mathematical development are low.
- There is also an increasing trend for children to have poor speech and language development.

**What did you do?**

**2007:** We outlined the proposed method of working with the staff team and discussed the rationale for the project.

We started the project taking a small group of children out into the woods for a full session and adopting some of the principles of the forest school ethos, documenting their learning and sharing this with families.
All staff had the opportunity to work alongside each other and to develop their skills in working in the outdoors.

**2008:** Staff felt more confident about working in this way and sessions were planned over a 6 week period; children participated in forest school sessions in the woodland for a block of time. Parents were involved by comments in a diary of the sessions and in a shared session at the end of the block.

All staff joined in 2 sessions of training with Archimedes forest schools to develop their knowledge.

Evaluations of sessions with children and monitoring of learning evidenced the impact that the forest school sessions had on a diverse group of learners.

**2008:** Parents' involvement further developed with weekend sessions for Dads; staff worked with Dads and children, creating structures and using natural materials.

**2009:** one member of staff trained as a level 3 forest school leader and led sessions with staff to support the development of forest schools.

All children accessed the woodland area and a key person led sessions in the woodland area.

**2009:** Childminders used the woodland area, forest school leader led 6 week block of sessions to develop a shared understanding of the forest school ethos.

**2010:** 2 staff attended level 3 training sessions.

**2010:** all staff allocated a fortnightly session in the woods so that all children in the school and centre can participate in forest school.

Parental involvement programme to be developed.

### Which members of the establishment and/or wider community have been involved and what was their role?

- Led by acting head.
- All staff involved in training to support their learning. All staff have led sessions and buddy system has supported less confident practitioners.
- Parents have been involved in sessions. They have been very positive about the detailed documentation in the woodland explorer's weekly diaries and their comments and children's comments evidence the benefits of the sessions.
- Parents and children involved in evaluations of sessions.
• Cascaded information to other early years settings.
• Dads involved in weekend forest school.
• Childminders involved in 6 week block of sessions and one day training on forest school.
• Toddler groups run in the woodland area.
• Babies and under 2’s in the full day care using the woods.

**How has the progress of the project been monitored and evaluated?**

- Learning stories document progress for individual learners.
- Value added scores for learners.
- Evaluations of sessions/groups.
- Observation of sessions from external trainers and by acting head of centre.
- Detailed case studies of targeted children.

**How has the practice been modified or improved during development?**

Sessions have been extended to include babies and the Children’s Centre has embraced the ethos of the forest school.

**What has been the impact of the project on pupils’ learning, achievement or enjoyment and how has this been measured?**

- Learning stories have been used to document children’s levels of well being and involvement and using the Leuvern Scale we have seen a significant improvement for some groups of children.
- Parental feedback has been very positive.
- Staff have noted the difference in children’s personal and social skills and this is supported in value added scores.
- Children who have left the centre still recall the sessions in the woods.

**What are the next stages in the development process?**

Next stages are included in the school improvement plan These include:
- Working with creative partnerships to focus on developing children's creativity and critical thinking in the woodland environment.
- A rolling programme of staff training and joint working with staff across the centre, developing a culture of peer training.
- Use of video to document children’s learning aimed at developing parents' awareness of the forest school.

**What aspects of this practice may be useful for other establishments to consider?**

Any school with an outdoor area could adapt some of the principles to enhance outdoor learning experiences.

**Any other comments:** This project has had a significant impact on the way we work with children and has been one of the most rewarding experiences for both staff and children in the school and centre.