Project summary

- Our project has been to develop the use of our outdoor areas to enhance learning across the curriculum. We aimed to engage and motivate all learners, particularly boys, and to have an impact on standards of achievement, particularly in writing.

- Through training and support the staff have developed the skills needed to plan creatively using the outdoor areas, throughout the school year, in all kinds of weather. All staff now plan and implement ways to include exciting outdoor activities through their cross curricular topics and themes.

- The children have access to a wide range of outdoor facilities including an outdoor learning area with sensory garden, vegetable plots, small orchard and an extensive woodland area which have been developed over time. Staff now make regular use of these areas across the curriculum and plan creatively for their use throughout the year to provide stimulating learning experiences for all pupils.

- The children are now engaged in active learning outdoors which has had a positive impact on attitudes to learning and standards of achievement. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the outdoor practical learning experiences which are now embedded throughout the school.

Specific aspect of practice to be accredited?

- Raising standards in writing and improving pupil attitudes towards writing across the school through the use of a creative outdoor curriculum.
- Use of outdoor learning in all areas of the curriculum, especially through cross curricular themes.
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?

- Pupils enthusiastic and motivated to write, through the use of the outdoor areas.
- Boys writing with more confidence, with real reasons for writing.
- Staff planning for use of the outdoor areas in all curriculum areas regularly throughout the school year.
- Outdoor areas used creatively across the school to create memorable learning experiences.

How did you identify the need for this practice?

We wanted to motivate and promote positive attitudes to learning and create real purposes for writing. Enhanced cross curricular themes in each class and more relevant, meaningful learning would help to raise standards. There had been a gap identified in boys’ learning, particularly writing. All the outdoor facilities had been developed and enhanced and were used by the Eco-Club, Gardening Club; however, they were underused across the curriculum and not accessed by all children and it was important to develop this across the school.

Briefly describe the main characteristics of the school?

St Leonard’s is slightly larger than the average sized primary school, with 275 pupils on roll in February 2012. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and only a few speak English as an additional language.

The school has gained a number of awards including: Eco-School Silver Award, Healthy School status, Sports Active Mark and the intermediate level of the International Award. There is an onsite before and after school club, with capacity for up to 50 children.

What did you do?

- Outdoor learning facilities used to enhance learning including use of woodland area - main focus in school improvement plan 2009/10.
- Forest Schools training - April to Sept 2009 by Headteacher.
- Creative Curriculum staff meetings - on Art, Geography and Planning for the outdoor areas.
- Creative Partnership project with Y4 children in the woodland area - Spring/Summer 2010
- Open afternoon was June 24th 2010 with projects by every class in the woodland area to promote the use of the outdoors. The whole week was dedicated to promoting Outdoor Learning, culminating in the Open Afternoon.
• Learning Outside the classroom training - by Head teacher March 2011.
• Outdoor Learning 'golden books' to share good practice and outdoor learning experiences by each class, 2009-2010 and ongoing.
• Link Governor for outdoor learning - reports to governing body on progress being made throughout school in outdoor learning.
• Reception class outdoor area developed with soft play surfaces and large storage unit. Children accessing the outdoors every day. All children now have access to wellies and waterproofs.
• Outdoor seating areas and worship area, storytelling area recently funded by PTA in 2011. Benches purchased with inscriptions by pupils
• Geography Trail completed outside, around the school grounds, new resource used by whole school.
• Staff involved in shared planning meetings and working together to make use of the superb outdoor facilities.
• Meeting between head teacher and Carr Hall garden Centre (9 March 2012) to develop community link and work in conjunction with Scouts on making better use of the vegetable plots

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

• Led by HT and DHT.
• Senior Leadership team - contributed to School Improvement plan and monitoring progress.
• Senior Staff led by example and planned outdoor learning experiences, supported all staff where possible in planning and creating their own outdoor learning for their classes.
• Creative Curriculum Adviser - enabled all staff to be trained in planning creatively and working together to plan inspiring learning opportunities outside the classroom.
• Creative Partnerships project used local artists - which ensured that the children were exposed to a wide variety of stimuli and strategies through the project.
• All teaching staff through staff meetings, training and planning meetings - showed enthusiasm for the project and commitment to see it through.
• Governors, particularly through Link Governor and through school improvement plan, helped to monitor the work taking place and see the improvements.
• Links with Scout group, local Pre-School, our Church use the facilities - all have expressed pleasure at the improvements we have made and are encouraged by this to use the outdoor facilities more regularly.
• Ribble Valley Mayor invited to our Open Afternoon and she expressed her delight in how the school has changed for the better.
• Parents and families with the Open Afternoon - shared their thoughts with us in the comments book, all very enthused by the afternoon and also by how excited their own children are about outdoor learning.
• PTA - held fundraising events to support outdoor learning - e.g. purchase of woodland benches.
• Local businesses e.g. Carr Hall and Stone hill Nursery - involved in providing support for the Gardening Club and Eco-Club through resources.

How has the progress of the project been monitored and evaluated?
• Through reports to Governors - governors involved through curriculum committee and Head teacher's reports.
• Staff meetings.
• Teaching assistant meetings.
• Senior leadership team meetings.
• Subject leader review meetings.
• Parents - through use of a questionnaire and evaluation comments.
• Pupils through pupil attitude questionnaire, School Council, Eco Club - evaluated projects.
• Outdoor Learning 'Golden Books' produced by each class.

How has the practice been modified or improved during development?
• Improved planning - planning templates evolved as the teachers now think about the use of the outdoor space in their own planning, providing learning activities for the children.
• Improved monitoring and evaluation - photographic evidence of the monitoring of the use of the outdoors.
• Improved subject leadership - subject co-ordinators promote the use of the outdoors in their subject.
• Improved community cohesion - through links with the local community, e.g. Links with other schools and head teachers who have come to look at our areas and find out how they can implement it in their own environment.
• Links developed with local businesses through the use of the outdoors.

What has been the impact of the project on pupils’ learning, achievement or enjoyment and how has this been measured?
• Standards in writing have continued to improve. 2010-11 96.7% of pupils achieved at least 2 levels of progress in writing.
• Writing standards across the school (EYFS, KS1 & KS2) are well above average.
• The school has been successful in closing any significant gaps between the achievement of different groups e.g. achievement of boys (recognised by Ofsted).
• Attitudes to learning show that pupils enjoy Outdoor learning and the creative curriculum.
• More children perceive themselves as writers - boys and girls.
• Enhanced opportunities for speaking and listening and writing through use of outdoor areas.
• Positive parental feedback after Open Afternoon and on report slips.
• Positive Pupil Attitude Questionnaires.
What are the next stages in the development process?

- Establish regular outdoor worship for classes/ key stages and whole school where possible throughout the school year. Build on existing good practice, share ideas at staff meetings. Take photographs as evidence and ask pupils to evaluate, explaining what they particularly enjoy.
- Add to outdoor provision in the woodland area with further seating and special areas dedicated to particular purposes e.g. Area of Reflection/ Area of Exploration or Investigation/ Sketching Area etc.
- Build on community involvement and strengthen links with other schools to establish a wider use of the outdoor areas for other children who might not have access to such a place.

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

Creative Curriculum provides pupils with a greater opportunity to write for real reasons. The Outdoor Spaces create inspiration for some exiting projects and themes. This encourages boys to write and enjoy writing as they see it as something different to sitting at a desk in class.

Outdoor Learning is now embedded into everything we do, recent Ofsted inspection in February 2012 commented on outstanding teaching using the outdoor areas. 'special events...such as outdoor learning projects ...capture pupils' imagination and make them keen to learn more.' Also 'The many opportunities for pupils to learn outside the classroom - in the superb woodland area, for example, generate an excitement about learning and help all pupils to experience success across many subject areas.'