

**Summary of forest school sessions, 8th November – 29th November 2012
Dingwall Primary and Kiltearn Primary**

Key themes:

Team working skills, communication skills, awareness of the woodland environment, thinking about others, helping others, designing and building.

Leaders:

Simon Harry

Dawn Taylor

Colin Morrison

Wilma Kelt

Pupils:

Abbie (ant)

Melvine (monkey)

Oscar (octopus)

Blair (buzzard)

Chloe (cat)

Ryan (rhino)

Sam (snake)

Kian (jackrabbit)

Evanton wood in partnership with Highlife Highland ran a 4-week forest school session with pupils from Kiltearn and Dingwall primary schools. The programme aimed to develop a small area of the wood into a forest school and outdoor learning location for use by other visiting groups as well as the attending primary pupils. The high staff ratio was to enable the supporting teaching staff the opportunity to experience an approach to outdoor learning which they had limited experience of.

Firstly the group was met at school to establish a contract regarding behaviour when in the wood, which everyone fed into and agreed upon. The first visit allowed the group to explore the area. Following this, the pupils were asked to assess the needs of a visiting group and from this the following were highlighted:

- Seating,
- Shelters
- Fire area
- A safe but exciting 'base'

A programme of work was developed and each week specific tasks were undertaken. In addition to the practical element of the programme, a high degree of communication skills were required to support group work and assist integration. The team worked extremely well and exceeded expectations as to the practical tasks completed (the seating task was only successful due to the group working as a whole). Each session had a fire due to the weather conditions, hot chocolate was made using 'kelly kettles' and each week different pupils took turns in managing the drinks and ensuring everyone got what they wanted.

Prior to leaving the site, the group was offered the opportunity to feed-back on the session and their replies were noted.

Feedback from the pupils:

- *Brilliant*
- *This is better than school*
- *Fandabitastical*
- *Can't we stay for longer?*
- *I loved the hot chocolate*
- *Awesome*
- *I love coming out on Thursdays*
- *I'm bringing my family to see this*

Feedback from assisting staff:

- *On the whole, all the children said they enjoyed it, and it was enjoyable from an adult's point of view also. I learned that its ok to take children and do things such as light fires and build dens and its entirely safe, as long as you have someone that know what they're doing.*
- *For me building team working skills with the children lay at the heart of the four sessions we participated in at Evanton woodland. It reinforced the point that as a group they could (and did) achieve a great deal, and as well as learning a number of new skills, they also proved to be very supportive of each other. Individual ideas and plans were discussed and agreed in a structured manner and the children demonstrated a great deal of positive behaviours throughout. Moreover, they gained a new insight into the overall woodland management plan, and going forwards they will be better informed when discussing their input in the classroom.*
- *All in all an inspiring project from which the children gained an experience of an outdoor classroom.*

Conclusion

The sessions illustrated how using the outdoors can support and reinforce many of the outcomes of the curriculum for excellence. The woodland environment furthered the ability of the group to explore, undertake challenges and work together which led to greater cooperation and integration between the two primary school pupils. This almost always takes longer in other settings. By the end of the four weeks, each member of the group showed greater confidence when working with others and in their general ability to relate to the woodlands even when condition were not as favourable as on previous visits. Each of the group expressed sadness that the programme was ending although almost all of the local pupils stated that they were going to carry on using the woods and would bring friends along to “*see all the cool things we built*”