

All about...

# forest schools

The forest school approach is growing in popularity, and it is taking a variety of different formats as settings embrace it in ways that reflect their individual needs. *Nicole Weinstein* explains

**F**orest schools and outdoor learning are becoming ever more popular across the UK, with early years settings and schools so keen to ensure that children are experiencing the awe and wonder of nature that they are redeveloping their outdoor spaces, buying in forest school leaders and negotiating the use of local woodland. After-school and holiday clubs and family forest school drop-ins are also popping up across the country as demand from parents rises.

There are now more than 35 training providers on the GB Forest School Trainers Network, and the Forest School Association (FSA) – the professional body for forest schools set up in 2012 – estimates that about 12,000 people have now gone through forest school training. Many settings are forging ahead with their forest school programmes despite local authority cuts to these services.

Jon Cree, chair of the FSA, forest school trainer and leader, says of the forest school ‘movement’: ‘It amazes me that it’s still growing at such a rate because many of the leading local authorities in forest schools, those that have embedded it into early years system for years, have either cut the service completely or are hanging on by the skin of their teeth.’

The bigger challenge for some settings is practitioner attitude, rather than money, he adds: ‘Forest school supports the Early Years Foundation Stage in a big way. It’s all about child-centred free play and getting kids outdoors. Most of the early years settings we are in contact with are getting it right – they might have a stimulus or a plan for the session, but they will abandon this if the children want to go down a different route. The biggest barrier we find is getting practitioners to go out in all weathers and having the right equipment to support this?’



## WHAT IS THE FOREST SCHOOL APPROACH?

Forest schools provide a specialised learning approach that offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.

The approach sits within and complements the wider context of outdoor and woodland education. It has a common set of principles, revised in 2012 following consultation with the forest school community, aimed at ensuring that all children experience the cumulative and lasting benefits that quality forest schools offer.

Mr Cree says, ‘The main changes to the ethos, which was decided during the first national conference in 2002, was to state that the forest school approach can take place in any “natural environment with trees”, not just woodland because woodland is often perceived as a mature natural forest



**At Osborne, children like to walk on logs, and get excited at seeing different creatures (top and middle); at Reflections Nurseries, there is a focus on experiencing the seasons**

whereas a local green space with trees can also support forest schools.’

Mr Cree has worked for 15 years at Worcestershire County Council’s Environmental Education Centre. The forest school approach has been running at the centre for the same number of years, and the centre was also the base for local authority co-ordination and support for forest schools in the county, until 2013 when the service was cut. ➤

He shares some of his observations: 'I recently worked with a group of Reception children at a rural primary school. One boy made his feelings of connection with nature abundantly clear by showing me his "be tree": the place where, in his words, he could simply be – incredible for a four-year-old.'

'This is a great example of how the risks involved may not just be physical; they can also be emotional. In one scene, some boys and girls were acting out an improvised wedding scene complete with mud pie cake. The "couple" had a row and called it off at the last minute – quite a daring and emotionally risky activity for a mixed-gender group, especially given that it was a Church of England school!

'The children's engagement in their projects point to a deeper sense of themselves, a sense of place and a meaningful connection with the natural world.

'Educators can see their children's confidence growing through the sessions: for instance, one boy who has a stammer in class was speaking completely clearly when he was outdoors.'

### OUTDOOR LEARNING

The phrase 'forest school' was coined by staff at Bridgwater College after a visit to Denmark in 1993. It is not a trademarked name and any setting can legally call itself a forest school,



whether or not it has had formal training or is a member of the FSA.

However, the FSA and its members believe that the name, forest school, should be preserved for the purpose that it was intended: to run sessions in the woodland following the forest school philosophy, with a Level 3-trained leader, on a long-term, ongoing basis.

Mr Cree says, 'There are many different types of outdoor learning, all of which provide fantastic experiences for children and young people – from gardening projects to bushcraft clubs. Practitioners might also take children out to the woods for a six-week period to take part in woodland experiences that are similar to some forest school sessions.'

But the message from the FSA is clear: 'Don't call yourself a forest school if you're not at least doing this long term and working towards a learner-centred approach. If you're just going out for six sessions, it's not necessarily forest school; it's outdoor learning.'

'There's a big difference and everyone who goes through the training always says, "You're right, after six sessions we're just starting to get towards that learner-centred approach and getting them to build a strong relationship with the wood and actually starting to take care of the woodland."

'But we understand that settings have got to start somewhere. For me, forest school is a learning process that is also about trying to build a better

**At Reflections Nurseries, children split into groups depending on what activities interest them**

**'Forest school is a learning process that is also about trying to build a better relationship with the natural world'**

relationship with the natural world and connect with it and to ultimately take care of it. You can't do that unless you have a regular bond with it.'

### LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE

Up until 2012, many local authorities in England had dedicated forest school co-ordinators who supported forest schools by providing advice, training and continuing professional development, resources, specialist knowledge and a local network for practitioners to share practice.

In Wales and Scotland much of the support came from the respective assemblies through the Forestry Commission. Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Norfolk, Dudley, Herefordshire and Devon are all examples of local authorities that embedded the forest school philosophy into their early years system for years but have all cut the service since 2010.

Forest school co-ordinators in these areas have either been made redundant, or if that role was as an advisor the role no longer exists. There is also no longer any support for training; there are no

local authority forest school leaders and there is no mandate to support schools.

According to the FSA, Oxfordshire is still running a service and Derbyshire, Shropshire, Sandwell and Cambridgeshire are still employing forest school co-ordinators and leaders that work to support forest school practitioners and settings in their respective local authorities.

Bradford Metropolitan District Council, on the other hand, has a slightly different approach to most other local authorities in the way that its forest school services are managed. Although the service faces the same budgetary cuts, its forest school support originates from a playwork pot of money.

As a result, the district has outsourced the majority of its forest school activity to Bradford-based charity Bradford Community Environment Project (BCEP), which launched a forest school strategy in 2012, an information-sharing website, information sessions and training for new forest school leaders.

Jennifer Scott, play and learning team leader for BCEP, says, 'This year we have provided more than 170 forest school sessions to more than 1,000 children. These have been to the voluntary and community sector, children centres, schools and open access holiday schemes. These are funded through the council, schools directly or other trust funds.'

To increase the number of forest schools sessions delivered, the local authority has commissioned BCEP to provide more free forest schools activity in areas of need, working with six schools and four children's centres in disadvantaged areas, targeting vulnerable children, hard-to-reach groups and groups that have not previously been involved in forest school – a further 313 children in total. This is on top of the local authority's team of Level 3 forest school-trained playworkers who, between April and September 2014, provided 40 free open-access forest schools sessions, working with 685 children in five venues across the district, as well as offering more structured programmes to schools and out-of-school childcare providers.

### CASE STUDIES: OUTDOOR CURRICULUM

**Setting:** Alfreton Nursery School, a 100-place local authority nursery school in Derbyshire. ➤



Alfreton Nursery School notes that children often become engrossed in outdoor activities

## THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

**Setting:** Reflections Nursery and Forest School, Worthing, Sussex.

**Forest setting:** Private woodlands, leased for £50 a year, 20-minute drive away.

**Access:** Three adults and 12 two- to four-year-olds access the site five times a week, arriving at 9.30am and returning by 12.45pm, from September to July.

**History:** Set up in 2009.

'We have our own approach to forest school,' explains Martin Pace, director of Reflections Nurseries. 'It's not forest school in the traditional sense because we virtually never direct children to activities like clay imprinting or tool work, unless they ask, and we rarely have a fire with marshmallows.'

'We call it forest school because it's clearer for the parents to understand, but what we do in the forest is what we do indoors: allow the children to lead and pick up threads of enquiry and report back to children and parents and see where they lead.'

'For example, we frequently find dead birds and foxes and

the children engage a lot with this and have theories about what's happened to them.

They like to build shelters for them. Back at the nursery these themes are picked up on and we build dens for the dead animals or the children wrap each other up like they wrapped up the animals.

'We usually have a theme for the session, which could be catching witches or magic.

When we arrive at the camp the children immediately go to the swings, climb trees, hunt for twigs, find places to explore that interest them, and start to engage with nature. We then split them into groups – some might try to catch the witch; others might create a tunnel or build a den, and some might try to tramp on the mammoths.

The adults stand back and take notes and photos and then the session continues.

'Our philosophy is based on the Reggio Emilia approach and we believe all children have the right to be understood as individuals and to be given time and opportunity to develop as creative, competent learners in a secure and inspiring space,

with lots of access to the outdoors. We look at theories and continual lines of enquiry.

'I did forest school training because I wanted to make sure that I could keep the children safe and warm. We also have a full-time Level 3 forest school leader and two other members of staff that are forest-school trained.

'The training helps develop an awareness of how to handle risk better. For example, there's lots of flint in our woodland, so when children are climbing trees the biggest concern is not how they get down but what they might fall onto. Staff will always kick away flint before children climb up the tree.

'For us, forest school has become a philosophical approach rather than a methodology. It's just about getting outdoors and experiencing imaginative play, finding places to hide, and feeling and experiencing nature and the seasons.'

- [www.reflectionsnurseries.co.uk](http://www.reflectionsnurseries.co.uk)
- I Love Forest School by Martin Pace (Featherstone Education)



**Forest setting:** Two dedicated forest school gardens attached to the nursery garden.

**Access:** Two adults and up to 14 three- to four-year-olds access the site for 20 forest school sessions, on a morning or in afternoon session once a week.

**History:** Set up 11 years ago, firstly taking children and their families to a local woodland site. In 2012, the nursery developed an on-site area for forest school, and then bought more land adjoining the site to further extend the forest school experience. Five members of staff now have forest school qualifications – two at Level 2 and three at Level 3.

Outdoor learning is a huge part of the nursery provision at Alfreton Nursery School. Before starting the forest school sessions in the third term, the three-year-olds have already spent much of their time outside exploring and interacting with a wide range of habitats and natural spaces.

‘We link the forest school sessions with the topics that we are focusing on in the nursery,’ explains Louise Ashmore, nursery nurse and forest school leader. ‘The younger children go into Granny Greenwood’s garden, which is named after a puppet that the children think lives there.’

‘For their literacy targets, we plan the session about the book of the week. When we did *Maisy Makes Lemonade*, we had laminated pictures of lemons with the numbers one to 20 hidden around the woodland and we set up a number line to help Maisy find her

lemons to make more lemonade. The children also had to find Maisy Mouse, who was hiding up in the tree and problem-solve how to get her down. This extended into the mud kitchen where we collected natural resources and made sparkly lemonade.’

Although the activities have been planned, Laura Dolby, nursery teacher and forest school leader, points out that if children want to take their learning in a different direction, that is also celebrated. ‘They have lots of free exploration time, but we find that some children need a hook to draw them in, particularly as they’re not in this environment every day,’ she says.

Staff carry out a knowledge and skills audit at the start of the 20-week

**Alfreton has a lacewing house (above), and puppets are important for shy children (above right); children get involved in ‘teddy slinging’ at Grade Ruan Under-Fives (below)**

programme where progress and achievements are measured. Families are encouraged to join in the experience with their children.

In the fourth term, the literacy targets are also taken outdoors and children are invited to take part in activities that complement the week’s learning. For example, there is a story about a puppet called Wally, who introduces the ‘c’ sound. This mischievous puppet has been camping and bumped into Claudia Cow. In the forest school session Ms Dolby sets up a camp, hides the letter ‘c’ and a soft toy cow around the woodland, and the children get involved in all sorts of activities like cutting carrots and courgettes to make soup on the fire.

‘It’s proven that children are more likely to retain information if they learn outdoors and we certainly see evidence of this,’ explains Ms Dolby.



‘It’s vital for boys, in particular, who relate to this form of learning.

‘We also have climbing trees, a pond and tools and we make soup, pizzas and popcorn on the fire, and the children whittle wood with potato peelers.’

Laura has been running forest school sessions for 11 years. ‘I observe children who are quiet in the nursery who come alive in the woodland; I see children with limited concentrations spans who can easily spend 20 minutes engrossed in a forest school activity. The puppets are hugely important for some children, who may be shy talking to adults or peers but will want to share their forest experiences with the puppet.

‘We observe changes in the children’s physical skills, their ability to problem-solve, their confidence to interact with each other and communicate and their resilience as individuals. This approach to learning has a huge positive impact on the children’s emotional well-being and how they translate this into their nursery learning. These experiences are shared with enthusiasm at home and are also uploaded on our nursery Facebook pages. The forest school experiences have a lasting impact on the memories of the children and their families.’

● [www.alfreton.derbyshire.sch.uk/home](http://www.alfreton.derbyshire.sch.uk/home)

● [www.facebook.com/pages/Alfreton-Nursery-School/35361212139444](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Alfreton-Nursery-School/35361212139444)

### THE RURAL APPROACH

**Setting:** Grade Ruan Under-Fives in Ruan Minor, a 20-place not-for-profit nursery in The Lizard, Cornwall.

**Forest setting:** National Trust-owned valley woodland with public access, a 20-minute walk from the setting.

**Access:** Four adults and up to eight children access the site once a week, arriving at 9.30am and returning by 12pm. For children aged two to four.

**History:** Set up 18 months ago.

Grade Ruan Under-Fives is a pack-away nursery set in the local village hall. Despite being surrounded by fields and countryside, the setting has very limited outdoor space.

Sarah Henn, director of Miracle Wood and a forest school leader who runs a weekly forest school session with the children at Poltesco – a now disused but previously busy 19th-century serpentine harbour – says, ‘Some of the children I work

## WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

**Setting:** Renhold VC Lower School, a 176-place local authority-maintained school, in Bedfordshire, with five classes from Reception to Year 4 and a pre-school.

**Forest setting:** A small enclosed area in one corner of the school field, where a nature area with a pond has been created. A footpath at the side of the school leads into a wood, which a local landowner has given permission to walk in.

**Access:** Ten children from each of the five classes have a session each day, so each child goes for a two-hour afternoon session once every three weeks. Pre-school and Reception classes go out in week-long blocks each half term.

**History:** Set up two years ago. The school has invested in a dedicated forest school leader, an outdoor learning assistant and an outdoor classroom.

Two years ago, head teacher Jane Ferguson implemented a forest school programme across the whole school, from nursery to Year 4.

She says, ‘I had to complete a pupil voice for my Primary Science Quality Mark Gold Award. All the pupils said that they loved

with in Cornwall are growing up on farms and are used to being outdoors. However, they see the outdoors as a place to work and not play. They are outside bringing the cows in or sitting in the tractor while their parents work with industrial machinery. As a result, they have not connected with nature. However, they are very adept at working with tools, so I tailor the sessions accordingly.’

At the base in Poltesco, the children choose their own boundaries for how far they feel safe exploring away from the central fire pit. Ms Henn says, ‘It’s interesting to see how the children’s confidence grows over time. At first, they will place their flag, which marks how far they want to go on their own,



outdoor learning and wanted to go outdoors more. In response, I appointed a teaching assistant dedicated to outdoor learning. I paid for her to have forest school Level 3 training and gave her £2,000 to set up and resource the initiative with outdoor clothing, wellies, waterproofs, hats, tools and all the necessities.

‘But last year my leader wanted to do more adventurous things in the woodland, like fire building and whittling with knives. The sessions were so popular with the children that I’ve appointed an assistant to work with her.

‘The forest school leader works closely with teachers across the school and links in outdoor art and science with topics that the teachers are working on – so as well as having time to explore nature, the learning links in with the curriculum.

‘We find that children are working better in teams; they can problem-solve; they have more respect for and knowledge of nature; they are more risk-aware and they have more understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They are able to see for themselves the awe and wonder of nature.

‘All the children are using hand tools, and with this comes rules. We believe that the forest school approach benefits all age groups, not just the younger children.

‘Children at the age of six, seven and eight are developing their physical skills so their tool use is more sophisticated. Children need to learn to take risks. It is one of the best initiatives we have implemented at the school.’

● [www.renhold.beds.sch.uk/classes/forest-schoolsoaa](http://www.renhold.beds.sch.uk/classes/forest-schoolsoaa)

**‘One of the major benefits of getting children out for forest school sessions is language development’**

behind them. This gradually moves a few steps further back and then maybe 10 or 20 yards further away after five or six weeks.

‘There’s often a bit of education needed here for practitioners, who may want to step in and help them, but it’s important for them to see that children can work out for themselves how to be safe.

‘The sessions are very child-led, but we usually have some structure at the start. For example, we often split into groups. Some might go teddy slinging, where they catapult teddies through the trees with a large piece of elastic, some collect sticks for the fire, and others might use the tools. I incorporate areas of the curriculum into ➤

my sessions, so when hunting for sticks, I will ask them to find five sticks as long as their arm, and three as long as their hand, so we incorporate numeracy work. During the free-time session, the children's imaginations usually runs wild. Recently, a group of five children found a log, attached rope to it and dragged it around the woods, declaring, "We're taking log dog for a walk".

'Forest school is also about giving children opportunities to break up their learning into small, achievable chunks. If we're making something with tools, I will make sure they achieve one skill one week and another the next week.'

- [www.miraclewood.org.uk](http://www.miraclewood.org.uk)
- [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lizard-and-kynance-cove/things-to-see-and-do/view-page/item956262/](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lizard-and-kynance-cove/things-to-see-and-do/view-page/item956262/)

### URBAN APPROACH

**Setting:** Osborne Nursery School, a 120-place nursery based in Erdington, Birmingham.

**Forest setting:** A small area on the edge of the site.

**Access:** Two adults and up to 15 three- to four-year-olds access the site for morning or afternoon sessions once every two weeks.

**History:** Set up in 2007 with a pilot and was so successful that three members of staff are now trained as Level 3 forest school leaders.

Many of the children who attend Osborne Nursery School live in high-rise flats without gardens. They are from mixed social and ethnic backgrounds and 40 per cent have English as an additional language.

'One of the major benefits of getting our children out for forest school sessions is language development,' explains Sharon Eeles, acting head teacher.

'We have a lot of children with speech and language problems or very little English. We have children who don't say anything all day in the nursery, but when they get outside the excitement of seeing a worm

### READER OFFER

*Developing a Forest School in Early Years Provision* by Katherine Milchem, Jenny Doyle (£19.99, Practical Pre-School Books), provides essential guidance on how to start, the equipment and training needed, where to gain support or funding, and how to involve parents or colleagues. *Nursery World* readers can get 10 per cent off the price by quoting the code NWDFS. Buy it by emailing [orders@practicalpreschoolbooks.com](mailto:orders@practicalpreschoolbooks.com) or calling 01722 716935

makes them string whole sentences together.'

Confidence more generally is another benefit, especially for children who don't thrive in the classroom. Ms Eeles says, 'Some children are the fastest to get dressed for forest school or the best at building dens. It's these things that help build their confidence.'

When Ms Eeles undertook her forest school training and had the idea to develop the long, narrow piece of 'dead space' that separated the main road from the nursery school into a space for forest school, she was initially met with reluctance – and resistance – from parents and staff.

'Parents wanted to know why children were going out in all weathers and coming back dirty, and what they got out of it,' she explains. 'I held workshops where I discussed the ethos of forest school and the benefits to children, and showed them pictures of children enjoying themselves.'

'The staff were also reluctant to go out in the cold weather. But once we

## THE MONTESSORI APPROACH

**Setting:** High Elms Manor School, Watford, Hertfordshire.

**Forest setting:** A 20-acre woodland on the school site.

**Access:** Four staff members and an external forest school leader for up to 20 children in three age groups (three to six, six to nine and nine to 11 years). One-hour sessions, once a week for each age group.

**History:** Set up four years ago.

When children arrive at the woods for their weekly session, they start with a safety game, such as Stop.

Down the Woods director Caroline Langley, who provides forest school sessions to High Elms and other settings across Hertfordshire, says, 'We talk about why it's important to stop in case they ever have to stop quickly to avoid falling in a hole or bumping into a tree.'

Children then sit on the logs and talk about the things they can do in the woods that day. They can build dens; swing on the ropes; play hide and seek; hunt for worms and bugs with

magnifying glasses; dig for treasure in the earth; birdwatch with binoculars, or go to the climbing tree, where they try to climb higher than the previous week. There's a meadow with a large tree that's fallen down and the children often go for walks here and climb under or over the tree and hunt for bugs.

At the end of each session, there is a made-up story by a woodland elf puppet, who often introduces the children to an activity – for example, how to make a bird out of clay or a bead necklace out of elder.

In the winter they build fires and at the end of each term the children cook pancakes, marshmallows and soup on the fire for a celebration feast.

Ms Langley explains, 'It's a very child-led approach. I'm here to help and advise the

children on their chosen path in the wood. If they're on the climbing tree I won't tell them they are too high. I might offer suggestions about a branch that's bendy and advise them to not step on it because it might break.'

'I work with children from three to 11 and I've seen them become more confident in the woods and in their daily lives. One child who was so shy recently led the fire lighting. He knew what he needed and how to organise his classmates to collect the wood. It's amazing to see their skills and confidence developing.'



Liadain O'Neill, partner at the school, says, 'The experiences are holistic, giving children opportunities to gain more confidence, to collaborate and work as a team, develop physically and have an increased awareness and understanding of and respect for the environment.'

### More information

- [www.downthewoods.org](http://www.downthewoods.org)
- [www.highelmsmanor.school.com](http://www.highelmsmanor.school.com)



Children at Osborne make 'fairy soup' with items they have collected

invested in the right clothing and they felt warmer, they began to see the benefits and after a year the concept sold itself. Now all the staff are eager to volunteer to go into the forest school to replace someone who is off sick. And for the parents, it's just accepted as part of the nursery offering.

'Our area isn't large, but we fit a lot into it. There's a circled seating area of 20 logs that we sit on for snacks and that the children like to walk and jump on. There's a large bush that children crawl through and like to hide in when we play One Two Three, Where Are You? We've created a digging area with a mud kitchen; we have a large old sink that we use as a pond so that children can see frog spawn; we have a fire area where we cook marshmallows and popcorn.

'We also do tool work – we work with bow saws on a one-on-one basis; we make necklaces and wind chimes with wood; we listen to stories like *Stick Man* and make stick men out of wood. We have large bits of wood for den building and we use tarpaulin and bungees.

'In autumn we use the leaves to make rainbows; we make fairy soup in big buckets with water and treasures that we've collected. Mud painting is one of the children's favourite activities and they like to paint the trees and leaves.

'Because they are out all year they learn about the seasons. For example, we have a lot of snowberry bushes. In

the summer, we watch the bees flock to the flowers on the bushes; in the autumn we learn not to eat the white berries that appear, and in the winter the bushes become just sticks. The children see first-hand how the weather and plants change throughout the year.'

● [www.osbornenurseryschool.co.uk](http://www.osbornenurseryschool.co.uk)

### A WALK TO THE WOODS

**Setting:** Mains Farm House Nursery, a 34-place private nursery in Chester-le-Street town centre, County Durham.

**Forest setting:** Twenty to 30 minutes walk from the nursery. A local authority-owned site with public access, behind the local cricket ground.

**Access:** Four adults and up to eight children access the site, arriving at 10am and returning by 12am. Sessions are for pre-school children from three to four years. Visit at least once every two weeks. Sessions become more frequent in spring and summer.

**History:** Set up four years ago.

When Mains Farm House Nursery first started taking children to the woods four years ago, the children used to hop on the local bus to explore the woodlands at the top of the steep hill. But two years ago, those running the nursery decided to look for an alternative site.

Manager and co-owner Maureen Sheekey says, 'Access to the site was

## MORE INFORMATION

- 'All about... forest schools' (2010), [www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/feature/1094543/eyfs-practice-about-forest-schools](http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/feature/1094543/eyfs-practice-about-forest-schools)
- Bradford District Council forest school strategy 2014-2017, <http://bradfordforestschools.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Bradford-Forest-School-strategy-document.pdf>
- Bradford Community Environment Project, [www.bcep.org.uk/home](http://www.bcep.org.uk/home)
- Forest school principles (which were updated in 2012), [www.forestschoollassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice](http://www.forestschoollassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice)
- Forestry Commission, [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)
- FSA, [www.forestschoollassociation.org](http://www.forestschoollassociation.org)
- GB Forest School Trainers Network, [www.forestschoollassociation.org/gb-forest-school-trainers-network-and-the-fsa](http://www.forestschoollassociation.org/gb-forest-school-trainers-network-and-the-fsa)
- Muddy Faces forest school resources, [www.muddyfaces.co.uk/forest-school-c-3.html](http://www.muddyfaces.co.uk/forest-school-c-3.html)

**Mains Farm lets children choose to either take part in planned activities or just explore**

limited at certain times of the year and we wanted to be able to take children out year-round. Our new site is a larger area with huge trees, a boggy area, long grass and there are sculptures of wooden animals dotted around. The children love going to these sessions. They enjoy the sounds of nature, away from the urban sounds of traffic.'

When children arrive in the woods they get the chance to either take part in the planned activities or just explore the environment.

Jane Forster, deputy manager, says, 'We often get children familiar with a story in the nursery and then extend the ideas in the woods. For example, with *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, we act out plodding through the stream and running through the wavy grass. We sometimes take musical instruments and make sounds with those we find in the natural environment – banging on the trees with sticks or rustling the leaves. We do creative activities like leaf rubbing and mark making with sticks. And the children just like to explore – they love to jump on the molehills or look for tadpoles in the boggy area. It's a wonderful chance to get some fresh air and connect with nature.'

All the practitioners who go to the woods have had in-house forest school training from the manager, who has had Level 1 forest school training with Mindstretchers, paid for by the local authority, and co-owner Lianne Dixon, who has a Level 2 forest school qualification with Archimedes.

● [www.mainsfarmhousenursery.co.uk](http://www.mainsfarmhousenursery.co.uk) ■

