

Enabling Environments Award

Beatle Woods Outdoor Nursery

Coventry



“
Love it! Living the
concept in every aspect
– judge

Frustrated by the limited range of learning experiences that she could offer children at the packaway nursery that she managed, Rachel Macbeth-Webb found inspiration and a solution ‘on her doorstep’ – a ten-acre area of woodland on which to develop an outdoor nursery.

Called Beatle Woods (in memory of her late father and great Beatles fan), the setting has been open since September 2017 and is bringing enormous benefits to all the children who attend.

Rachel originally planned to provide a building on the Frogmore Grange site but decided to offer outdoor-only provision after observing a young child at play, clambering up trees and hiding in bushes. She was also inspired by outdoors consultant Jan White while studying under her for a Master’s degree.

The nursery has sole use of the woodland site, and since opening, Rachel has done little to develop the space other than to create a base camp area, and provide a large tent, a shed, rope swing, hammock, mud kitchen,

basic facilities and an array of natural resources. ‘We don’t have toys, we have tools!’ she says.

The environment is calm, unhurried and relaxed, yet offers children enormous freedom, challenge and constant change which engages their curiosity. Working alongside Rachel are two ‘energetic, understanding and passionate’ practitioners, who were former colleagues and share her vision for the setting. They will continue to change and adapt the area in response to the children’s interests.

Provision and practice within the nursery have enabled Rachel to achieve some of her primary aims for young children, principally to allow children to ‘be’, to feel empowered and to be well supported through each stage of development.

As well as boosting the children’s well-being and levels of engagement, the approach has also raised their self-esteem, feelings of agency and self-worth. ‘We have witnessed so much progress, without exception, for all children coming to Beatle Woods,’ says Rachel. ‘The impact has been

nothing short of phenomenal.’ Its real value is captured by a parent following a trial visit, ‘When I visit the site I can see the wooden stepping stones, the footbridge, the paint station. I imagine that an early years professional would see the opportunities the children have for learning. However, the magic of Beatle Woods is when you ask a child what they see. That large muddy mound is a volcano to one child, and he is telling you to step around the lava. That fallen tree? It’s a scary octopus, a rocket ship. That hollow? That’s where the dinosaur bone was hidden last week and the children are using a map to find it again.’

The setting has now launched toddler stay-and-play sessions, and held its first training event at which 30 practitioners discussed how to overcome the barriers to outdoor play.

FINALISTS

Busy Bees, Our Heuristic Approach, Coventry

Dandelion Education, Safe places; Nurturing Space, Norfolk

Saffron Walden Nursery School, Free-flow outdoor area, Saffron Walden

Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School, Sunshine Room, Warrington

SEND to Learn Nursery, Morpeth

South Hills School, On the farm, Wiltshire

CRITERION

Open to early years settings that have developed elements of their provision to create stimulating, child-centred learning environments in line with the principles of the EYFS



HIGHLY COMMENDED Kidzone Cranwell, Transforming our outdoor area, Sleaford

Over the past nine years, Kidzone Cranwell in Sleaford has developed its vast outdoor area to create ‘an imaginative and energised place of inspiration and stimulation’ (Inclusion Quality Mark 2014).

Excited but slightly daunted by the task ahead, the setting first undertook quality initiatives to establish how the space could reflect both the ethos of the setting and the principles of the

EYFS. It was also keen to create a more ‘traditional’ play space where children could climb trees, roll down mud hills and have camp fires. Among the many features that have been developed over the years are: various natural habitats with bird and insects boxes, an allotment, a mud kitchen and mud hill, a wildflower ‘shhh’ area, sensory areas and willow domes, ‘go ape’ ropes, a Forest School area and role-play shed.

Whatever area the children access, they are always encouraged to be independent and think for themselves.