

**ELIN Woods Project. February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012. Di Teasdale, Headteacher, Skerne Park.**

Important that the Leadership of the school supports the project. It will only work if the Headteacher has a belief that the project is worth it. It involves being quite brave in moving away from traditional classroom learning.

There has to be a belief that the children can initiate their own learning. They have to be allowed to pursue their ideas and interests, with adults there to offer re-assurance and support. There has to be a letting go of traditional planning.

The Leaders of the school have to commit time and resources to the project and be willing to learn about a new way of doing things. We have to be brave enough to try something new.

Right from start this has proved to be an exciting and innovative project. Staff initially a little nervous – how could the children’s developmental profiles be completed if they were out in the woods all day?

In fact, the children were developing their skills in all areas of the EYFS curriculum – physical development, communication and language development, creative development, number development and Knowledge and understanding of the world. There was a whole exciting environment for the children to explore, have adventures in and take risks in, all in a carefully managed and safe environment.

**How has the project helped to raise standards?**

Our Early Years department has gone from strength to strength in terms of provision and progress made by the children. Last years end of Reception results, particularly for CLLD and physical development were the highest we have ever had, and are certainly down to the creation of a wonderful, stimulating learning environment generated in no small part by our woodland work. The follow up work from woodland visits is very expertly supported by the ELIN staff who work very well alongside our teachers. Together, they

nurture the children's ideas by writing an adventure story or making an environment for dinosaurs to prowl in.

The project has been extended to Year 1. Teachers there were very sceptical about the project at first and insisted on producing detailed plans of what the children would do in the woods. A couple of visits later, they are true converts to the wonder of the woods, and their children have produced some wonderful work based on their experiences.

The project has helped teachers to develop greatly in their approach to teaching in an exciting and often child initiated way. Rachael in particular has grown in confidence and has shared her experiences with many local teachers, our own staff and on occasions such as today. Our teachers have benefitted greatly from working with expert ELiN staff.

It is easy to speak well of such an exciting and worthwhile project. It has brought the life back into our curriculum, which probably like many schools, had become stifled by the constraints of the National Curriculum.

Our children need to get out to grow and learn. They need to share these experiences with their parents, and indeed many of them do.

The project has helped us build excellent relationships with parents, and seeing them in the woods building dens with their children is worth every penny it costs.

We do now contribute money for the project and will continue to do so as the ELiN project is truly the best investment we have made for our children.