

Box Moor Trust Forest School

Winner: The Chilterns Enjoyment and Understanding Award 2009

The Box Moor Trust manages over 450 acres of woodland, grassland and commonland close to Hemel Hempstead, all of which is open to the public. Its Forest School project has created an outdoor classroom in woodland on the Trust's land near Bourne End.

The concept of Forest Schools came from Scandinavia originally. It is based on the principal that the woodland environment offers children many opportunities to learn and develop. It's not just about learning about plants and animals: children learn to make choices, use their initiative and take risks, within safe boundaries. The natural surroundings are found to encourage positive attitudes and behaviour among children, including those with behavioural difficulties.

Children from four local primary schools have been visiting the woodland classroom at the Box Moor Trust regularly. Forest School Leaders Yvonne Masters and Janet Halse lead them through lots of activities to learn all about nature and wildlife, like making colour palettes using leaves and building dens.

"I love the look on the children's faces when they arrive, they are so excited and full of anticipation," says Yvonne Masters. "We play lots of fun games with them to help them explore the natural world. They gain so much confidence and many quiet ones become chatty and outgoing. Forest School promotes self confidence and good relationships which in turn help the children to achieve in their regular lessons."

Janet Halse added: "We also hope to instil a life-long love of nature and the countryside in the children. For us it is encouraging when the children have such positive experiences that they come back to the woods at the weekend with their families."

Annette Venters of the Chilterns Conservation Board says: "This project is a fantastic example of how to inspire children

about the great outdoors in a safe and imaginative way. They're learning how to enjoy and respect their local countryside and their teachers and parents are learning all about the Forest School principles as well."

