

# A School Grounds Makeover - for nature, learning and play



Pupils at Crookfur Primary School in East Renfrewshire achieved their John Muir Discovery Award by transforming part of their school grounds into 'Crookfur's Woodland'. Creating the new woodland has had a positive effect on wildlife, and a lasting impact for pupils and the wider school community.



## Laying the foundations

As part of their John Muir Award activities, the school's outdoor learning group and primary six pupils took part in several trips to their local country park for inspiration. Here they got to know the woodlands, ponds and meadows through activities such as orienteering and pond dipping. They also spent time quietly thinking about how they felt in nature and taking part in reflective activities including natural art and poetry.

**'I liked when we were moving the wood chip. We got to run and jump into the pile!'**  
Adam, Pupil

Inspired by their park visits, pupils focused their Award activity on creating a woodland play area to support more wildlife in the school grounds. Both groups helped to plan and design the new space within a limited budget. All were involved in fundraising, tree planting and landscaping in the school grounds. Pupils shared their Award progress on the school's website and local paper and invited parents, siblings and friends to volunteer at a number of community open days.

**'I enjoyed building the woodland area and it gave us a chance to do something for nature.'** Matthew, Pupil

## Everyone mucking in

Using the school grounds for their Award activity meant that pupils were able to go outside every week and experience the changes throughout the seasons as the site developed. This regular and frequent approach created a strong sense of ownership and enthusiasm amongst pupils and staff.

**'I liked making the woodland and knowing that my school and class all helped to make it.'**  
Sophie, Pupil

Staff also noticed that taking part in the Award helped to motivate pupils, and created a strong sense of achievement. Many pupils spoke about feeling proud of their John Muir Award and were keen to continue to develop the site after receiving their certificates.



Teachers commented that enthusiasm for Award activity spread from pupils to other teaching staff, parents and wider community. The community open days, as well as significantly helping with the practical work, allowed for local people to feel more involved with the school in a positive way. They also helped to build a sense of collective ownership, which was demonstrated after an act of vandalism in the grounds:

**'The response from the school community was really amazing; I had parents turning up at school the next day ready to help. If anything the vandalism has made me realise just how much people care about the woodlands.'** Claire Reynolds, P6 Teacher



## Year round opportunities

Crookfur's Woodland is having an impact on learning and teaching across the school. Since the woodland was completed, teachers throughout the school have said they feel more confident to take lessons outside in a variety of curriculum areas including philosophy, science, maths, language and health and wellbeing. Teachers have also noticed that pupils are more stimulated outside and find it easier to engage with lessons.

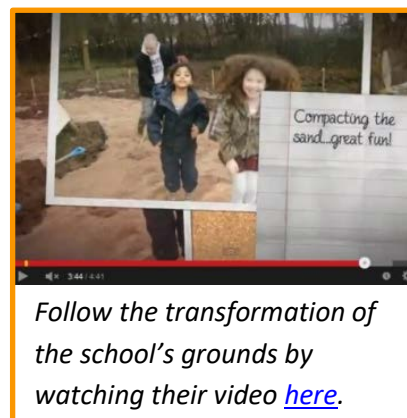
The new woodland also provides an interactive, natural space where all pupils can enjoy play in a natural setting at breaks and lunchtime, as well as during weekends and throughout school holidays.

**'It's great to see the children playing in the woodlands. It's just a whole new magical area for them. We've even seen pupils from the high school next door playing here after school.'** Ashley Pinna, Teacher

The importance of unstructured, outdoor free play has been recognised by the Scottish Government as key to children's development at all ages:

**'...Schools that provide rich outdoor free play environments report happier children, better break-time behaviour and children who are better able to concentrate in class.'**

Scottish Government Play Strategy for Scotland



Follow the transformation of the school's grounds by watching their video [here](#).

## Next Steps

The pupils are taking part in the next level of the Award this year, continuing to care for the school woodlands. They will also be venturing further afield with day visits and a residential experience in more remote places.