

The Parish Council page in the May 2018 edition of the Village magazine refers to the following article, written by Sian Cain the leader of Forest School activities at Blackwell First School.



A message from Blackwell First School's Forest School Leader...

Unlike many people, most of the days that I return home from work I have a smile on my face and a wonderful feeling of accomplishment from seeing the benefits that Forest School brings to the children that I work with at Blackwell First School.

In a fast changing world dominated by computers and social media, Forest School is a fantastically effective way of helping young children to learn about the environment, about other people and about themselves. It is proven that Forest school has a huge effect on children's self-esteem, enthusiasm, communication, problem solving, self-confidence and motivation skills. This is something that I see developing in the children of Blackwell every day and it is a joy to watch! Many children begin their Forest School journey as shy, anxious and cautious individuals who have never climbed a tree or maybe even entered a woodland. But by the time they leave us at Blackwell they have blossomed into confident, risk taking, problem solving, self motivated individuals with skills that they can use for the rest of their lives.

Today was different.

I spent the afternoon with 30 disheartened children, collecting snapped canes, ripped up tree saplings and tree guards flung all over the woodlands.

2 weeks previously after a lot of planning, discussions and research by the children, they started to plant their personally selected trees from a generous donation to Blackwell First School from the Woodlands Trust, following our Gold Award for encouraging outdoor learning and environmental projects. The children came away very rewarded in knowing that they had contributed to the sustainability of the woodlands in Blackwell, and really felt that they had made a difference to the world, knowing how important trees are to all of our lives. Some children even joked about how they would bring their Grandchildren to visit their planted tree in many years to come!

Fast forward 2 weeks and I have to sit around the fire circle and try to find the words to explain to these innocent children, why some individuals think its ok to rip out every single tree sapling that they had carefully labelled and planted in areas all around the woodlands that they thought would be 'safe'.

It is not the first occurrence of this kind in these woodlands. The children recently made a 'Fairy Village' of quaint little stick houses, with washing lines and pathways. They added laminated signs asking people kindly to 'take care not to destroy the fairies homes'. They even constructed their own 2 foot fence around the area to 'protect' the fairy village from wild animals! Only to return after half term to a totally flattened fairy village and their signs ripped up to pieces. Again this was a hard conversation to have with the children around the fire circle. I understand that children need to learn about the real world and we can't wrap them in cotton wool but I also worry that all of the fantastic benefits that Forest School brings to these children is being squashed by the actions of a few selfish and destructive individuals.

The woodlands around the field and football pitch belong to Blackwell First School and Hunter's Hill School and it is left open to the public by the schools rather than being fenced off. The village is lucky that the schools have left the sites open. We are very lucky to have it. Although I do find evidence of activities in these woodlands that some parents would not necessarily be happy with, I do also see lots of families and children using the areas and treating it with the respect it deserves.

Please help to protect the woodland in Blackwell and spread the message so that it hopefully gets back to the people targeting the school site and makes them realise the effects that their actions are having on our children.

Sian Cain – Forest School Leader, Blackwell First School.

