



# Mill Water School

Preparation for *their* best future

## **Forest School sessions for young people with severe learning difficulties**

Thank you for providing a grant of £2000 to fund a group of pupils from Mill Water School with severe learning difficulties (SLD) to attend Forest School sessions. Please accept my apologies for the delay in providing you with this report; unfortunately this was missed whilst I was absent from school on maternity leave.

The grant enabled a group of young people with SLD, aged 14-16, to access Forest School activities at Barley Lane School, which is a special school in Exeter, approximately 15 miles from Mill Water. Barley Lane has an on-site Forest School area, and the sessions were led by a qualified Forest School teacher, who has extensive experience of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The sessions took place weekly during the 2024/25 academic year.

The Forest School teacher's experience meant that they were able to pitch the sessions and activities to the abilities and needs of the pupils attending. The pupils enjoyed having the opportunity to work with an unfamiliar adult and to do new things, and this increased their confidence and self-esteem. They thoroughly enjoyed the experience of working outdoors and the increased independence they were able to have, particularly being trusted to work around fire and tools.

During the sessions the pupils completed several small projects, including helping to develop the site by contributing to landscaping for a pond and making bug hotels. They used various tools, often for the first time, including saws and small knives. They also helped to make cooking fires, and enjoyed making outdoor doughnuts, toasting marshmallows, and making smores. They were also able to make and enjoy hot drinks.

Working outdoors brought many benefits for the pupils' wellbeing. Forest School brought opportunities that pupils had not experienced before, and they enjoyed learning new skills whilst having the freedom to explore. Being outdoors and in nature also helped pupils' emotional regulation.

Mill Water staff have fed back the pupils' achievements to their parents and carers, with the aim of them accessing further outdoor activities outside of school, where possible.

Thank you again for the generous grant, and for helping us provide opportunities that would otherwise not have been possible.