



**Gildredge
House**



Allowing children to be children

Using open space to fulfill basic childhood needs - jumping, running, climbing, swinging, racing, yelling, rolling, hiding, and making a big mess - is what childhood is all about! For a variety of obvious reasons many of these things cannot occur indoors. Yet children must have these important experiences. Today children's lives are more and more contained and controlled by small houses; high-stakes academic instruction; schedules; tense, tired, and overworked parents; and by fewer opportunities to be children. Outdoor environments fulfill children's basic needs for freedom, adventure, experimentation, risk-taking, and just being children (Greenman, 1993).

Children need the opportunity to explore the unknown, the unpredictable, and the adventurous. They also need to be able to wonder at nature.

Vision Statement

At Gildredge House our vision is to create a natural environment in order that our students can engage in the natural world. Although not a Forest School as such, this is in keeping with the principles of Forest School. Like Forest Schools, Gildredge House also seeks to 'promote holistic development of all students, regardless of background and needs, by providing regular opportunities to foster resilient, confident independent and creative learners through hands-on learning experiences in a natural environment.'

We seek to provide such an environment which will encourage all our students to explore and discover; to take risks and challenge themselves; to choose and initiate and therefore drive their learning forward and to develop a strong and positive relationship with the natural world.

We know that fresh air and natural light stimulate the brain. Outdoors, noisy behaviour is encouraged and making a mess is allowed. Our whole curriculum can be taken outdoors and concepts that are abstract theories in the classroom can be brought to life.

Outdoor Learning in a natural setting at Gildredge House aims to:

- support creativity and problem solving;
- enhance cognitive abilities, increasing a student's ability to focus;
- improve academic performance, as other studies have shown;
- Reduce ADD;
- Increase physical activity;
- Improve nutrition by growing their own vegetables and fruit;
- Improve eyesight (proved in American Academy of Ophthalmology, 2011)
- Improve social relations with the ability to play more cooperatively;
- Improve self-discipline and reduce stress (Wells & Evans 2003)

- Support the practical learners who respond best to practical experiences, learning by doing, thus reducing the sense of failure in the classroom.

Our Plans for the future

We are seeking to create a natural outdoor learning environment with:

- Trees, shrubs and flowers;
- A wild-life pond;
- A Sussex round-house;
- A woody area;
- An allotment with compost area;
- An insect hotel;
- A mud kitchen;
- A digging area;
- A quiet, sensory area

Mrs C Geldard
Director of Lower School
January 2015