

Volunteers transform forest school in Gloucester

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Children at a Gloucester primary school are set to benefit from a newly revamped forest school area following a huge makeover by volunteers from Mears Group.

Volunteers from Mears Group Plc joined force sat St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School in Churchdown to breathe new life into a nature area which had fallen into disrepair. With the support of a £2,000 grant by the company's charitable arm, [The Mears Foundation](#), volunteers have built a wildlife pond and decking area, providing an immersive learning environment for children to explore nature and conservation.

A group of 16 volunteers worked over five days removing more than 75 metres of rotten fencing, before installing new fencing and gates, together with a decorative rope fence.

Funding by the Mears Foundation bought the pre-made ponds, materials, and tools, as well as a hedgehog house, bat house, bird feeders, and bird food to encourage wildlife to rediscover the area. After a week of settling, the ponds were stocked with pond plants, attracting frogs and newts to their new habitat.

Mears Group offers all employees up to two days volunteering leave to support causes or projects in the communities it serves, and the forest school project was suggested by employee, Sheridan Hendzel, whose son currently attends the school.

She said: "I grew up in the area and have strong family connections to St Mary's. When I saw that the forest school area had become unusable, I really wanted to do something to help. The area had become so overgrown, and the pond was damaged years ago by vandals, so I was keen to not only reinstate the pond, but design a whole new area for all the children to enjoy."

Liam Jordan, Headteacher at St Mary's RC Primary School, said: "All of our pupils relish their time at Forest School. For children with additional needs, offering an outdoor environment and the opportunity to collaborate with their peers is particularly important. In recent years, with ever-dwindling school budgets, we have struggled to access the funds required to maintain the area and so, the idea of introducing additional features the children have longed-for, felt impossible.

"The funding and personnel power that Mears Group and the Mears Foundation has so generously provided has been a godsend. It has been fantastic to see (and hear from the other end of the school grounds!) the pupils' surprise and palpable excitement upon discovering their new wildlife pond area. It has enabled us to make great headway towards our goal of providing the children with an exceptional outdoor learning environment and the project has sparked renewed ambition among the school and community for future Forest School plans."

Plans are now underway for the next phase of the project which will include an 'Ecohut' outdoor classroom encompassing water harvesting and sustainable energy solutions including a wind turbine and solar panels.

Heather Tyrer, General Manager, Mears Foundation added: "The success of this project would not have been possible without the dedication of our volunteers. We are proud of the impact this project has had on the school and the outdoor learning experience it provides for these students. The Mears Foundation remains committed to supporting initiatives that make a positive difference in the lives of individuals and communities."