

# Trainer of the Year

Katie Ward, Holmsdale Manor Nursery  
Ibstock, Leicestershire



Katie is very knowledgeable and, more importantly for me, patient with continuous questions. I highly recommend any opportunity you get to train with her  
– trainee

**K**atie Ward has had an outstanding influence on practice in her setting. A Level 4 Forest School trainer, who also has a PGCE, Early Years Professional Status and a Master's in Early Childhood Studies, Katie introduced Forest School to Leicestershire, instituting the practice at Holmsdale Manor before any other local setting.

The setting has recently been awarded a prestigious Forest School Leadership Centre award from Archimedes Earth and now offers Forest School to babies right up to children aged 11.

Katie started to deliver Forest School sessions at the nursery ten years ago, developing a small on-site area with trees she gained free from The Woodland Trust. She also negotiated with the Forestry Commission to obtain access to a nearby area of woodland, and now the nursery has acquired its own patch of wood within walking distance. She has trained ten members of her team in the practice, including all the setting's team leaders.

Katie takes a highly flexible approach to training, running skills development days to enable staff who are already qualified to refresh their skills, repeating for those who

missed them and producing training materials for staff to take away. The overall result has been significantly improved attainment, particularly in physical development and creative play using loose parts.

Spreading good practice throughout the local area has been a priority for Katie, having trained more than 100 local setting staff as Forest School leaders. This includes childminders, for whom she runs weekend courses, as well as week-long courses around the year, taster days and introductory courses – and an annual party in the woods with parents. In this submission, her colleagues said, 'It is clear to see that Katie engages and enthuses the staff she works with. For example, the head of a local school attended two years ago and has now sent a further seven of his team.'

But it is not just Forest School in which Katie excels: literacy is another focus, as she was involved in the Raising Early Achievement and Literacy project with Professor Cathy Nutbrown. Since then she has run literacy workshops with parents which has expanded into Forest School, and workshops on the importance of play. She worked with another trainer on a parent play project which saw parents attend a workshop

on child development, which had a big impact on the parents.

Other workshops have followed different areas of Katie's interest, such as transient art at local authority conferences, communication skills at a local teaching school, creating attractive and engaging displays, facilitating sand play, gender equality training and more. She is also experimental in her methods of delivering training, using video to show best and less good practice.

The setting has been Outstanding since 2011 and is now visited by practitioners from across the world, while attendees of Katie's Forest School training have come from Switzerland, Germany and Israel.

## FINALISTS

**Debbie Alcock**, Chatterbox House Day Nursery/Influential Child Care Training

**Gemma O'Hara**, Mini First Aid, Manchester

## CRITERION

Open to anyone responsible for training in colleges, training companies or in-house nursery groups