



Stoke by Nayland C of E Primary School

Years 5 & 6 Residential 5th - 7th June 2019

Essex Outdoors Centre, Danbury

A Governor's Experience

It was a normal arrival time at school for Oak Class on Wednesday morning however, this was not going to be a routine school day. There was a high level of excitement and a number of the children talked about waking up early that morning, unable to wait for the adventure that was to follow.

The bags were loaded on to the coach, I think most of us had enough luggage to last us for two weeks! The children were amused to be riding on a 'Squirrel' (Squirrels Coaches). The group boarded, were counted and then we set-off for Danbury with our driver, Morris.

The journey went well and the children chatted the whole way about the fun that awaited them and played card and other games. On arrival we unloaded our luggage and took it to our cabins. We found that our bus was not the only squirrel and we were warned to keep the lids on the bins and doors closed as the squirrels would go in the bins and through the doors in search of food.

Our school had four cabins, two for boys and two for girls. Each had a Group Room with 4 bunk beds (8 beds), a Leaders room and a bathroom with a toilet and washbasin. Each cabin had a 'Leader'. Mrs. McGrath-Wells, Mrs. Locke, Mrs. Day, (Taylor and Ethan's Mother) and myself.

There was no time to unpack before the first activity at 11.00am. The children filled their water bottles and gathered on the green in front of the cabins. We had three mixed groups for the activities, led by Mrs. McGrath-Wells, Mrs. Locke and myself. Each group would complete the same activities in a different order.

My Group 3 started with Orienteering. The Instructor, Patrina, met us on the green and introduced herself, then lead us to the area where some cones were set-out in a grid format. The group were asked which direction they thought was North and some were correct. They divided themselves into two groups (they decided boys and girls) and were given a card which showed 'N', to focus the group on which direction to face and instructions on a route to take around the cones. Each child had to take a turn to find the next cone, each cone having a number value written on it which the group had to add and, when all points had been reached, report back to the Instructor with a total to check. They were then given a new card to complete. This was an introductory exercise to focus the group on always starting by pointing the map North, before moving to the next point and, importantly to stress the importance of teamwork and communication, listening to each other and hearing what each other say. The group had to stay together, start to finish. Once they were proficient with the task they were given a map of the area, were told the out-of-bounds areas, then were given a number which related to a point where they could find the name of an animal, which they would report back before being given a new number. The groups were given a pencil and paper, which maybe was a mistake, as the boys came across other animal names by accident and noted these down. When, on the occasions the Instructor gave them a number to find and they immediately responded with an animal name, she instructed them run to that location to make them do the work. For me it was interesting to watch the teamwork and communication in the groups and the sharing of responsibilities. The session as with all sessions lasted 90 minutes, so ensured plenty of fresh air and exercise.

At 12.30 we returned to the green for our packed-lunches, before re-loading our water bottles and starting our next task at 1.30pm. There was a slight drizzle so we had our rain coats on. Our next activity was 'Aerial Trekking', which involved wearing harnesses and helmets, which we were instructed how to put on and secure, before climbing the steps to the platform. In turn we had our harnesses attached before we were allowed through the gate on to the outer platform. From there,

one at a time, we moved our way around the course. We were instructed that there could only be one person on each obstacle and platform at a time. The first piece of equipment was a wobbly wooden tunnel to crawl through, followed by a round 'seat' to sit on whilst you pulled a rope to get you to the next platform, then three wobbly planks hanging in a line to cross, a long section where you had to trust the harness and let go of the frame and hold a floppy rope with one hand and step sideways across a cable to a diagonal rope, that started at foot level and raised to head height, right to left. The next section was a climbing wall to traverse across, rope-suspended vertical round posts to walk across and finally, a beam to walk across with floppy hanging ropes for 'support'. We had at least two rounds each. It was amazing to watch the children consider their fear of heights, challenge and then conquer them, also to observe the support from their classmates, who even kept an eye on another group on the Zip Wire, shouting them encouragement, including for their Leaders who were game to join in the fun!

Our next activity was Low Ropes, with our Instructor Hannah. This was a similar activity but near ground level and one where teamwork and communication were much more important to enable the group to navigate the course together.

We then returned to our cabins until it was time for our evening meal in the dining hall. Then at 6pm we started our last activity of the day, the Vertical Obstacle Course. Again, we were instructed to put on harnesses and helmets by our Instructor, Charlie. We were divided into two groups and side by side we attempted to climb the vertical wall. One side had shapes that allowed for hand and foot grips, though this was difficult as they were small and with the rain it was slippery. The other side was slightly easier with a pattern formation. When reaching the top or as far up as the children felt able, you then lean back and ease down to earth. We were each able to try both sides before moving around to a different course. This involved climbing a ladder fixed vertically to the wall, then moving over to diagonal wooden steps, then at the top, turning around completely with a round metal post sticking-out as an obstacle, then you use a series of these round metal posts as stairs to get you to a hanging rope to help you get up to bits of wood secured in a 'V' shape in three sets, to reach the top. At the top, you again lean backwards and walk down the wall. With this exercise the children got involved with holding the safety line next to the Instructor. The whole group gave it a go and decided what their target was on all three courses, with some exceeding those targets and surprising themselves.

We then had hot chocolate back in the dining room and shared experiences of the day, before getting ready for bed and a night's sleep.

Wake-up on Thursday was 7.15am, though most, if not all, were awake before then, looking forward to a full day of activities and a sunny day. Showers etc. were taken before our turn to have breakfast of toast, eggs, sausages, bacon and cereals. All dietary requirements, including my own, were catered for. Sun cream was applied, water bottles loaded and we gathered on the green for a 9.30am start.

Group 3 opened with the 'Obstacle Course'. The group were given helmets and had to make their way through (over and under) a structure of tyres. Then they climbed up a high sloping ramp and, at the top they straddled the top beam where the Instructor was waiting and they had to sit and tell a joke or a fact, before descending down the cargo net. The next obstacle was a series of beams to go over and under, then a horizontal cargo net to climb across, followed by some balance beams to walk across and up. The final obstacle was a tube with a rope to pull themselves up to a platform. The first ones up were able to help the others.

The second activity was climbing, which was a near vertical wall with a 45-degree incline on the lower section, then vertical above it. The group was able, after a demonstration from Hannah, to get involved in operating the ropes. One child was attached to the line, which was also secured to the ground, to prevent them from flying up in the air. They were taught a mantra, 'V to the knee, 1, 2, 3, meaning you hold the rope to the climber with your left hand, you pull on that and the other hand holds the rope that has passed through the harness on their waist. This right hand is raised to make a 'v' with the slack. The right hand moves down to the right knee (you never let go of the rope that has passed through the harness mechanism), then keeping hold of the lower rope with the right hand, you release the upper rope from the left hand and place the left hand on the lower rope above the right hand (1). The right hand then releases and grips the lower rope next to the harness (2) and the left

hand returns to grip the upper rope (3), high enough to pull down and begin the process. A second child stands next to them and makes a smile with the slack rope and a third child next to them holding the rope flat. They work together and 'sing' the mantra as they go. The climber starts next to the wincher and they start the process until the rope tightens, giving the climber a 'wedgie' and enabling them to start moving towards the wall and begin climbing with a taught (tight) line. The line must be kept tight for the climber's safety. Charlie S ensured my line was tight and that I moved quickly up the wall, trying to reduce the uncomfortable 'wedgie'. The climber reaches the first marker and stops, shouting knot, to allow the Instructor to apply a security knot. The climber proceeds up to the start of the vertical section and repeats the call, as they do half-way up, before proceeding to the top. At the top, or wherever they choose to finish, they wait until the knots are undone. They can then lean back and ab-sail down.

Lunch followed Climbing and for the afternoon we started with Archery, lead by Kiera. We were instructed how to stand with feet either side of the line, face sideways (in line with our feet), hold the bow, lift and direct the arrow to its slot and pull it back into the string between the markers until it clicks. Then lift the bow up, always pointing the arrow towards the target, keeping our heads only pointing towards the target, keeping the bow arm straight and extended, pulling back on the string with three fingers as far as possible and close to the face, aim and fire! After two rounds of practice we played the pizza game to aim at colours on the target to collect the ingredients. The children then had to answer questions of their best and worst to come up with answers that would apply to the colours on the target and arrows off-target.

Next up was Bush Craft and the children were asked about their thoughts on what was Bush Craft. They provided great answers, including the ability to light a fire to keep warm, providing shelter from the sun and rain, being able to eat and drink. They talked about what could be burned and what should not be burned because of the chemicals released into the environment. The group divided into two and set about collecting small and medium twigs to prepare for a fire. They were given a cotton wool pad and were shown how to make a hashtag shape with twigs to surround it. They were then given the tools to make a spark to ignite the cotton wool. They learned how important it was to have lots of small dry twigs to carefully place on the flames to 'feed' the fire. When the fires were going they were given marshmallows to cook over the flames as well as hot chocolate to drink. At the end the Instructor put water on the fires to ensure they were safely extinguished.

After dinner we went Caving. The Centre had built a twisting, turning, tubular fibre-glass structure above ground, but when inside it gave a true caving experience that was very much appreciated by the group. Some were a little tentative and we started, with our helmets and head lights on, by crawling up, (not an easy manoeuvre!) and in to a small chamber to adjust to the dark and small space. There were doors in each chamber that could be opened to let light in. When everyone was comfortable we wriggled our way to the next chamber. Here the group was told about chemicals, such as iron that can be found in the rock (coloured brown) and were showed in the walls the effect of water dripping down the walls of caves. The Instructor informed the group that there was a secret passage to find and they set off in search. Nobody in the group found it so maybe it remains a secret passage. They then proceeded down a narrow passage and dropped into a ball pit, which they loved. We then crawled down another passage and out into the sunshine. Any fears about the dark or enclosed spaces were overcome and everyone had fun. Another very important learning experience that enhances their development.

It was then time for hot chocolate, preparing for bed and a well-earned good night's sleep.

Friday morning arrived and we set about packing our bags and tidying the cabins. Not an easy exercise when some children forget which items are theirs!

After a good breakfast we started with Problem Solving, again with Keira and her colleague Charlotte. We started by standing in a line on a log and had to order ourselves in month of birth order without touching the 'burning lava' surrounding the log. Next it was order by shoe size without talking to each other. Next up was to get the group across 'water' by using three planks to get from one tyre to the next, without treading in the 'water' and on to the island. The problem being that the planks weren't long enough for one stretch, so the group had to devise a plan to use two planks together. The third exercise was with three groups, having to stand on one foam square together and put another in front of them and move on to that and repeat the process to make their way to the line ahead without

touching the ground. They then put on 'skis' (a plank for three people with foot straps) and had to coordinate together to make their way back to the start. The final task was for the group to use 12-inch lengths of guttering, each member had one section, to move a tennis ball from the start to a bucket a distance away. The rules were that the ball had to be kept moving forward all the time. The group discussed at the start their tactics and experimented to find the best method and, succeeded in working together to complete the task.

Our group was lucky to finish on a 'high' with the Zip Wire. We were back in our harnesses and helmets and one at a time we ascended the tower to be met by Keira, who attached our safety lines. We went through the gate to the outer platform and stepped on to the box and were attached to the wire and the safety lines undone. We then sat and lifted our legs and away we went. Bradley was waiting at the bottom to apply the brakes! It was impressive to see some on their first run holding tightly to the line, then for the second waving and making shapes. By the 4th run they were really on top of their games.

Behind us we saw the coach arrive and generally I think the group were wanting to stay and do more activities, however I'm sure they also were thinking they had achieved so much and were happy about returning to their families and pets. We returned to the dinner hall for a final time, where the dinner ladies gave us a good send-off. Morris loaded the coach, we counted numbers and appeared to have all the children and the luggage we came with. We began our journey home with, I'm sure, a feeling of pride in what we had achieved, the fears faced and conquered. I spoke to a number of the children over the three days after activities and told them they should let their parents know how brave they had been, whether it be to walk up to a high platform, climb, go into the caves, crawl through tunnels, get on the Zip Wire - they were all amazing!

I believe these trips are so important for the children's development and significantly complement the curriculum taught in school. They learn life skills in an open environment, together with their friends and classmates, spend time away from home and families, some for the first time and learn to work and play together. For me it is always a privilege to be accepted into the group and be able to observe the development, the interaction and particularly the friendly way the pupils behave towards each other, helping, caring for and encouraging each other

The feedback we, the Leaders, received from the Instructors was extremely positive, commenting on what a lovely group of pupils they are and how it was a pleasure to work with them. The children gave a wonderful impression of the school and should be very proud of themselves.

On behalf of the Local Governing Body a big thank you to the Leaders for giving-up their time, without which the trip could not take place and, special thanks to Mrs. McGrath-Wells for organising and leading this fantastic residential.

Peter Drew,
Governor.