To whom it may concern….

At Southmead Primary school we were delighted to know that one of our parents, Stuart Young had bought Hakeford Woods. As a fully inclusive primary school we know the benefits outdoor education has on all of our physical and mental heath. We were keen to support Stuart and offered him opportunities to work on our school site to set up a ‘forest school’ where children could learn outdoor survival skills but also to reflect upon what can be achieved by learning outdoors, not just about the environment but about ourselves and one another. His work at the school was well-received by children and parents/carers alike. We were looking forward to seeing his next big project and visiting the woods.

To date we have visited many times and for many different reasons. We have taken whole class groups to learn about specific plants, animals, minibeasts and food chains. We have learnt to name flora and fauna and have created some vivid memories such as the time when deer ran along the slope up which we were climbing in order to get to the field above. We have found fossils, learnt about the eco structure of the environment, built camps, seen the changing seasons, used our senses to solve clues and problems. We have climbed trees, made mud pies at the café, sat around the campfire – which we made beforehand, and talked about ourselves, one another and Nature. Stuart has brought us an endless resource which never fails to inspire, despite the British weather.

Bringing specific groups to the woods has been particularly rewarding. Children with extra learning needs, children in care, children who find classroom learning difficult, children who have suffered a family bereavement, children who struggle to express emotions in a way which enables them to cope with life, children who have never worn a pair of wellington boots or stayed out in the rain and jumped in the mud, children who find friendships difficult, children who need space, children who want to learn about nature, children who rarely experience team work…all have found something special under the guidance of Stuart Young and his team.

I have been impressed by the amount of thought and organisation which Stuart has put into his project. It has been interesting watching him move forward after the setbacks of a particularly ferocious storm and to work his way through the many challenges he faces to make this project useful to his community – and it is!

Below are quotes from children who have attended one or more sessions at Hakeford Woods:

‘I really enjoyed that we got to go out and be adventurous. I had a go at building dens. It was awesome!’ – Liam

‘I enjoyed the fire lighting because it is not all the time you get to make proper fires!’ – Henry

‘Teamwork is hard work but it is such a beautiful place and we are environmentally friendly.’ – Elyse

‘I enjoy the amount of cool and fun activities there are and it’s also nice to be outside with Nature experiencing how it’s really like being out in the wild.’ – Kieran

‘I developed lots of new skills and it was great being outside.’ –Cerys

‘I really enjoyed the morning even though it rained most of the time. When we were sketching it was funny because everyone kept slipping and falling over. It was fun.’ – Brad

‘I liked forest school because it is great learning in the forest with your friends. I made some new ones too.’ – Archie the Alpaca

‘I enjoyed that I got to go every Friday and made friends and we got to build stuff like dens, rafts and dams. We went for a big walk, exploring. It made me feel better.’ - Ryan

‘We learnt about different types of trees I’ve never heard of before. I enjoyed it.’ – Macy.

‘I had the time of my life!’ – Emily

‘After we finished making our den my groups made a swing and everyone was having such good fun!’ –Amy

‘I enjoyed all of it because it made you work as a team and help others. It was great fun.’

‘Lighting fires really makes you persevere till you do it. Resilience!’ – Ezra

Best Wishes Gill Gillett - Headteacher