

Forest School



What is Forest School?

- 🌳 Murray and O'Brian (2006) define Forest School as; “An inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults regular opportunities to achieve, and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands on learning experiences in a woodland environment” (pg 3)



Why Forest School?

“Children want space at all ages. Space, that is ample space, is almost as much wanted as food and air. To move, to run, to find things out by new movement, to feel one’s life in every limb, that is the life of early childhood”

Margaret McMillian
(1930)



Our Forest School Sites

Forest School can take place in any area where there is nature, no matter how big or small. Even the smallest outside space can seem vast and intriguing through a child's eyes and can provide space for children to explore and connect with nature. We are lucky enough to live in a beautiful area where we have different sites to choose from.





🌳 Sand hill Woods is our main Forest School site. This ancient woodland (privately owned by The Kosmon Sanctuary) encompasses a variety of wonderful habitats. We have our fire circle and snack area established here with dens and climbing trees. We also like to dig in our sandy mud hill, sail away on our pirate ship, search for mini beasts in our bug hotel, check up on frogs in the pond, enjoy stunning bluebells and wild garlic in spring, follow deer tracks, ...

Our Forest School Sites *continued*

🌳 The Heath provides is a beautiful local site. Although we can't light fires here we enjoy exploring the terrain, visiting and climbing Grandfather Oak tree, playing hide'n'seek in the heather and bracken and visiting Walton Pond.



🌳 Breech Lane playing field has the space to become a Forest School area. This will evolve over the years to incorporate different areas as children's interests grow and develop.



🌳 Walton School playground itself is our own Forest School mini site. All year groups have access to the school playground and we are hoping to further develop the environment so children have room to learn, think and play.

Getting Ready

Getting Ready is an important part of children's involvement in Forest School. We encourage and support children to get ready independently.



Come prepared

We go out in all weathers. Children, staff and helpers need to be well equipped and comfortable to get the most out of every Forest School session.



Summer kit:

- sun hat
- suncream already applied
- sensible shoes that cover the toes
- small water bottle that children can carry themselves
- legs and ankles covered



Winter kit:

- waterproofs or warm ski suit
- wellington boots with welly socks or snow boots
- hat and scarf
- gloves including waterproof outer gloves

ALL BELONGINGS NEED TO BE CLEARLY NAMED!

Typical Routine (for EY & KS1)






- Getting ready – children get themselves ready: waterproofs, boots and high vis jackets, sun cream and hats if necessary.
- Pack bag and discuss safety along route to Forest School, especially roads
- Safety Circle – talk about how to stay safe in the woods
- Boundaries and practice *1,2,3 come to me!*
- Looking, listening, smelling, touching and describing our discoveries
- A challenge – small, achievable task. This can be linked to children's individual learning, the revised EYFS or to general Curriculum areas.
- Free exploration
- Drink and snack
- Tidy up time
- Route back to school
- Reflection time, thoughts for what we'd like to do next time





**Quality outdoor experiences
are so important**





Forest School Sessions

-  We can go out as a whole class or as small groups maintaining safe adult: child ratios.
-  We go out all year round as our FS sites are naturally enabling environments.
-  Carefully planned learning where experiences are tailored to children's interests and needs.
-  Flexibility combined with the reassurance of routine and familiarity.
-  Fun!



Clove hitch knots to make a rope ladder/xylophone




Brief history of Forest School

-  Forest Schools originated in Scandinavia in 1950s and were based upon views that children benefitted from having close contact with nature and the natural world.
-  Forest School practice was introduced in Britain by Bridgwater College in 1995 after an inspirational visit to Denmark.
-  Forest School has branched out across Britain. It is well established in Wales and Scotland but has really begun to take off in England.
-  The Forest School Association is the professional body and UK wide voice for Forest School, promoting best practice, cohesion and '*quality Forest School for all*'.
www.forestschoollassociation.org

Endless Learning Opportunities





Forest School supports all areas of the EYFS in a fun, environmentally friendly way!

Core areas:

-  **Personal, Social, Emotional Development** – sharing resources, helping each other, problem solving, increasing independence, self-esteem, self-confidence and promoting positive behaviour...
-  **Physical Development** – moving in variety of ways, using space, un-even terrain, tree climbing, balancing, fine/gross motor control, self-care...
-  **Communication and Language** – developing social skills by speaking, listening and understanding in meaningful situations and activities...



Specific areas:

-  **Literacy** – retelling stories, using sticks to write in the mud, labeling trees...
-  **Maths** – counting, measuring sticks (stick rules), spatial vocabulary and awareness, shapes, sorting, ordering...
-  **Understanding the world** – environmental awareness beyond EYFS expectations...
-  **Expressive Arts and Design** – role play, sculpture, weaving, malleable materials, collage, music...

KS1 & KS2 – English and Maths

By thinking outside the box Forest School can be a great time for English and Maths activities in meaningful contexts.

Years 1 & 2:

Labels, lists, captions, adjectives (adults collect adjectives used), poetry, expression and tone, recounts, verbs past and present, suffix, riddles, postcard, report, persuasive writing, letters home...

Number, addition, subtraction, measurement, sorting, shape, fractions, mental maths...

Year 3 & 4

Non-fiction, poetry, characters, story settings, adventure, synonyms, plurals, instructions, bullet points, narrative, adjectives, explanations, persuasive writing...

Number, word problems, position, sequence, measure, fractions, shape, direction, mental addition, subtraction, multiplication and division...

Year 5 & 6:

Narrative, report, letter, non-fiction, persuasive writing, investigation, recount, balanced argument, personification, synonyms, antonyms, I/me, questions/commands, metaphor, simile, passive voice...

Number, addition, subtraction, shape, multiplication, division, measure, fractions, problem solving, data – bar charts, line graphs, block graphs...



EY, KS1 & KS2 - Topics

Forest School can be used as backdrop for curriculum based learning and experiences.

- 🌳 **Cygnets:** Senses, Keeping Healthy, *Owl Babies*, *Goldilocks*, *The Gruffalo*, *We're going on a Bear Hunt*, *The Three Little Pigs*, Spring Watch, *Ugly Duckling*, Living Eggs project, Dinosaurs, Ponds, Minibeasts...
- 🌳 **Year 1:** Senses, Weather, Castles, Growth...
- 🌳 **Year 2:** Fireworks and fire safety, Trees, environmental comparisons – Africa, sea sides...
- 🌳 **Year 3:** Light & Shadows, Road Safety (*The Hodgeheg*), Regional studies (WotH compared to __), Life Cycles, Rocks & Minerals, Plants, Orienteering, Forces ...
- 🌳 **Year 4:** Locations, *The Tunnel*, Dreamtime stories and art, Water Cycle, Living things and Habitats, Orienteering, Environment...
- 🌳 **Year 5:** Locations, Kandinsky, Storytelling, Life Cycles, Water, Orienteering...
- 🌳 **Year 6:** *Harry Potter* – Forbidden forest suspense story, WW1 - letters from the trenches, *Chaperon Rouge* – puppet show and stop frame animations in woods, Rainforests, support for SATs prep...



Learning Values and SMSC

Focusing on the individual is a key part of Forest School. Being outside allows children the space to be themselves and gives teachers the time to discover different needs/talents in their children. SMSC can be included in plans in virtually every area.

- 🌳 **Collaboration** – working together, taking turns, listening, unity.
- 🌳 **Resilience** – not giving up, risks, developing high self-esteem.
- 🌳 **Equality** – tolerance, inclusion, diversity. Recognising differences and rights of each other and wider community.
- 🌳 **Compassion** – kindness and concern, friendship and love. Communicating effectively, understanding the needs of others. Respect.
- 🌳 **Creativity and Innovation** – valuing imagination and originality, being inquisitive and inspirational.
- 🌳 **Exploration** – active learning, curious, confidence to experience new things. Respect for nature and a love of the great outdoors.



Supporting Children with SEN

- 🌳 Forest School fosters communication particularly for children with EAL or SENs.
- 🌳 Forest School can help different types of learner - kinaesthetic, visual and auditory
- 🌳 Visual stimulation and the ever-changing environment inspire children.



Benefits of Forest School (from research)



🌳 *“A study carried out in Sweden on children from similar backgrounds found that children attending FS kindergartens ... are far happier than children in kindergartens located in the urban environment. The study concluded that children in the FS are more balanced with a greater social capability, have fewer days off sick, are more able to concentrate and are better co-coordinated than the city kindergarten children.”*

www.forestschool.com/history-of-forest-schools.php (2001)

Benefits continued









Norfolk County Council (2009) summarise 5 main themes:

- 🌳 Physical health benefits: increased oxygen levels outside, increase brain function, reduce chance of obesity. Sunlight aids vitamin D production with increased resilience to illness.
- 🌳 Mental health benefits: spending time in green spaces reduces cortisol (stress chemical) levels in the brain - calming influence.
- 🌳 Social benefits: children who tend to lead in FS settings tend to be the most intelligent and imaginative compared to hard-top play areas where the dominant children are those who are physically fit.
- 🌳 Risk awareness: playing outside allows children to learn about risk assessment.
- 🌳 Behaviour: improved behaviour – ADHD symptoms are not as apparent when children are playing in a natural space.



Supporting self-evaluation and reflection

The outside environment can provide children with challenges that support their ability to reflect and evaluate.

-  Walking on un-even terrain
-  Tree-climbing
-  Pond dipping
-  Negotiating space around brambles/nettles
-  Balancing on logs
-  Using tools such as saw, whittling
-  Tree swings
-  Camp fires and cooking



Supporting Schemas

The outside environment provides an ideal place for children to develop and extend on their schematic interest.







- 🌳 Orientation – exploring new points of view by climbing trees, walking over hills/obstacles.
- 🌳 Positioning – using natural materials to place and arrange (leaves, stones, acorns, conkers, pine cones)
- 🌳 Transporting – carrying items around the Forest School site (providing children with collecting bags/buckets) and taking items back to the setting.
- 🌳 Rotation – rolling down hills, running around trees, playing spinning games.
- 🌳 Enveloping – den building large and small scale, mud painting

Risk Taking

- 🌳 Natural space can provide children with the opportunity to explore what their bodies can do.
- 🌳 Children are able to use the environment for physical challenge, this may be by exploring un-even terrain, rolling/running down hills, balancing along logs, jumping from a height, climbing trees and using tools.
- 🌳 Children also learn about how to behave around a fire and follow rules to stay safe.



Why Risk and Challenge Matter

-  It is important to highlight that although most children will actively seek risk in their play (Stephenson, 2003), they do not set out to fail or hurt themselves. The vast majority of children seek a level of challenge they are developmentally capable of achieving. (Stephenson, 2003; Little and Wyver, 2008)
-  Children “have a right to feel ‘the knot in their stomach’ – that feeling of anticipation and exhilaration when taking risks during play” (Warden, 2011). She also argues how important it is that children experience the possibilities of now and the promise of ‘more to come’.
-  The main challenge lies in adults’ perceptions as Little and Wyver (2008) highlight, “where parents and teachers accept and even encourage children to take risks and challenge themselves mentally, physical risk is often seen as something negative and dangerous and to be avoided.”
-  Sue Palmer (*Toxic Childhood*, 2007): “All real children’s play involves an element of risk, and the more real play children are allowed the better they become at analyzing and managing those risks. If, on the other hand, adults try to eliminate risk from their lives they’re likely to grow up either unduly reckless or hopelessly timid.”

Valuing parental involvement

A study by the DCFS (20078) found... “Parental involvement in children’s education from an early age has a significant effect on education achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood.”



Affects on children’s development include:

- 🌳 Enhanced confidence and self-esteem
- 🌳 Positive behavioural and attitudinal changes
- 🌳 Pleasure from collaborative learning

Benefits for parents include:

- 🌳 A greater understanding of child development and how they could support their child’s learning
- 🌳 Better relationships with children



Any Questions?



Useful websites



Field Study Council (free Opal packs) www.opalexplorenature.org



Nature Detectives (The Woodland Trust) www.naturedetectives.org.uk



RHS campaign for schools gardening apps.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening/



Council for learning outside the classroom www.lotc.org.uk/

Forest School Association

Play England

Wild Child campaign

Surrey Forest School Cluster groups

Further Reading

Forest School for all Sarah Knight (ed.), Sage 2011

Last child in the woods Richard Louv, Algonquin Books 2005

Playing Outdoors: spaces and places, risks and challenge Helen Tovey OUP 2007

A marvelous opportunity for children to learn: a participatory evaluation of Forest School in England and Wales Brian and Murray, Forest Research 2006