

Forest School at St Bartholomew's CE (VC) Primary School



Intent

At St Bartholomew's CE (VC) Primary School we want to give our children the best possible opportunities and experiences.

The ethos of Forest School is based on a respect for children and their capacity to initiate, investigate and maintain curiosity in the world around them. It believes in a child's right to play; the right to access the outdoors (and in particular a woodland environment); the right to experience risk in a controlled way in the natural world along with the right to develop their emotional intelligence through social interaction, building a resilience to enable creative engagement with their peers and their potential. The children use full sized tools, play, learn boundaries of behaviour; both physical and social, establish and grow in confidence, self-esteem and become self-motivated.

Forest School is nature-based, where practitioners nurture learner-led exploration and discovery, nurturing meaningful experiences for positive lifelong impacts. Through creating learner inspired experiences based on exploration and discovery, we recognise opportunities to mentor holistic growth. Wellbeing is the foundation of our practice and Forest Schools help to develop social, emotional and physical needs as well as build confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands on experiences in a natural setting.

As the children visit the forest school site over a long-time frame, progression and new skills are linked to the site. The progression allows for the children to build on previous learning and develop new skills. This is underpinned with the adult repeating the same safety rules, identifying boundaries, emphasising the importance of safety, and making links to learning new skills to their everyday lives.

Forest school expands the children experience of the natural world and how they as individuals can have an influence and impact on the world today e.g. saving energy, recycling, protecting trees. promoting wildlife habitats

One of the principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. This is particularly important as many of our children will continue to live and work in the National Park.

The children are taught about respect and responsibility for the world around them. Both the children and adults are encouraged to respect their environment and to be aware of conservation issues of the wild area around them.

Implementation

At St Bartholomew's CE (VC) School we aim to give all children an insight into the ethos of Forest School.

Forest School builds on a child's positive attitude to learning, offering them the opportunities to take risks, make choices and initiate learning for themselves. The Forest School learning environment provides opportunities for children to develop self-esteem, self-confidence, to form positive relationships with others, to develop a growing awareness of their emotional needs and the needs of

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others, to learn to cooperate and work with their peers and adults and to develop strategies in order to take risks within the boundaries of safety.

Forest School is about exploring and experiencing the natural world through play.

The child can access the forest at their own level, be it age related or ability. The recapping of previous skills and knowledge allows access for all. The child initiated approach gives a greater level of understanding and engagement. The children are actively choosing appropriate equipment or tools that they need.

The aim is to promote respect for wildlife, which will be achieved through detailed session plans, evaluation and careful reference to our Woodland Management Plan and Ecological Impact Assessment. If appropriate, reclaimed, recycled and sustainable resources will be used to maintain and develop our forest school site.

Encouraging children to care for the environment is an essential part of Forest School. To encourage the children to look after the site we will always leave it tidy and never damage anything growing in it. We will only collect things that are on the ground and leave the area as we found it when we leave. The Forest School Leader will monitor the site so that it does not become overused.

Impact

Children will grow in confidence because of the freedom, time and space they are given in their learning. This allows them to demonstrate independence at each individual child's rate.

The children will begin to understand, assess, and manage their own risk and safety. This will allow the children to become more independent and show them that life comes with not only risk but also rewards. It also teaches them what their own limits are and that they can push through them. They will see that sometimes we don't always get the desired result the first time but that doesn't make us a failure, it helps us to grow, forcing us to try again in a different way. Forest schools encourages problem solving, logical thinking and self-reflection and evaluation.

Activities such as sharing tools and participating in play, help teach the children to work together as a group, which strengthens their bonds and social skills. The review time at the end of each session allows time for this self-reflection and for all children to share their successes.

The sensory experiences provided by Forest School helps prompt language development. A greater vocabulary that is learnt in situation, with hands on experience. The adult can play a role of just observing, coming along side, modelling, supporting, or encouraging.

Children develop an interest in the great outdoors and respect for the natural world around them. The changing seasons and weather offer a wealth of interest and opportunities.

We measure the impact of our curriculum through the images and videos of the children's practical learning and talking to the children about their learning during reflection (pupil voice). These are included on school website so parents and other adults can see the images.

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Ideas are shared with the children how they can expand their learning by going for nature walks, putting up bird feeders in their own garden, building bug hotels and using their new learnt skills in a new way.

Forest School is also beneficial to teachers and support staff. Observing their class in a different setting allows them to gain a new perspective and understanding of their class. It allows relationships to develop and allows adults to see children achieving in a completely different environment.

When children really engage with Forest School they will take their experiences home to share with friends and family. This will often encourage families to visit their local woodlands more frequently.

Taking children outside of the classroom removes the pressures of academia and allows them to play to their strengths. This is beneficial to children who struggle in the classroom because there is more of an opportunity for them to learn at their own pace.

Teaching and Learning

Forest School has no set of prescribed activities. Nearly any type of outdoor learning activity could be undertaken as part of our Forest School process. It is the ethos in how the activities are delivered that make it part of Forest School.

Within the Forest School:

- Children have a choice in what activities they undertake.
- The Forest School Leader will observe the children carefully to plan for the next steps.
- The Forest School Leader will introduce relevant skills, knowledge and resources based on what the children are interested in and need to develop.
- The Forest School Leader set up what the children are to achieve by breaking tasks into small achievable chunks.
- Tasks are open – no right or wrong way of doing things (exceptions to this are health and safety procedures).

The types of outdoor activities children undertake within a Forest School may include the following, and countless more. Activities selected will depend on the learner's age, stage of development and interests and time of year:

- Field Studies Activities – minibeast hunts, tree identification, bird watching, life cycle games.
- Sensory Activities – games to do with colour, smell, sound, touch, blindfold games.
- Bushcraft – shelter building, knot use, fire lighting and cooking, cordage making, wild foods, whittling
- Woodland crafts – willow crafts, natural jewellery, weaving, natural dyes, traditional crafts
- Teambuilding and trust games – blindfold games, circle games, problem solving activities, team games
- Wildlife conservation – tree planting, nest box construction, coppicing, fence/path building
- Imaginative activities – story telling, drama, role play, songs, mud kitchen



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- Physical play – tree climbing, balancing, log dragging, digging
- Construction – shelter building, ropes, pulleys

Organisation, Planning and Resources

It is the responsibility of the Forest School Leader to organise and plan all forest school sessions with the support of the teacher. All resources are kept in our outdoor Forest School storage, and it is the responsibility of the Forest School Leader to ensure these are kept in a clean, secure working order.

Assessment

When conducting and planning Forest School it is important to take a step back and observe and assess the children. The observations of children achieve several functions,

- it gives you a baseline of their skills
- identifies where their next steps maybe
- it informs planning for the next session
- it helps you learn as a Forest School Leader.

Equal Opportunities

At Forest School we actively promote the inclusion of all children and adults into Forest School sessions, and we endeavour to ensure that the opportunities for learning, development and participation are available to everyone, irrespective of race, gender, ability, religion, sexual orientation or age.

Inclusion

We aim to and are committed to:

- providing a secure environment in which children can flourish and in which all contributions are valued;
- including and value the contribution of all children and adults to our understanding of equality and diversity;
- make inclusion a thread which runs through all of the activities of Forest School

Role of the Subject Leader

The Forest School Leader is a trained Level 3 Forest School Practitioner and holds an up to date ITC Outdoor First Aid certificate. They are responsible for organising the planning and running all Forest School sessions. The Forest School leader has the safety of the children at the centre of all activities.

The leader will carry out a detailed safety check before each session and comply with health and safety risk assessments. The leader will ensure that all documentation is relevant and up to date. They are responsible for all equipment and will ensure that it is checked before use and returned to the resource area after use.

The Forest School leader will keep an accident book and keep parents fully informed of any incidents that may occur during a session, eg, trips, falls, stings, etc.

Working with Parents/Carers

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At Forest School we value the input of parents and carers. Before the start of all our Forest School sessions a letter is sent home to parents/carers informing them about how and when the sessions take place.

We also run taster sessions and early years sessions for children who may be thinking of attending St Bartholomew's CE (VC) Primary School. This enables the children and parent/carers to get an insight into the fun activities our forest school provides

I like forest school because I can make dens. Y5

I like getting messy in the mud kitchen. EYFS

I like using the real tools to craft. Y2