



Forest School at Holy Family



Respect, Responsibility, Resilience.

What is Forest School?

The ethos of Forest School is to inspire and encourage children through positive outdoor experiences in a chosen location. This experience is separate from outdoor learning as it is taught as a separate entity, building confidence and self-esteem and providing unique learning experiences. There are however many links to the National Curriculum and in particular the Characteristics of Learning from the Early Years Framework.



Forest School sessions are based around the needs of the learners and formed around their interests and imagination. Tasks and activities will aim to be motivational and achievable and provoke and develop many skills from shared experiences.

Some skills that can be developed and nurtured during Forest School sessions are:

- Curiosity about the natural world and their connection to it
- Independence and motivation
- Increased confidence, courage and self esteem
- Speaking and listening skills
- Links to our school values of respect, responsibility and resilience



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What are the benefits of Forest School?

Forest School programmes are planned and delivered depending on the age and abilities of the children involved. Sessions will contribute to the holistic development of the children taking part. There are many benefits to Forest School and there are countless pieces of international research to demonstrate the benefits of children spending time in natural, outdoor spaces. Here are just a few of these:

Physical health

- increased oxygen levels outside increase brain function
- increased gross motor movement reduces chance of obesity and increases bone density (reducing chances of osteoporosis)
- sunlight increases vitamin D production | increased resilience to illness.

Mental health

- Spending time in green spaces reduces cortisol (a stress chemical) levels in the brain and therefore has a calming influence.
- The reduction in cortisol also increases receptivity for building neural pathways (learning) in the brain.
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Social benefits

- Research suggests that in natural play areas the leaders tend to be the most intelligent and imaginative.
- When playing outside, communication, teambuilding and language skills are developed.

Risk awareness

- Playing outside allows children to learn about risk assessment and risk taking.
- Children that are exposed to acceptable levels of risk at a young age are less likely to make bad judgements in the future.



What are the benefits of Forest School? Continued

Behaviour

- Due to the calming effect on the brain and the increase in physical space outside, improved behaviour is often noticed.
- Research is taking place into ADHD and the outdoors, as ADHD symptoms are not as apparent when children are playing in a natural space.

Social development

- Forest School provides endless opportunities for co-operation, social interactions and sharing.
- Teambuilding activities form a key part of Forest School sessions for older groups.
- The Forest School setting gives young people space and freedom within defined boundaries. It gives them the opportunity to run, balance, jump and climb and consequently helps them to become more spatially aware.
- For older groups the woodland setting provides the opportunity to participate in conservation tasks and learn practical skills including woodcraft and survival skills, and develop environmental knowledge and understanding.

Language and linguistic skills

- Forest School promotes communication skills. It provides the opportunity for young people to express their feelings, ideas, thoughts and needs orally through exploratory and imaginative play and creative activities.



What are the benefits of Forest School? Continued

Emotional development

- The outdoor environment provides the time, space, peace and freedom for young people to establish deep thought processes. The Forest School ethos and setting provide an environment where they are able to develop the strength and resilience they may require to cope with emotional difficulties.
- Safety games encourage young people to take responsibility / show concern for one another.
- Review and reflection time encourages them to consider the impact other people have on their Forest School session

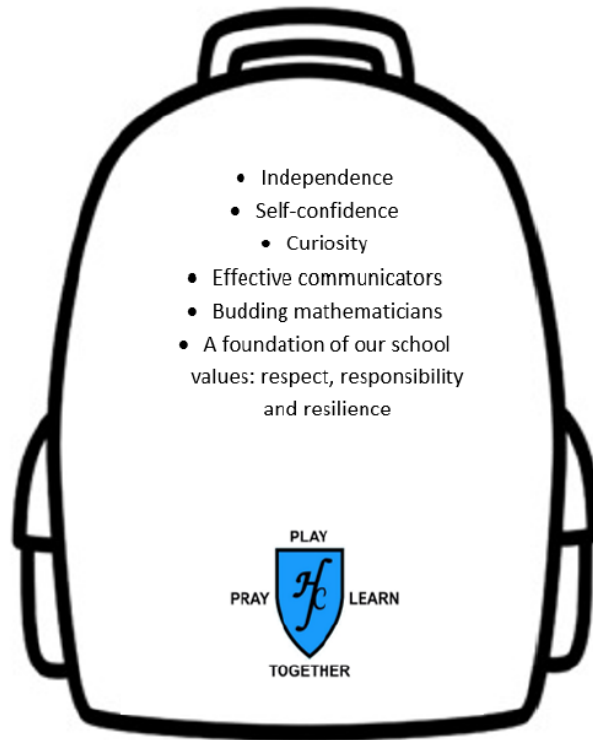
Building self confidence

- Young people have the time to become familiar and confident within their Forest School setting and accustomed to the routines associated with it. The familiar structure and content of Forest School aims to provide stability, security and consistency.
- Once the boundaries are known there is time for freedom of thought and the opportunity to take acceptable risks. Confidence may be boosted by learning new skills.



Enhancing the EYFS Curriculum

At the end of their time in the EYFS, our aims are that our curriculum, environment and teaching will support children to develop the following key skills:



Forest School is a great way to further develop these skills, as well as building on the Characteristics of Effective Learning from the EYFS:

- Playing and exploring.
- Active learning.
- Creating and thinking critically



Enhancing the National Curriculum

At Forest School, activities are planned carefully to consider the skills and links we want to make with children's learning and areas for development. This may be to tie in with the class' current learning journey or to consolidate prior learning in different curriculum areas. There are many links to the National Curriculum and we plan sessions to support and consolidate learning in many different areas. For example, Forest School sessions build and extend knowledge in:

LITERACY - Children will use descriptive vocabulary to describe woodland objects and plants, through sensory games. All of these sessions used speaking and listening, key literacy skills such as exciting vocabulary which then permeates all areas of learning. They will talk and share ideas about how we can help to look after the planet and our local environment.

SCIENCE – Children will make links to the specific science headings such as plants, living things, habitats and everyday materials. There are also skills that can be developed through the 'Working Scientifically' part of the curriculum, developing curiosity and knowledge of key concepts in Science through the natural environment.

MATHS - Children will use a variety of measure and practical maths skills during sessions.

ART and DT - The wider Forest Schools curriculum gives all children the opportunities to cut wood and shape it safely using a range of tools. They will, in our long term development of our sessions, learn how to use simple tools and manipulate natural materials to create new things.

PSHE - There are many links between Forest School sessions and PSHE for example we will nurture and develop a deeper bond with nature and consider the joy that it can bring us. We will also discuss the links between Forest School sessions and ourselves and our school values of respect, responsibilities and resilience. We can also make links between Forest School and caring for our planet on a local and global scale.



A Typical Forest School Session

A typical session starts off with getting wet weather suits and wellies on. This encouraged physical development and independent skills. We then walk over to the woodland area and begin our session by gathering as a group.

Frist we do an emotional check in. This helps the leaders to see how we are feeling and support us if we are not feeling our best. After this we do a main activity, usually something that links to something we are learning about at school or it might be linked to a standalone event that is happening in wider society throughout the week. After this we have a song together and share our feelings and what we have learnt. Then we come back to school and get changed.

