

Birkenhead School Forest School



What is Forest School?

Forest Schools is an innovative approach to learning utilising the natural environment to present learning opportunities and challenges. Through regular exposure to the natural environment in Forest Schools, children develop a wide range of skills, attributes and personal qualities that foster more independent, resilient and motivated learners. The acquisition of these skills and the improved self esteem gained from Forest School sessions, creates more resilient, independent and motivated learners back in the classroom.

Each session is tailored to meet the needs of the individual children taking part, ensuring that there is progression and development as each child grows in confidence, skill and understanding.

“Forest Schools is an inspirational process that offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence through hands-on learning in a woodland environment”

Forest School Association



History of Forest Schools

The concept of Forest Schools can be traced back to 1927 in Wisconsin USA, where 'School Forests' were founded. The original idea behind the programme was to promote an urgent reforestation programme. Children planted and managed tree growth as part of an educational programme, aimed at giving them an understanding of and connection with nature.

Following this model, Forest Schools was adopted in the 1950's by a number of Scandinavian countries, most notably Sweden and Denmark. With an increased focus on measurable outcomes, Forest School gained acceptance as an educational method in its own right.

Since the 1990's, the number of Forest Schools in the UK has grown immensely and vast amounts of research have proven the positive benefits children experience from a closer connection with nature, and the hands-on experience that Forest School offers.



Learning to manage risk and adventure has important cognitive benefits, not just in increasing knowledge but also in developing personality traits such as team working skills, motivation, concentration and perseverance.

Knight (2011)

Why Forest School?

There is an ever increasing amount of research that highlights the importance of children connecting with nature and the quality and depth of learning opportunities there are outside of the classroom, utilising the natural environment and resources provided by nature. The Forest Schools approach enables children to explore, investigate, seek challenges, collaborate and manage risks in an environment that fosters resilience, communication and team work.

Confidence

Children build up their emotional resilience and self esteem through tackling small achievable tasks, and working as part of a team to achieve wider goals.

Social Skills

Children communicate, collaborate, devise and share ideas in an environment away from technology and distractions.

Risk Taking

Taking and managing developmentally appropriate risks is part of the learning process in Forest Schools, and is something very few children experience in everyday life.

Concentration and Motivation

The sessions are led by the children and their interests. This approach sustains their concentration and provides motivation to succeed and achieve. These outcomes have had proven benefits back in the classroom.



Why Forest School?

Physical Skills

Children build a wide range of core muscles through climbing, building and carrying, but also improve dexterity through knot tying, threading and manipulating tools. Children gain an understanding of healthier and more active lifestyles, and take on physical challenges which many may not experience in day to day life.

Practical Skills

Tools are introduced as and when children are deemed competent and responsible and key skills are developed, linked and built upon throughout each session.

Team Work

Collaboration plays a key role in Forest School sessions and activities. Children need to work with others to meet common goals and therefore essential skills such as compromise, empathy, listening and communication are being constantly developed.

A Sense of Wonder

Children develop a respect and appreciation for the natural world around us, through the activities experienced and the ethos promoted.



Expectations & Safety

During Forest Schools, children are provided with expectations about the standard of their behaviour towards others and their environment, rather than formal rules being laid out. These expectations will be agreed by the children and re established at the beginning of each session.

The safety of all children attending the sessions is of paramount importance and therefore, each session will be led by Mr Davies, a Level 3 Qualified Forest School Practitioner. The forest school environment and all activities have been risk assessed and carefully planned to ensure there are no undue risks. However the environment and activities will allow for developmentally appropriate risks to be taken by the children. All children will be escorted to and from the site by Mr Davies after being collected from their class/form teacher. First Aid and emergency equipment will be on site at all times and adult helpers will ensure there is a low ratio of children to adults during sessions.



“Education is a natural process carried out by the child and is not acquired by listening to words but by experiences in the environment.”

Maria Montessori

Activities and a Typical Session



Every Forest School session will be different, dependent on the children accessing the site and also the season or weather, and the activities will differ accordingly. Children will change into appropriate clothing and walk to the site. Upon arrival, children will gather around the seating area and collaboratively with Mr Davies, the expectations of behaviour will be established. As is the ethos of Forest Schools, children will then be able to explore, experiment, build and create in their own time and in their own unique way, with their learning being guided and by Forest School staff. There will be activities planned by Mr Davies and the supporting team, based on careful observations of the children from previous sessions, in order to further develop skills and learning experiences. There will be opportunities for snack and story telling, and then a consolidation session about what the children feel has been successful, difficult, challenging or enjoyable.

Activities will include:



Den Building - Natural Collages - Creating Animal Habitats
Sculptures - Flora Identification - Knot Tying -
Tree Climbing - Tool Use for a Purpose

Weather and Clothing

Children will attend Forest Schools in all weather, unless it is deemed too dangerous, i.e. strong winds or storms. Therefore it is essential that children are dressed correctly and appropriately.

Warm Weather

Long sleeved t-shirt

Jogging bottoms

Wellington boots

Long socks

Sun hat

Sun cream

Cold Weather

Jumper and t-shirt

Jogging bottoms

Wellington boots

Thick socks

Waterproof trousers

Hat and gloves

Any extra layers such as fleeces, leggings, tights



Location

The Forest School sessions will take place on campus, on the piece of land in front of the Nursery, which has been thoroughly risk assessed and securely enclosed, whilst still allowing for the feeling of being in nature. The site has a variety of flora and fauna and some well established trees. The future development of the site will be managed in partnership with the children.