

Forest School Curriculum Intent, Implementation and Impact

Intent

At Edgar Stammers Primary Academy, our values are 'Ready, Respectful, Safe' and our Greenheart Learning Partnership values are 'Being, Becoming, Belonging' and as such, we have decided to expand and enhance the breadth of our curriculum by incorporating a designated Forest School curriculum which promotes these values. It is our aim that this will uphold the high standards and expectations that our school sets for its pupils and serve as a cornerstone to increasing their life skills and experiences throughout their primary school education.

The primary aims of this curriculum will be:

- To build self-esteem and confidence in children.
- To build resilient, determined and independent learners
- To develop children's personal, social and emotional development. • To develop children's and encourage creativity
- To encourage collaboration.
- To develop and build the ideas of risk management and risk benefit
- To improve children's life skills and experiences
- To enable children to gain a respect for the natural environment and wildlife.
- To transfer negative behaviours into positive ones.
- To let children be children

These aims will be covered with a variety of Forest School teachings and strategies that not only seek to aid the children in their learning, but also be provided in a positive, enjoyable, creative and inspiring manner that will allow them to transfer the skills and knowledge from the forest school lessons into the classroom and life outside of school.

During forest school sessions, we seek to encourage and inspire children through positive outdoor experiences. Children will have the opportunity to learn about the natural environment, how to handle risks and most importantly to use their own initiative to solve problems and co-operate with others. 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.

Implementation

We aim to give all children a collective insight into the ethos of Forest School. Forest School builds on a child's innate motivation and 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 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 practical activities. The children go out in almost all weathers, all year round, exploring and learning from the seasons and

environment changes. Appropriate clothing will be worn and during high winds it will be considered unsafe to go into the site. The children's interests along with the varied natural resources in our woodland are used to stimulate creative thinking, problem solving and skill development.

One of the principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. 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. 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. In order 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 endeavour to leave the area as we found it, where appropriate, when we leave. The Forest School Leader will monitor the site so that it does not become overused.

To ensure that this forest school curriculum reaches the high standards of teaching and learning that we expect at Edgar Stammers we have implemented a progressive curriculum that begins in Year 1 and continues and grows until its culmination, when children leave in Year 6. Throughout the years, children will be offered a spiral curriculum, which will enable them to revisit learning in order to build on their knowledge and skills. Each year group will be offered forest school sessions for half a term each year. This is in addition to outdoor learning children will participate in with their class teachers.

Forest school is a globally recognised teaching system that aims to meet the intent of this curriculum through holistic learning. It is through this method that we strive to provide our pupils with the widest range of skills and opportunities available to us. Due to its child led nature and focus on social development, Forest School engages children in a manner that is hard to imitate in the classroom. This creates new opportunities for learning and development that might not be accessed during regular day-to-day schooling. As we know, every child is different, as are their learning habits, something that here at Edgar Stammers we recognise, encourage and utilise.

At Edgar Stammers, we are blessed with a beautiful outdoor learning environment. It is on site that the majority of the learning will take place but it is our aim to also expand our outdoor learning into the wider community and environment to give the children a wider range of experience and allow them to become more familiar with the world surrounding them.

Impact

After the implementation of the is robust forest curriculum, children at Edgar Stammers will become more well-rounded and prepared learners and individuals. They will not only be more confident and resilient learners, they will become more caring and supportive peers due to the heavy focus the curriculum places on understanding and generating empathy. This will allow children will become more able to regulate their social, mental, emotional and spiritual health meaning the children to perform better in collaborative learning and tasks, arming them with the skills necessary to improve themselves in their schooling career and life in the wider world.

As children grow in confidence in their abilities in the outdoor environment, they 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. It encourages problem solving logical thinking and self-reflection and evaluation but most of all the pupils will see that mistakes aren't failures; they are a part of learning, that they are, ultimately, human.

The success of forest school allows the children to grow as a result of the freedom, time and space they are given in their learning. This allows them to demonstrate independence at each individual child's rate.

- 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 sensory experiences provided by Forest School helps prompt language development. Improving communication skills has a positive effect on a child's self-esteem and is a crucial part of their development.
- High levels of interest lead to high levels of attention. Spending time in the woodland is exciting for a child. It tends to fascinate them which develops a strong will to participate and concentrate over long periods of time.
- The increase in outdoor activity has a positive physical impact. Not only does the development of physical stamina improve but also gross and fine motor skills.
- Children develop an interest in the great outdoors and respect for the environment. Encouraging children to develop a relationship with the natural world will help in protecting the environment for generations to come.
- Forest School isn't just beneficial to children it is also beneficial to teachers. Observing their class in a different setting allows them to gain a new perspective and understanding of their class.
- When children really engage with Forest Schools 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 expectation for children to participate in adult led activities. Activities are provided that enhance the children practical skills, understanding of nature, teambuilding and problem-solving skills and confidence, in addition to complementing the school curriculum and topics which each year group covers in class. These activities are optional and are only heavily adult led when necessary for health and safety. Children will choose the direction of their learning whilst at forest school and 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 in order 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 will provide opportunities for curriculum links across all areas of the curriculum.
- 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:

- 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
- Physical play – tree climbing, balancing, log dragging, digging
- Construction – shelter building, rope swings, tree houses, pulleys

Planning

It is the responsibility of the Forest School Leader to organise and plan all forest school sessions. When planning, class teachers will be asked to give insight into the class as individuals and their strengths and weaknesses, in order to inform planning. Planning is flexible and child led, activities may be set aside if children take their learning in another direction. All main activities are free choice. Most children will be expected and encouraged to participate in base camp routines, which include group discussions, mindfulness activities and circle games. All activities and resources at forest school are designed to be inclusive of all children and children can build skills starting from no ability to an already competent or high skill level.

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 a number of functions,

- To give a baseline of their skills
- To identify where their next steps maybe
- To inform planning for the next session
- To learn and develop as a Forest School Leader.

In addition to general observations, a case study will be undertaken each half term, to specifically track the progress of one area of learning that the child has been identified as having some challenges in. This could be fine or gross motor skills, communication and language development or personal, social and emotional development.

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 and learnt from;
- Including and valuing the contribution of all children and adults to our understanding of equality and diversity;
- Making 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 Paediatric 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 and any accompanying adults uppermost at all times. 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 a suitable 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. The forest school leader will hold up-to-date details of any medical details, including allergies, of any children or adults coming to sessions. These details will be held and stored in accordance with GDPR compliance.

Working with Parents/Carers

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.