

Forest School and Outdoor Learning at Surrey Hills All Saints

Intent, Implementation and Impact

Intent

Learning outdoors encourages children to develop their natural curiosity and understanding of the world around them. Building love and respect for nature and its works.

The holistic approach of Forest School and outdoor learning immerses children within a unique educational experience that is inclusive of all. Opportunities to evaluate risk, problem solve, succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in our woodland environment are paramount within the curriculum that we provide.

Implementation

At Surrey Hills All Saints we provide weekly Forest School sessions for EYFS and KS1. Children engage in motivating and achievable tasks and activities, at different times of the year and in almost all weathers. Children work with tools, play, learn boundaries of behaviour; both physical and social, grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world.

Opportunities to develop outdoor learning experiences in KS2 along with Forest School experiences aim to build a strong bond and understanding of the natural world and the importance of caring for it. The experiences strengthen social and communication skills; improve the ability to work in groups effectively, work through practical problems and challenges, build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk, and generally raise self-esteem and a confidence in the children's own abilities. These foundations help to raise their academic achievements.

Planning and Resources:

Planning is linked to seasonal change throughout the year and where possible makes best use of links and themes across the whole curriculum. Activities such as Den Building, Cooking and Arts and Crafts have strong links with Science, STEM, DT and Maths but can also provide inspiration for English, Geography and Music. The opportunities to embrace the PSHE and RHE curriculum are embedded in all sessions encouraging children to build relationships, negotiate boundaries, develop the capacity to make decisions, evaluate risk, problem solve, build resilience and appreciate the mental and physical benefits of time spent outdoors being in nature to promote a sense of positive emotional wellbeing. Children also to build upon moments of awe and wonder found in Forest School sessions within the classroom where knowledge is applied to their real life experience. The ethos of Forest School ensures that sessions have a child led element which enable pupils to follow their interests thereby deepening their own learning. Wherever possible, natural resources are gathered and used. To safeguard habitats (in line with the site management plan detailed in the Forest School handbook) some natural materials are imported from other local sources. Subject specific skills and knowledge, for each learning theme are mapped out, to ensure the curriculum is sequential and builds upon previous knowledge and skills, coverage and progression.

How are lessons taught?

In EYFS, and KS1 children attend a weekly session (EYFS morning, KS1 afternoon) throughout the year. We are fortunate to have the benefit of volunteers from parents and the local community to assist with and share our sessions. This models the benefits of taking part in hobbies and community action (RHE curriculum) to promote positive relationships with trusted adults and the consequential boost to mental wellbeing.

The curriculum is designed to develop knowledge of the importance of caring for our natural world as well as progressive development of skills. This includes the evaluation and management of risk and the techniques for safe tool use.

Forest school sessions begin where the children 'knock for nature', take part in enquiry-based learning, critical thinking, skill development and end with fire circle time and reflection time.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

Outdoor learning specifically allows children to develop and build upon the 'Characteristics of Effective Learning' which are set out within the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework. The unique child learns and builds upon these characteristics through their time in school. Feedback is given and examples of; perseverance, problem solving, making links, resilience and evaluating and managing risk shared and celebrated.

Staff CPD/Development

The Surrey Hills Forest School Handbook is shared with LSA's and Volunteers. Safe tool use, firefighting techniques and woodland craft skills are modelled and shared throughout sessions. The handbook details Risk Assessments, Safeguarding, Habitat Management and The Forest School Ethos. Volunteers are DBS checked and complete an induction from SLT.

Impact

During Forest School and Outdoor Learning sessions, assessment for learning strategies are used such as questioning, feedback, peer and self-assessment. To monitor the impact of Forest School and Outdoor Learning sessions, children are interviewed from each class to gauge impact, understanding and enjoyment.

Parent comments are welcomed and regular discussion with KS1 staff for feedback on how Forest School impacts pupils' school experience and learning are embedded. Working alongside the Class Teachers in EYFS, data is submitted for Knowledge and Understanding of the World. This will flow through to KS2 as the subject is developed for older children. Pupils can make links between their hand of experiences and knowledge.

Parents and children realise that the outdoor learning and forest school offer fuels a passion for learning that transfers into the classroom which in turn improves outcomes for children.