

What is Forest Schools?

Forest Schools is a type of outdoor education in which school children visit forests or wooded areas, learning personal, social and technical skills. It has been defined as "an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence through hands-on learning in a woodland environment".

Forest schools use the woods and forests as a means to build independence and self-esteem in school-age children. Topics include the natural environment, for example the role of trees in society, the complex ecosystem supported by a wilderness, and recognition of specific plants and animals. However, the personal skills are considered highly valuable, such as teamwork and problem solving. The woodland environment may be used to learn about more abstract concepts such as mathematics and communication.

Schedules within forest schools vary, but a typical approach is to take school children to woodland areas for once a week, for perhaps 6 weeks. The duration and frequency of visits influences the degree of outcome; more time spent in forest schools brings greater benefits. Visits should ideally continue throughout the year, allowing children to experience all weathers and the changing seasons.

Forest schools are often led by the child's interests. The main goals of forest schools in primary age children include encouraging curiosity and exploration with all of the senses, empowering children in the natural environment, and encouraging spatial awareness and motor development.

Children learn about flora and fauna but gain more abstract benefits in social skills such as team-building and cooperation, project planning and recognition of each pupil's own achievements. By setting children small manageable tasks and giving praise, they are given a good foundation for future learning. With high adult:child ratios, children can safely experience activities that are often prohibited, such as climbing trees or lighting fires. The programme allows children to grow in confidence and independence and extend their abilities.



Currently, Mrs Thorneywork and Miss Rhian Jones are trained Forest Schools practitioners at Sydenham Primary School. Forest Schools sessions take place every Friday, and this year, we are delighted to be able to offer this exciting curriculum opportunity to every child in our school over the course of the year. All children are provided with smart new red waterproof trousers and jackets, so they do not need to bring in a change of clothes, but they do need wellies or old trainers.

Juliette Westwood