



Sunningdale School

Subject Overview: Outdoor Learning & Forest School

The school is ambitious in its pursuit of the best possible outcomes for its pupils. Sunningdale School is committed to providing a broad and balanced curriculum that remains wholly appropriate to the needs of each learner. A multi-tiered curriculum model is utilised so that content and pedagogy can be closely matched to the needs of pupils. This approach is arranged across 3 theoretical pedagogical pathways that begin on transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage and run through Key Stages 1 and 2 until the pupils' transition to relevant secondary provisions at the end of year 6. The pathways are the Pre-formal Pathway, the Semi-formal Explore Pathway and the Semi-formal Play Pathway.

The subjects taught within each curriculum pathway are closely matched to the developmental needs of the learners accessing that pathway, enabling them to develop the appropriate baseline level of knowledge, understanding and the skills required to access the next pathway approach or to prepare them for life beyond the school, secondary school and adulthood.

Our Outdoor Learning approach makes strong links with Preparation for Adulthood (PFA) outcomes and Outdoor Learning overtly supports these: Employment, Independent Living, Community Participation, Friendships & Relationships.

Through the curriculum area of Outdoor Learning and Forest School we aim for children to have regular opportunities to undertake learning and play in an outdoor environment. It is complementary, not separate to learning in a traditional classroom environment and is closely linked to the school's multi-tiered creative curriculum model. Outdoor learning is not timetabled or workbook-led, but driven by the learners themselves, drawing on their interests and imagination.

Through Outdoor Learning and Forest School at Sunningdale children are able to develop a lifelong love and understanding of the natural environment, whilst developing the core purposes of the Forest School ethos, namely, development of self-esteem, confidence and social skills.

Forest School Philosophy

The philosophy which underpins the Forest School idea is to encourage and inspire individuals of any age from 2½ years upwards, through mastery of small, achievable tasks in a woodland environment, to grow in confidence and independence so that they are able to develop a sense of self-worth. Children will acquire new skills as they are ready for them so that activities can maintain a degree of challenge and excitement, whilst remaining safe and controlled.

Forest School at Sunningdale seeks to increase each child's capacity to instigate, test and maintain curiosity in the world around them. Sessions will allow pupils the right to access risk and the vibrant reality of the natural world; and the right to experience a healthy range of emotions, through all the challenges of social interaction, to build a resilience that will enable continued and creative engagement with their peers and their potential

Children see natural outdoor settings as free from adult agendas and influences. This encourages unrestricted play and the right balance between challenge and discovery will help develop many different skills for life. Playing outdoors, in natural places, supports and develops a child's sense of awareness. They recognise their independence and connection with nature and the outside world.

Experience

Experience in other settings has shown Forest School to be inspirational, opinion changing and challenging (for pupils and staff members). It raises expectations and develops insights into individual learning styles and schemas. It is personally and socially uplifting so laying the foundations for other learning. Unlike other forms of outdoor education which generally concentrate on team-building, challenging activities or competitiveness, the Forest School embraces an entirely different approach through the nurturing, support and development of the self-esteem of participants.

The key skills and knowledge we want to develop in Outdoor Learning and Forest School, are:

Resilience: This relates to the ability to recover quickly from disappointment, failure, difficulties, toughness, etc.

- Skill based activities in particular require resilience. Resilience develops as children/clients try new skills and don't achieve the required result initially. As children/clients attend forest school from week to week their resilience will grow, they will learn practice makes perfect.
- A particular example I have encountered regularly is the ability to light fires, which caused people issues at all training sessions, however it was clear that resilience coupled with perseverance ensured they finally achieved.
- Working with groups of people can also require resilience as children/clients learn to cope with other people's ideas and differences. Resilience is required when solving conflicts.

Confidence: This is the ability of the children to have faith in themselves and others.

- Confidence is again built through the practice and perfection of forest school skills. You can often see shy children grow in confidence as they master a new skill, especially if they achieve it before others and can help teach the skill.
- The nature of the freedom to explore and investigate with activities allows individuals to tackle them in a way that suits them, often leading to positive results and a growth in confidence.

Independence: Is the ability of the children to work on their own free from influence of the leader. A group can also work independently without influence from others.

- The freedom for an individual to explore/investigate a task and how to solve it.
- The use of tools and skills without the lead practitioner, once a level of competence has been gained.
- The ability for an individual to decide what they want to do in the woods, start their own projects.

Creativity: This is the ability of the children to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, interpretations, etc...

- The ability to choose their own activities, allowing them to creatively use the woodland.
- Targeted open ended activities that encourage creativity, e.g. make your own woodland seat, build a house for the fairies, create some artwork using the nature around you.
- Fostering the Forest School ethos, no idea/ interpretation is a bad one, allowing people to share their work, others can learn to be creative through watching those around them and hearing their ideas

Outdoor Learning supports pupil's development and understanding of British Values.

The school promotes British Values through our spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning that permeates through the school's curriculum and supports the holistic development of the child so that they can 'be more'.

Outdoor Learning supports pupils' ability to be responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society; developing their understanding of fundamental British values; developing their understanding and respect of the outside world. It supports the development of independence and working with others.

Our Curriculum Intent: Outdoor Learning

The Outdoor Learning curriculum has been carefully designed and sequenced to provide pupils with a range of experiences and knowledge related to:

Physical Development:

- Moving activities – moving through the woods, climbing trees, balancing on logs, moving items between locations.
- Fine Motor Skills – building shelters, woodland craft, learning knots, building fires, using hand tools, cooking
- Just experiencing the woodland environment can help develop physical senses.

Emotional Development:

- Setting tasks that require perseverance and resilience through having another go. A prime example for this is lighting fires.
- Enhance calmness through not pressuring time restraints.
- Setting activities that give a sense of achievement when finished: fire lighting, building a shelter, woodland craft.

Social Development:

- Working as part of a group.
- Many woodland activities incorporate working as a group: shelter building, collecting fire wood, building woodland crafts.
- Setting groups projects/challenges.

Cognition & Learning and Communication & Interaction:

- Again working in groups: shelter building, collecting fire wood, building woodland crafts. Introduce an element of discussion to allow clients to talk about the task and the best way to complete it.
- Creative activities: making art using the natural materials around them. Give them a specific objective for the art.
- Encouraging reflection following an activity, discussing what we achieved and learnt.

Spiritual, Moral and Cultural Development :

- Playing different games and then allowing children to develop their own. Children will have to develop rules that are fair and just.
- Respect and love for the woodland. Teach how to care and protect the woodland, considering the long term impact for future generations.
- A chance for quiet meditation.

Outdoor learning provides opportunities to link to the content of other subject areas and to develop a cross-contextual understanding of concepts.

The Outdoor Learning curriculum is carefully planned to ensure concepts are taught at an appropriate developmental level to support children's understanding. Medium term plans are tailored to the needs of each class, adapting the learning areas and opportunities to the interests, needs and level of learning of the class. They consist of basic mapping of concepts, resources, activities and content link to the termly curriculum connector theme. This is actioned at a pupil level through the use of a highly personalised planning system supported by specific Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs). PLPs are used these to set very small stepped targets across a range of areas (including communication, interaction, emotional development and social skills) so that pupils make consistent progress towards their aspirational targets outlined in their Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and linked to Preparation for Adulthood outcomes.

At the earliest stages, the sequence of learning begins with simply being outside and experiencing the outdoors from a sensory perspective and beginning to undertake learning outside but adjacent to the classroom.

As Outdoor Learning becomes more developed it incorporates early phonological understanding through an experience and understanding of environmental sounds. It builds towards working in groups: shelter building, collecting fire wood, building woodland crafts. Eventually it introduces team work and discussion about the task and the best way to complete it. Over time Outdoor Learning incorporates creative activities such as making art using the natural materials around them. Finally it creates an environment for critical reflection following an activity, discussing what has been achieved and learned.

Outdoor Learning prepares pupils for future learning and transition to Key Stage 3 by developing resilience and independence. It also supports the development of independent risk assessment and understanding how to safely undertake activities that may contain elements of danger. Outdoor Learning can be used to support the learning in a number of other curriculum areas including Maths, Science, Expressive Arts and Literacy.