



NEW MILLS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Forest School & Outdoor Learning Programme of Study

Forest School and Outdoor Learning at New Mills Primary School takes place on-site in our school woodland. It is a natural environment where learners work both within, and outside of their comfort zones in activities which help them understand themselves, the natural world and how their choices and actions impact on their relationship with others. Learners in our Forest School are encouraged to assess their own boundaries and risks. Learners are encouraged to use their Forest School experiences to help them better understand their sense of self as well as their learning needs, patterns and behaviours in more formal educational settings.

Play is at the heart of Forest Schools sessions. Sessions are largely child led but often have a theme or challenge for children to take on. They are designed to encourage children to work together often outside of their comfort zone in a range of play related activities. Types of play can include:

- Rough and Tumble – with others and with nature
- Playing at height – tree climbing
- Out of Sight – away from but not disconnected from adult supervision
- Play with tools – This can be creating tools from the natural world or can be use of real-world tools such as saws and knives (adult supervised)
- Elemental play – with water, mud and activities around the campfire including food preparation.

Forest School sessions are designed to help children reach the point of 'deep play', a state where they are totally engrossed in their activity, building relationships and a sense of community with other learners. Adults in a Forest School session facilitate these activities.

National Curriculum

Forest Schools is not currently a formal part of the National Curriculum however it is widely recognised as having increasingly vital role to play in child development for both children and young people of all ages. Forest School is a child-centred inspirational learning process, that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. It is a long-term program that supports play, exploration and supported risk taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting.

Forest School has a developmental ethos shared by thousands of trained practitioners around the world, who are constantly developing their learning styles and skills to support new and imaginative learners. Its roots reach back to the open-air culture, friluftsliv, or free air life, seen as a way of life in Scandinavia where Forest School began. It arrived in the UK in 1993 and has grown from strength to strength since then.

National Curriculum link - <https://forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school/>

Intent

At New Mills Primary School, we teach Forest Schools as part of our main curriculum. This approach gives all children the chance to develop a wide range of skills which contrast with, and compliment, formal classroom learning. Forest School sessions focus on developing an inquisitive and caring attitude to the natural world and we aim to create environmentally conscious citizens for the future. Forest School activities are seasonal and encourage children to notice the changes in nature which go on around them throughout the year. Children with SEND or those who struggle to concentrate in the classroom, often excel in a Forest School setting and it is our intention to give those children the opportunity to find an environment where they can see their strengths.

Our Forest Schools offer provides children with an environment where they can experiment and collaborate without the need for any formal output. The focus for Forest Schools is on the learning process itself and through the sessions we want to help children to develop the following skills:

- Development of fine and gross motor skills
- Building self confidence
- Raising self esteem
- Development of communication and language
- Developing resilience
- Developing social skills such as leadership, decision making, sharing and empathy
- Building respect for and understanding of nature
- Becoming a problem solver
- Developing creativity and imagination
- Promote mental health
- Building a community and a sense of belonging

Implementation

Forest School sessions start with the group around the fire circle where we talk about the changes in season, share a poem and discuss the activities on offer that session. The children help to set ground rules for the sessions, and we cover safety and expectations for behaviour in this time. A session will often have a theme or an activity focus and sometimes leaders will set the children a challenge which they ask the whole group to take part in eg a den building challenge. Other activities we take part in during sessions include:

- Child led play and exploration.
- Woodland Crafts – making and using natural paints and dyes
- Tool work – saws, hammers, loppers, knives, drills etc
- Bird box and bird feeder making
- Pond dipping – identification of what they fish out. Interaction with frog spawn, understanding of life cycles.
- Whittling – to make something or as an end in itself.
- Mud Kitchen – potion making, role play.
- Team Games
- Fire lighting – the children collect wood for the fire, set it and light it under supervision.
- Campfire Cooking – Bread, pancakes, apples, popcorn. We often use produce from the edible garden in our cooking.
- Shelter building – with tarps and natural materials. We make dens for toys and each other.
- Rope play – tying knots, making swings.
- Tree climbing and slackline.
- Woodland conservation – bramble clearing, nettle clearing. Tree planting
- Nature Art – Andy Goldsworthy sessions, collage and ice art
- Storytelling round the fire circle

- Problem solving and team challenges – channelling, sticky weed fashion show.
- Theme days – Viking morning

Impact

The impact of Forest Schools on our children is evident in the attitudes and behaviour they show inside and outside of school. Some of these benefits include:

- Fewer playground arguments as the children know how to play and how to resolve arguments.
- Children are more physically resilient – they don't mind, and actively seek getting dirty and wet.
- Children are better able to make decisions independently.
- Children are confident to play out of sight and are better at resolving disputes themselves.
- Children are confident to play at height and know how to support each other in this type of play.
- Children have experience of, and are confident using tools to achieve their ideas
- Children are confident and safe around fire – they understand the consequences of not respecting the fire circle.
- Children are more open to trying new tastes and foods. They understand where food comes from and sessions enable us to have a conversation about good food choices.
- Children know how to work as a team to achieve a shared goal.
- Children build resilience through 'failure'.
- Children have a better understanding of topics through curriculum link days eg Vikings day.
- Children have a better understanding of and appreciation for the natural world, life cycles and seasonal change.