

Forest School Reflection and Review



As we come to the end of another very busy academic year, we thought it would be useful to share with you our reflections on our first year of Forest School; what we have achieved and the aims for next year.

Our first year of Forest School has been full of unknowns!! We had no idea how the Forest would grow and change through the seasons and we have seen how it stands up to snow, torrential rain, frost and high temperatures. It has been really exciting watching what grows and appears. During the winter the site was bare and we will never forget the rather alarming first session after the Christmas Holiday in January in the cold and wet when there was no sign of life! Then came the excitement of spring where new buds, leaves, flowers, plants and saplings appeared every week. We welcomed back some wildlife and new life was appearing everywhere! During the summer term we have enjoyed glorious sunny days and got to grips with all the species of trees in the woodland.

One of our main aims of Forest school is to make sure the children develop a shared sense of responsibility to maintain, protect and promote the forest school area both for themselves and others at this current point in time and for future users. In order to facilitate this, we aim to involve learners in sustainable woodland management. This must begin by developing and fostering that relationship with the woodland and this has been the overarching aim for this year. All the children have been able to observe and notice how our woodland has grown and changed but they have also seen for themselves their own impact. We have talked about what happens if we snap a branch, pick a flower or drop our litter and all the children have come face to face with their role in looking after the space.

We have reviewed our 3-year management plan for sustainable use of the forest and we are on track. A copy of the management plan is available in school if you would be interested in looking at it. This year the priorities have been maintaining the pathways, clearing and building a quiet reflection in the woodland, making a pathway into the forest around the edge of the field, controlling the nettles and continuing to rid the forest of debris as we unearth it.

We have also managed to get our allotment site up and planted and I am delighted with how it is looking. Next year we will continue to develop this site and would welcome any parental help or support with this.

In terms of finance we have been really lucky to have secured 3 Outdoor Learning Grants. The first came at the beginning of the year in the form of a Local School Nature Grant, thanks to players of the People's Postcode Lottery. This provided us with £500 worth of equipment and training for staff. After Christmas we received £1000 from the RBWM Green redeem scheme thanks to all your generosity with your recycling points. This covered the cost of purchasing water proof trousers for every child in the school. Finally, in March we received a small grant from The Ernest Cook Trust. We have used this to buy equipment and resources, which included things like tarps, ropes, twine, peelers and knives for whittling, bow saws, loppers, a fire bowl and fire equipment, outdoor first aid kit, bug pots, binoculars, magnifying glasses etc. As well as this we have had ongoing costs for things like hot chocolate, marshmallows, campfire food, disposable resources e.g. bird seed, paper plates, napkins, soap for handwashing, squash, biscuits etc.

What next?

We are hoping to begin the new academic year with a big tree planting project! We have applied for a grant from the Woodland Trust for hedge saplings. We are hoping to receive these plants in early November. These will be planted around the perimeter of the forest school site, offering natural screening for us and the surrounding neighbours as well as encouraging more wildlife. Our aim is that every child will be involved in planting a sapling. More detail will follow nearer the time.

We would also like to dredge and clear our pond area early next term. Following the success of the forest school clearance day back in January, I would like to organise a similar Saturday next term to clear and dredge the pond. If anybody out there has any experience with ponds, then please come and have a chat with me!

Strategic Usage for 2018-2019

The children have absolutely loved forest school from those in Reception to those in Year 6. We are delighted with the plans moving forward for Forest School and they will be as follows:

Wrens Class – we will be trialling having a whole forest school day every week

Robins Class – 1 half day session per week (pm)

Doves Class – 1 half day session per week (am)

Lower KS2 Classes (Nightingales and Kingfishers)– half termly blocks of 6-7 weeks approx. Each class will have 3 half termly blocks of forest school over the course of the academic year. Sessions will be half day sessions. Kingfishers will begin with forest school in September up until half term and then Nightingales will have sessions from half- term to Christmas.

Upper KS2 (Kestrels and Owls) – weekly 1 hour long sessions throughout the year.

In Reception and KS1 the focus will be on the holistic development of the whole child and it will be about fostering skills for effective learning. This will include things like building resilience, risk taking, perseverance, challenging yourself, as well learning about the woodland.

In lower KS2 we will continue to grow and develop these skills but the learning will be more curriculum focused and have session objectives related to specific curriculum areas.

In upper KS2 we are delighted to report that children in these year groups will be taking part in a research project being carried out by Royal Holloway, University of London, to investigate whether learning about nature and science in the outdoors could help to improve wellbeing, mood, educational attainment, and connection to nature. During these weekly hour long sessions children will be involved in projects designed to help them learn about the species and habitats in our outdoor environment in a fun and interactive way. More details will be sent out separately to those involved. These sessions will be run in conjunction with myself and PHD students from Royal Holloway University.

Detailed on the following page is an outline of Forest School Skills Progression so you can see what skills your child will be working on during forest school.

Timetables (green shading indicates when Forest school sessions will be taking place)

| Year | | Autumn 1 | Autumn 2 | Spring 1 | Spring 2 | Summer 1 | Summer 2 | Objective/Assessment |
|------|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--|
| KS1 | R | | | | | | | Learner: Holistic development |
| | 1 | | | | | | | |
| | 2 | | | | | | | |
| KS2 | 3 | | | | | | | Learning: Curriculum focused objectives. |
| | 4 | | | | | | | |
| | 5 | | | | | | | Biodiversity Project work (1 hour per week) |
| | 6 | | | | | | | |

| <u>Day</u> | <u>Am Session</u> | <u>Pm Session</u> |
|------------|--|--|
| Monday | | |
| Tuesday | Cheapside Pre-school | Cheapside Pre-school |
| Wednesday | Wrens Class | Wrens Class |
| Thursday | Lower KS2 (either Nightingales or Kingfishers) | Upper KS2 – (Kestrels and Owls) 1 hour session each on biodiversity project work |
| Friday | Doves Class | Robins Class |

Cheapside Forest School Skills Progression



Reception

- Introduction to rules/boundaries/format of sessions
- Promotion of independent learning opportunities/skills
- Introduction of basic real tools – peelers for whittling, hammers, mallets, trowels and forks
- Introduction of basic shelter building with support
- Safety procedures, including fire safety
- Promotion of free exploration.
- Observe and talk about fire lighting procedures, begin to contribute by selecting fuel

Year 1

- Re-enforcement of rules and boundaries
- Continuation of the use of basic tools, larger ropes and independent cutting of string
- Introduction to basic knots
- Supported construction of tripod structures on a small and large scale.
- Introduction of simple tools – peeler for whittling and 1-1 bow saw to cut disks.
- Contribute to fire lighting by gathering fuel.

Year 2

- Re-enforcement of rules and boundaries
- Continuation of the use of basic tools, larger ropes and independent cutting of string
- More sophisticated use of knots for attaching to structures, trees etc.
- Independent use of tripod structures
- Introduction of lashing and frapping techniques to make frames.
- Use of bow saw 1-1 to cut disks and peelers for whittling.
- Experience Using fire strikers to spark a flame a light a fairy pillow (cotton wool 1-1)

Key Stage 2

- Re-enforcement of rules and boundaries
- Continuation of the use of basic tools, larger ropes and independent cutting of string
- More sophisticated use of knots for attaching to structures, trees etc.
- Lashing and frapping frames and dual structures – attaching hessian using knots
- Re-enforcement of rules and boundaries
- Continuation of the use of basic tools, larger ropes and independent cutting of string
- Continued more sophisticated use of knots for attaching to structures, trees etc.
- Further extend lashing and frapping techniques on a smaller scale at an independent level

- Introduction of hack saw/loppers/secateurs/whittling using knives with appropriate support
- Continue to use fire strikers to create a spark. Prepare and Light a campfire with supervision

Finally, we would like to thank all the Parents for their overwhelming support for Forest School. Thank you for providing any resources we have asked for and for volunteering to help out with sessions. A huge thank you to those Parents who helped out on our Forest School clearing day back in January and a special mention to Ruby's Dad who has made us a fantastic sawing bench!

We would also like to say a huge thank you to Fran Miles who is our Level 2 assistant who has been helping us run sessions with some of our younger classes all year. She has been an amazing support and we love her passion and enthusiasm for forest school! Moving forward the more help we have with running the sessions the better. We would be delighted to welcome anybody who is interested in supporting Forest School to come and help out with our sessions. It might be yourself, an interested relative or maybe you know a retired member of the community that might enjoy spending an afternoon in the forest with children? Please spread the word and come and have a chat with Mrs Summers if you would be interested in helping out. All you would need is an up to date school DBS check, plenty of enthusiasm and some waterproofs!!

The website will include a gallery page for Forest School in September where we will post regular updates and photos to keep you all in touch with what is happening in the Forest. Sadly, Mrs Aplin will be moving on in September but she has promised to keep in touch and come back and visit our forest school when she can. Please feel free to come and speak to me if you would like to find out any more information on Forest School or to view our policies and procedures.

We hope you all have a fantastic summer, hopefully out and about exploring lots of wonderful places and Mrs Summers will look forward to working with your child in Forest School in September.

With thanks

Mrs Summers and Mrs Aplin