



Whitley Chapel Church of England First School

Friendship, Community, Faith

Leazes Lane, Steel, Hexham, Northumberland, NE47 0HB

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Forest School – Information for Parents

March 2024

What is Forest School?

The Forest School approach began in Scandinavia, where learning in the outdoors has been a key part of the curriculum since the 1950's. The use of a woodland environment to promote open-ended, child-driven learning activities allows children to develop independence, confidence and self-esteem. The philosophy and practice of Forest School was brought to the UK in 1995 when Bridgewater College, Somerset, became the first UK Forest School. Now many schools and settings across the UK are adopting the Forest School approach.

What are the benefits of Forest School?

Forest School is an approach which builds self-esteem and emotional intelligence, by fostering resilience, confidence, independence and creativity through use of the outdoor and woodland environment. Forest School promotes emotional intelligence and self-esteem through a range of activities and approaches. The environment is a key tool in empowering learners and giving them responsibility. Children at first observe a new skill or activity being taught, and then practice this skill with adult support or independently, as appropriate according to the level of risk. Children are also given time and space to select their own activities and guide their own play. Adults adopt a supportive and encouraging role, helping to develop confident and resilient learners who are not continually looking to adults to direct their learning.

At Forest School, children independently explore the environment within set boundaries, allowing confidence and resilience to develop. Children are given responsibility to make their own choices and guide their own learning, helping them to become creative learners.

“Start children off in the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”

Proverbs 22:6

Children develop social and teamwork skills as they share new and exciting experiences with others, including campfires and cooperative team games. Friendships develop and children help and support each other during their outdoor learning. Self-esteem is increased as all children can experience 'success' in the open-ended, child-focussed activities.

What activities take place at Forest School?

As the focus is on child-initiated learning, Forest School sessions take a number of different directions. However, some skills will be taught directly to the children, such as whittling sticks and using other tools. Forest School will usually involve lighting a fire and could involve preparing food, or using sticks to toast marshmallows or bread, for example. Hot drinks and snacks will likely be part of each session, depending on the weather and length of the session. Children may play team games, create natural art, collect natural materials and make dens and shelters. They will be encouraged to observe and explore the environment and the changes across the seasons. Children will be encouraged to care for their environment and the animals within it, for example making bird feeders. They may climb or hang from trees or use rope to create swings. The possibilities are endless and the interests of the children will guide what we do.

Although Forest School will largely involve being in our wooded area, we will sometimes take the opportunity of extended outdoor time to use other parts of our school grounds, including the Early Years playground, to play on our school field, visit the Parish play park or explore some of the area beyond the school grounds.

When will Forest School happen?

We will have Forest School approximately once a month and it will last for the whole morning, weather permitting. In cases of extreme weather, it will be cancelled and re-arranged. Parents will be informed in advance of Forest School dates, as children don't wear uniform that day. Appropriate clothing will depend on the weather, but must always include long trousers and no skirts or dresses. As we will be out all morning, it is essential that children are dressed warmly enough. We will wear the wellies and waterproofs we keep in school. In cold weather, children should come to school with thermal socks, boot liners, or other

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appropriate warm footwear for under wellies. Gloves should be brought to all Forest School sessions and hats are essential in cold weather.

What about health and safety?

Forest School involves managed risk taking and children will use tools, help to create fires and prepare food, have hot drinks, explore the natural environment with their hands, climb and swing etc. There are risks associated with these activities but children will be taught how to keep themselves safe, and adults will remain vigilant throughout the sessions. There will be clear rules and boundaries to help keep children safe. There will be appropriate adult to child ratios for higher risk activities. There are various risk assessments in place which can be found on our school website, along with other Forest School information. A Forest School first aid kit will be taken to every session and there will always be a qualified first aider on site.

Any questions?

For Early Years, please see Mr Harrison if you have any questions about Forest School.

For Class 1 and Class 2, please see Mrs Robinson.

All children will need to have been given permission to participate by a parent or carer before they can take part in Forest School sessions.

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