

Forest School at St Mary's VA school

Here at St Mary's we are lucky to have weekly Forest School sessions for Reception and Year 1 classes run by myself, Mrs McInnes (Level 3 qualified Forest School leader and Year 2 class teacher). I am passionate about children and their learning. I have seen in my 10 years as a teacher how much they enjoy learning outside and how much they gain from the experience. I have observed children of varying abilities and backgrounds thrive in the outdoor environment which allows them to take risks in a safe environment, explore in a free and independent way, use their creativity and imagination whilst also developing their communication skills and physical strength.



Forest School is shown to have gains in the following (taken from *An Evaluation of Forest School in England report by Murray and O'Brien 2006*):

Confidence

This is characterised by self-confidence and self-belief that come from the children having the freedom, time and space, to learn, grown and demonstrate independence.

Social skills

The children demonstrate an increased awareness of the consequences of their actions on other people, peers and adults, and acquired a better ability to work co-operatively with others.



Language and communication

The children develop more sophisticated uses of both written and spoken language prompted by their visual and sensory experiences at Forest School.

Motivation and concentration

This is characterised by a keenness to participate in exploratory learning and play activities as well as the ability to focus on specific tasks for extended periods of time.

Physical skills

The children develop physical stamina and their gross motor skills through free and easy movement round the Forest School site. They develop fine motor skills by making objects and structures.



Knowledge and understanding

Increased respect for the environment is developed as well as an interest in their natural surroundings. Observational improvements can be noted as the children started to identify flora and fauna.

New perspectives

The teachers and practitioners gain a new perspective and understanding of the children as they observe them in a very different setting and are able to identify their individual learning styles.

Ripple effects beyond Forest School

The children bring their experience home and more likely to ask their parents to take them outdoors at the weekend or in the school holidays. Parent's interest and attitude towards Forest School can change as they see the impact on their children.

Added to this, there are huge benefits of being outside in a natural environment:

Stress relief

Being outside in a natural environment has been shown to relieve stress by reducing the levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, in the brain. Children are increasingly assaulted by stressful environments (media, increasing emphasis on targets and testing, screen time, ever busier urban environments), being out in the woods gives them a much needed time to relax, enjoy themselves and have some stress free time.

Connection to nature

Children are increasingly being kept indoors, even before we were in the grips of a pandemic. A recent National Trust survey suggests that children are spending half the time outside that their parents did as children. As a result, they are missing out on the opportunity to get out and connect with nature on a personal level. Forest school gives them the time and opportunity to do that. Connecting with nature will allow our future generations to understand and value the natural world.



All of this is very much in line with development of pupils as a whole and wellbeing. Particularly given has undoubtedly affected wellbeing over the last year, connecting with nature has ever before. Let's not forget that environmental crisis and need to natural world and the animals and



OFSTED's current focus on the and the importance of their health the current global pandemic which children's mental and physical meaning that getting outside and become even more important than we are also in the midst of an nurture more respect for the humans that live in it. Respect for



nature and living things is at the core of the Forest school ethos as well as a large part of life at St Mary's as a whole.

