

West St Leonards Primary Academy Forest School Report

November 2019



Our children. Our families. Our community.

Registered Charity Number: 1146171

Company Number: 7852922

Patron: Baroness Stedman Scott OBE

West St Leonards Primary Academy Forest School Report

Education Futures Trust, The Firs, Elphinstone Road, Hastings.

Aims of Forest School

The aim of Forest School learning is to create affinity with the outdoors and engagement with the environment. To achieve this, the sessions run on a regular basis in the woods adjoining the school and are inspirational, stimulating and hands-on; encouraging the children to guide their own learning experiences. The sessions take into account young people's views and needs, offering enrichment and complimenting the existing curriculum.

Many of the children that attend may be receiving additional support through SEN or pupil premium. Research has shown that access to forest school sessions can be highly beneficial to children that require additional support, with sessions giving the children time and space to investigate and explore their natural surroundings; allowing their natural curiosity to lead their learning.

As well as encouraging young people to engage positively with one another, forest school also connects young people with the local landscape and allows staff to model safe and responsible use of woodland. This helps participants to see the natural environment as an asset to be used and respected and helps to reduce littering, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Benefits of Forest School

Regular and significant periods of time spent outdoors during forest school supports the development of both physical and mental health; helping children to deal with negative events in a more positive way. Encouraging the children to take part in challenging but realistic activities promotes a feeling of satisfaction and achievement. Opportunities for challenge are used to encourage the children to test themselves in a way that is freely chosen. Positive relationships and friendships are developed through the communication skills learned in group games, prompting the children to become more sociable. Outdoor learning has considerable benefits for both the individual and the wider society. Emotional intelligence is the way in which we understand and manage our own emotions and how we understand the emotions of others. Forest school learning assists in the development of this through its five main elements.

1. Self-awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to know one's own strengths, weaknesses, emotions, drives and values and understand the impact of this on others. Children can determine what they are capable of, when they require help and what their emotional triggers are. Forest School assists in this development by providing opportunities for children to take risks and challenge themselves, supporting reflective activities that encourage the children to think about their own successes and failures.

2. Self-regulation

Self-regulation is adapting to challenging circumstance through redirecting and controlling ones disruptive emotions and impulses. Self-management means being able to control outbursts and calmly discuss disagreements. Forest School can promote self-regulation in the same way as self-awareness by providing activities that challenge the children. Only when a child is exposed to a challenging situation can they learn to manage their emotions providing they feel they are in a physically and emotionally safe environment.

3. Social skills

Social skills are required to help manage relationships with others. Group members can find common ground and learn to manage working relationships. Social connections are not only with other children and the child's parents but with teachers, educators and practitioners. Children found to have better social connections are reported to do better academically and have a high level of self-confidence. Forest School supports social skills by giving children the opportunity to work in various groups and playing games that incorporate verbal and non-verbal communication supports social interactions. Resolving conflict independently is an important social skill which is supported by the outdoor environment.

4. Empathy

Empathy is the ability to read the emotions of others and consider other people's feelings, especially when making decisions. Forest School provides an environment which is inclusive of all and encourages participants to talk

to each other about how they feel. A symbol of the woods, usually a stick, is passed around the group to prompt discussion about what the children and adults felt about the day's session, what they felt they had achieved and what they felt challenged them.

5. Motivation

Motivation is having a drive to achieve something either through curiosity or the enjoyment of being productive. Children that are highly motivated will successfully motivate themselves to achieve their own goals. Forest School allows children to pursue their own interests as they are predominantly child-led, enabling children to utilise their own learning styles. The children are able to lead and take ownership of their own learning which promotes motivation.

Outdoor learning activities include

- Woodland art
- Outdoor stealth games
- Co-operative games
- Shelter creations
- Team-building exercises
- Learning basic forest school skills
- Survival skills



**'It's been fantastic, given F
an amazing confidence
boost and had a large
impact.'**

Parent May 19

Summary of outdoor learning

Providing a forest school offers a unique way of learning to the children of West St Leonards School. The children learn in a way that gives them freedom to control their own way of making sense of the world. They do this by

- working hard;
- learning self-control and discipline;
- being honest; showing respect and empathy;

- learning how to be tolerant and be respectful of one another.



'I learned how to plant a tree and
now I have to look after it.'

Pupil May 19

To accomplish this, children are offered various activities that appeal to their natural curiosity. In turn, these assist everyday learning in school.

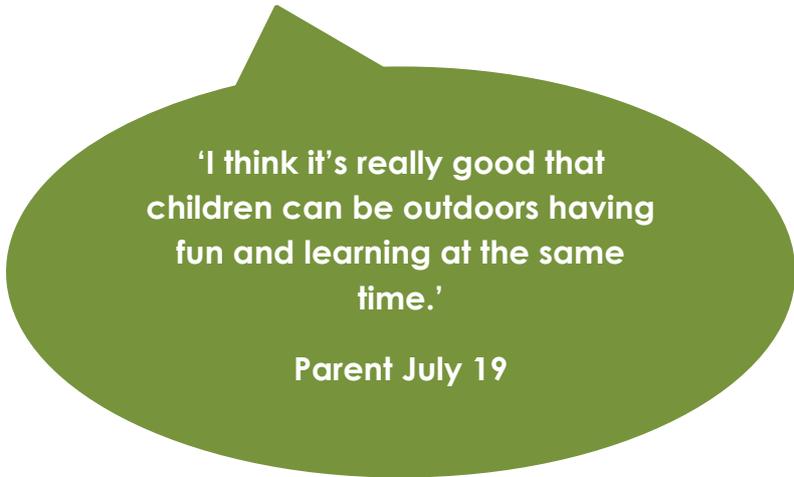
Activities such as tying up hammocks and making woodland toys using palm drills can assist in fine manipulative skills which help with writing.

Playing nature based games that encourage the children to use just one of their senses can help the children to fine tune their other skills, and can also assist in healthy physical development, boost creativity, improve attention span and promote a positive attitude towards learning.

Providing opportunities for the children to take control of their own learning can boost their confidence and encourage critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Giving the children an element of risk in their play when using tools and climbing trees, offers the children body awareness skills. It extends their motor skills, balance and co-ordination and they can learn valuable transferable skills.

Collaborative games and shelter building offers the children inspiring ways to communicate with each other, talking through different ways of making their own creations and thinking of ideas together. At the beginning of the course staff noticed that to begin with some of the children had difficulty listening and following instruction. By the end of the course the children were able to demonstrate their learning to their parents in a celebration session.



'I think it's really good that children can be outdoors having fun and learning at the same time.'

Parent July 19



Recorded results

At the beginning and end of each 10 week session the children are asked to fill in a questionnaire that asks them about their feeling towards being outdoors and how they manage their feelings in play and at school. They mark them on a scale of 1-10. Every child over each of the three groups showed an improvement in their feelings and behaviour when outdoors, and they identified this themselves.

Attendance for the course was high at over 92% and, as the sessions went on, the participants took responsibility for their own wellbeing, for example by

remembering to bring their own drinks and change of clothes independently. Staff observed that the children had improved listening skills and followed direction well when given responsibilities.

Essential skills questionnaire

The children were given questionnaires to determine their own personal progression. Feedback included:

'I keep trying when something is hard' and

'I enjoyed working in a team or group'

Outcomes showed significant improvement with scores going from a low 3 to a high 7.

80% showed an improvement in their persistence

85% showed an improvement in their confidence.

How these skills were achieved

Safety rules and boundaries were established in the first session, and revisited each week, allowing children to lead their own learning in a low-risk environment. The children were able to explore using their own senses, and developing their learning through small achievable steps. Learning was led by interest, and with a high staff ratio of 1-5, practitioners were able to 'tune into' a child's learning style and extend the available opportunities.

Data collected

Number of participants	Course completed	Did not complete	Max footfall	Actual footfall	Sickness or other reason given	No reason given
24	24	0	224	207	Holiday	0

100% of children completed the courses

92.41% of children attended all sessions

100% of children gave positive feedback about their experience.

At the end of the course:	Yes	No
Did the teaching and learning activities help you to learn??	24	0
Did they make you think differently about the subject?	24	0
Did some of them match your learning style?	24	0
Are you satisfied with what you learnt on the course?	24	0
Did your tutor talk to you about how you were doing?	24	0
Have you gained confidence in this subject as a result of the course?	24	0

Case Study

O was referred to the forest school provision by school staff, who commented that he had 'recently found it difficult to form relationships' with other children. The remit was therefore to engage O with the outdoor environment and build his social confidence in the manageable setting of a small group.

To begin with O presented as a confident individual who was excited about being outdoors. This was challenged when he was overwhelmed by tasks he struggled to understand.

Having the opportunity to control his own play and give his own explanations of tasks encouraged O to change his attitudes towards his emotions, which by the end of the course helped him to develop closer relationships with peers. This ability could be further supported to develop over time and with regular interactions with familiar participants.

O demonstrated that he has the ability to progress by self-moderating and considering the impact of his actions on others; this pro-social behaviour could have a lasting and long-term positive impact.



Parents' feedback

- 'My daughter has enjoyed her time at forest school, she looks forward to it every week. She enjoyed the muddy mountains and toasting marshmallows. She has been taught valuable skills. Great teachers!'
- 'My daughter has really enjoyed the forest school and couldn't speak highly enough of the experience.'
- 'Staff excellent, polite and cheerful, my daughter got a lot out of it. 5*!'
- 'Learning new skills within the outdoor world. Thank you.'
- 'My son has learned new skills for when we go camping. My son struggles in school and has found being outdoors exciting and enjoys being in the woods.'
- 'It's a really great experience; my daughter has really enjoyed it. She has learned a lot.'
- 'My daughter now has a good understanding of the dangers of fires. Keep up the good work.'
- 'My son has enjoyed the hands on experience of forest school and loved getting muddy and climbing trees.'



And finally...

Thank you to West St Leonards Primary Academy for its support of the forest school experience with Education Futures Trust and its ongoing commitment to the holistic development of its students. The unwavering consistency in offering this valuable experience is locally unique and highly commendable. Thank you to all of the staff who come out into the woods throughout the year in all weathers to support students.

And a huge thank you to all the children for bringing your enthusiasm, for getting muddy, having fun and enjoying being outside. Remember that nature needs us, and we need nature.

Liz Snape, Go Wild Session Leader

Carole Dixon, Chief Executive

Education Futures Trust

November 2019.