

Seekers Forest School with the support of the PTA

We have enabled 270 children from Cringleford CE VA Primary School to spend time learning in the local woodland. Each week during term time small groups of children from the Reception classes, walk to the local woodland to have Forest School sessions. Forest School is now a core part of Cringleford CE VA Primary Schools early years provision. We work in the woods to build the children's self-esteem, knowledge and respect for nature as well as supporting the development of their core learning skills (Creativity, resilience, reflection, curiosity, imagination, communication) through play. We have been delivering Forest School in the Community Woodland since October 2016 so all the children up to year 3 have had the chance to come to Forest School thanks to the fantastic ongoing support of the PTA.

Over this year, all 90 reception children will attend forest school (in groups of 10 children for 10 weeks each group experiencing the change of the seasons).

- On M's forest school days, she always came out full of beans and wanting to tell me everything she had done! It really captured M's imagination and sparked her curiosity and understanding of caring for nature and creatures.

Benefits to the children

The experience of entering the spectacular and sensory space of the community woodland is something we cannot offer on the school site.



The huge scale of the trees and the space before them really excites the children. The mature trees provide habitat for creatures large and small and when we enter the space we ask the trees permission “ can we see the secrets of the wood.”

This action though small invites the children to focus on the trees as important living things and to connect the well being of the trees to the well being of everything that lives there. It is also the first step to them forming a close relationship with the trees and noticing changes in them.

-J enjoyed tree rubbing and mud digging. Learning what the forest has to offer not just a bunch of trees.

The walk in through the woodland is often the starting point for our explorations that day – perhaps focusing on the seasonal changes they see, perhaps hunting for spider webs or using the skills of a particular creature to notice what is happening around us on that particular day or using magical ideas and stories to connect with the space.



The children see themselves as explorers and they know their observations will be valued at Forest School. We bring all our equipment in and out of the space between sessions to minimise the impact on the space for other users.

- “I enjoyed making tapping sticks. I enjoyed the week we put ribbons on our eyes so we couldn’t see! The marshmallows were fun – I think everyone will say they enjoyed marshmallows!”

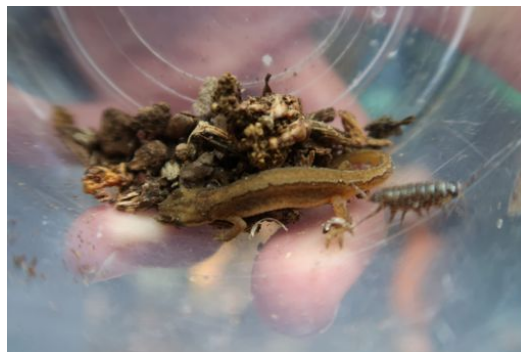


This space has no man made objects in it. This enables the children to feel connected to the details of the natural world around them.

Forest school helps the children to build a personal relationship with the space and all the living things that inhabit it.

-G has always been very reluctant to share with us what she has done at school but she was keen to talk about forest school – rope climbing, cutting wood, camp fires. We were delighted that G had this opportunity as the EYFS playground is so limited for natural experiences so G doesn't often choose to be outside at school.

We are lucky to have had many special moments, witnessing life in the woodland. We have done lots of investigations of the insects living in the space and even have found a baby Lizard on one visit.



Without man made distractions the children's observation skills expand as they learn how to use all their senses to explore the woodland and the fascinating finds they can personally make while we are there. They often find this a good space for building relationships with one another. As we visit the wood in a small group there is lots of time to play with new people, to help each other and find common ground.

- *I liked working and playing together with friends, playing hide and seek with the birds, making a shelter, using a rope bridge and using the hammers.*
- *E loved learning about the forest and playing with N! She didn't know anyone to start with so a small group was particularly valuable for her.*



What are the benefits to the children's learning of going to the woodland?

- Real physical challenges
- First hand experiences of the natural world
- Improved well being from time spent in green spaces.
- Multi sensory stimulation
- Opportunities for social development
- Opportunities for emotional development
- Space to discover and explore individual interests

-M loves facts and he really enjoyed sharing his new bug and tree info. He still plays with his flight stick. He is becoming more dextrous which is an achievement I think the use of tools has helped.

The interests of the group drive the content of the sessions and the connections they make with the space, so with each group it is different.

- We build our skills and our knowledge all through play.
- We look at things in a new way using all our senses: Laying down and looking up, digging down and feeling what is underneath us.

- We learn practical skills like tying knots to help us build shelters and make swings and bridges.
- We use tools to cut wood, to make musical instruments, sculptures, tables, insect houses, wands and decorations.
- We plant seeds and trees and care for them.
- We make pictures and sculptures with leaves and sticks.
- We learn through games and stories about the qualities and identities of the plants, animals and trees in the woodland.
- We make real discoveries, we ask big questions.
- We climb, we balance we explore, make stories and imagine.
- We develop our own memory maps of the woodland and our special places within it.

Benefits to the wider school community

- Many children talk about how they are sharing their knowledge and the experiences they are having with their families. Sometimes this is by taking their families into the woods to see the den they have made or teaching them about the important role of fungus or how to identify trees.
- All of this extended learning is vital to building the children's confidence and care for the local environment. Sharing this value with families will help the community value the local environment and wildlife too. We are incredibly lucky to have this space within walking distance of the school and it adds so many opportunities for the children.
- When some of the class are out at forest school this give the teachers time with to work in the classroom with smaller groups too.
- Teachers from across the school, know they can ask for support and advice about outdoor activities.
- We are always looking for more ways to bring forest school to more children in the School. This year the Language Group have benefited from doing Forest School too, after successful securing a Tesco carrier bag fund grant and a company donation.

Feedback and reflections on Forest School

Forest School is highly valued by the children and parents and teachers. Each year we collect feedback from the parents and children. Here are some examples of the feedback we have collected. We have also asked my parent helpers and the Teaching Assistant to share their experience of supporting children at Forest School.

-I liked the smell of the forest, it was great naming trees and making dens.

-I liked making our secret hide out and cooking my own marshmallow, and watching the fire.

-I liked looking at spiders and drinking hot chocolate. It was fun on the swing and bridge”

-I liked listening to the birds. I enjoyed the swing and making a wand and a dream catcher. -

-I liked having the campfire, having stories with puppets and a rope bridge to climb on – all of it!

Teaching Assistant feedback

Forest school is an amazing opportunity for the children to get out of the classroom and explore the world on their own terms, interacting directly with the natural environment and learning by making their own real discoveries. Things they learn are real and vivid for them and they often draw on these experiences when back in the classroom, perhaps remembering planting an acorn, or seeing the tiny new shoots of spring or the first ladybird, or digging for worms as they relate to our learning in the classroom. Even more importantly than this, forest school nurtures curiosity, confidence and communication skills, which are powerful tools for learning that then transfer back to the classroom.

It is always lovely to see how the forest schools’ approach of respect and wonder is embraced by the children and seems to foster in them a natural respect and sense of responsibility for nature and each other. New relationships between the children frequently blossom in this new setting, and it often brings out a different side to the children that they have not shown in the classroom, usually quiet or anxious children becoming chatty, and children who struggle with the classroom environment relaxing and thriving. They often carry some of their new confidence and attitudes with them back to school.

Forest school also inspires children to try different activities from those they habitually choose in the classroom. Just in the last few weeks I have been impressed by one child who rarely seeks physical challenges, really persevere with mastering the rope swing, carrying on trying until she mastered it. Another child who I don’t often observe at the craft table or participating in imaginative role-play, be so excited by moulding a hedgehog from clay and pine cones and taking care of it in the forest. Another who finds it challenging to participate in adult led learning in the classroom, really engaging with thinking about the water cycle after digging up some roots and wondering where they came from.

Forest school is an experience that stays with the children, not only throughout the time they are participating, when they will often ask - when is it forest school? , or in the case of B who tells me how many sleeps till forest school every time I see him in the

corridor, but over the years: children in Y3 still remember and talk with excitement about things they did in the forest.

Parent feedback

-Every week he had something to share, mini beasts trees, plants etc. it has increased his knowledge of nature, reduced fear of bugs/spiders and nettles.

-W has increased his confidence, self belief and problem solving skills. He has learnt to assess risks when using tools etc. it has helped develop his team working skills and independence.

-F was very excited telling all the wonderful natural things and how good she was at spotting rubbish in the woods.

- Learned to be creative with different materials, learned more about the woodland habitat, gained confidence in a smaller group setting than in the classroom.

YR parent "B gets home from school on a Tuesday (and every other day, too,) and asks 'how many more sleeps until Forest School?'"

Ongoing feed back from the parents whose children are now further up the school.

Y3 parent " my daughter still talks about things she did at forest school, it seems to really stay with them."

Y1 parent "A always asks when he will be able to do it again. He still talks about what he did at forest school."-

Y2 The campfire was a big highlight. He talks about things a forest school even now. He learnt lots of things about looking after our forest and the whole experience has been one N will remember.

Y2 parent " I wish they could do forest school again, E found her wand the other day and explained how she had made it at forest school, still so proud of what she had done."

Parent helper observations.

Rachel - I love seeing the confidence of the children grow. Seeing the shy one start to blossom and their smiles get bigger every week. It gives the children a real chance to stretch their imagination. They can make the same log into a snail to ride on, a speed boat, a tight rope, a seesaw.

When else do they get a chance to pretend to be a spider and crawl through a Web? The children are encouraged to explore, ask questions and ENJOY their time.

David- Being in a natural environment appears to spark their creativity, I feel this is because they are less inhibited.

When they find some interesting thing, be it unusual plant life like forest fungi or animal life found on the forest floor, they are always keen to share the experience of what they have found.

Tracey- Forest school offers a natural environment, fresh air and movement - in short a freedom to be naturally curious in a less planned environment. The children can steer their own learning and that of those around them.

Different children learn different things, the climbers learn how to find a safe tree to climb, those interested in using tools learn to use these safely and learn about the different materials in the space. The children learn to share, reflect (through use of the talking stick particularly), and be inquisitive. The space changes in different weathers, and sometimes clues of other visitors to the space are evident. The children are always keen to explore each fresh visit to the wood. Children find new ways to express themselves and always take pride in their achievements be they creative or overcoming a fear (e.g. of walking over the wobbly rope bridge)

We would like to finish by thanking everyone who has and continues to make this opportunity possible. We are all extremely grateful.