

OXFORDSHIRE FOREST SCHOOLS PROJECT

'The best classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky' Margaret McMillan

What is Forest School?

Forest Schools are a unique way of building independence and self-esteem in young children. They originated in Scandinavia in the 1950s and focused on teaching children about the natural world. From here the idea was brought to Bridgwater College, Somerset, in 1995 and has spread throughout the UK since.

Forest Schools started in Oxfordshire eight years ago using the outdoor environment to support children's learning across the whole curriculum. We use learning and teaching strategies which foster and develop confidence and self esteem. We find that the combination of freedom and responsibility have been particularly beneficial to children who, for whatever reason, struggle within a conventional classroom environment, or who exhibit challenging behaviour. The experience is fun, and the learning which occurs is observed and recorded in a similar way to the learning which occurs in school. The children splash about in puddles, roll in the leaves and because of the high adult /child ratios, they can safely experience types of activities that are so often considered dangerous, such as climbing trees or cooking on fires. At Headington Quarry Foundation Stage School children who go to Forest School regularly visit a marked out area of woodland in Stansfeld Field Study Centre, Quarry Road, which has been specially set aside for their group. Once children get to Forest School they are free to participate in activities suggested by staff such as mini-beast hunts, collecting found objects, as well as undertake their own exploring. The session includes time for a drink and a snack, and will end with walking back to HQFSS and a chance to share all the exciting things they did.

Outcomes for children and young people are improved after Forest School experiences:

- Personal confidence and self esteem
- Social Skills

- Motivation and concentration
- Language and communication
- Physical skills
- Knowledge, awareness and respect for the environment

Ideally children will attend Forest School sessions weekly, throughout the year, and although this isn't a specific environmental education programme, they will experience all weathers and seasons and develop a deeper understanding about the natural world along the way. Children at HQFSS are given a term of visits so that we can try to give as many children as possible the chance for this exciting experience.

Cath Tattersell is our trained Forest School Leader who takes up to 10 children on Tuesday mornings and afternoons with 2 other adults.

Please see the OCC website for more details and www.foresteducation.org