

**Forest School at Free Rangers**

***The “Free Range*” *Approach***

WHAT IS FOREST SCHOOL?

Forest School is an alternative approach to how we conceive learning and play outdoors. It is a concept originally born in Scandinavia in the 1950s, before being eventually brought to the UK and developed by practitioners from Somerset in 1993 (Bridgwater College) and has since grown to be a major part of schools, clubs and organisations across the UK as its potential has been realised, developed and expanded.

Forest School offers children opportunities to re-address how we learn and play in the outdoors, not just for those attending but also for those running Forest School sessions. For many schools, and adults as well, the idea of introducing children to tools and sharp equipment or making fires and dens would carry too much risk to be viable activity options. This is of course not the case! But in order for activities like those mentioned earlier to run, there needs to be a common sense approach to Health and Safety requirements and careful and thorough planning to be considered before a Forest School session, but this shouldn’t stop children and adults alike from being able to experience and benefit from such activities. Forest School facilitates this.

Various studies have highlighted the effectiveness of regular Forest School sessions on the social, physical, emotional and personal development of children. It has a particular role to play for those who suffer from specific physical and mental disabilities as well as children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may suffer with educational, behavioural, and learning difficulties and who perhaps struggle in the normal classroom environment. It should be delivered as an open, safe and child led allowing children to play, learn and develop not just academically, but physically, emotionally and mentally as well. ‘Problems’ become challenges the adults can help the children overcome through scaffolded learning and modelling, socialisation skills are strengthened, children develop a sense of empathy and a love of learning new things. The further benefits of attending regular Forest School sessions can be found below.

OUR AIMS & OBJECTIVES – THE “FREE RANGE” APPROACH

The Free Rangers site is set within a converted Duchy of Cornwall farm in 5 acres of mixed pasture, meadow and woodland, in which the children have exclusive access. Our Forest School utilises various areas to fulfil our aims and objectives:

* Main Nursery Garden (Burrow/Den)
* Farm House Garden (Hive)
* Forest School Paddock (Cabin, Tree House, Fort, Timber Trail and Yurt)
* Farm Yard
* Poly Tunnel and Growing Beds
* Heritage Orchard
* Conservation Pond
* Otter Brook Woodland
* Tree Plantation
* The “Green Way” (Radstock Cycle Path)

Research has been compiled supporting the multiple benefits of Forest School[[1]](#footnote-1). This is ever important for our children, who are faced with an ever-increasing sedentary & technologically based future, and a limited knowledge and confidence to explore, play and most importantly protect our great outdoors. Technology does play a small part in our day-to-day Nursery life, as we also believe children will need to be able to understand and utilise various forms of technology in order to be prepared for their later lives, but we also appreciate this will also be facilitated at home. However, we see the outdoors of greater importance during these foundational years of life.

Forest School is key to reversing this trend and can further aid in creating a sustainable awareness of the environment, on an emotional and physical level. Through regular contact and experiences, we look to provide a challenging but safe environment taking a holistic view of the child.

Forest School at Free Rangers is run twice daily throughout the Nursery giving these opportunities to all. Where possible, we tailor our sessions giving every child the opportunity to access Forest School and plan with their interests.

Our objectives for Forest School are to:

* Use our onsite environment/facilities to provide outdoor learning opportunities for our children and create positive outdoor experiences.
* To plan alongside the children to create open-ended and creative learning, supporting our children through their time at Free Rangers. The children’s interests are evaluated, documented and fed back into the planning, extending and expanding upon their play outdoors.
* Enable children to become effective lifelong learners, through deep and meaningful experiential, hands-on interactions with their immediate environment.

OUTCOMES

We achieve our aims and objectives through our well-trained, skilled and experienced Forest School practitioners.

As mentioned beforehand the list of benefits of increased outdoor time has been well documented. It is our intention that through our holistic view of the child, and through Forest School at Free Rangers, your children will develop in the following areas:

* *A boost in their self-image* – Through a challenging environment, physical risk-based activities and social play scenarios, we hope to see a child increase their confidence and self-esteem.
* *Curiosity* – a natural fascination and enthusiasm in discovering about the world around them can aid in developing learning skills and influencing lifelong learning.
* *Problem-solving skills and creativity* – all are influenced through Forest School’s broad and child-led activity base. Independence is promoted so children become more resilient and autonomous in their play and learning.
* *Self-Regulation (Risk Management)* – Children face risk independently to figure out ways to overcome or avoid them next time, with our without supervision from adults. Safer children lead to safer, longer, richer and more diverse play.
* *Socialisation/Relationship skills –* children strengthen language and listening development as many of the activities are based on, or are bolstered through, the ability to communicate with peers. As with emotional development below, the children also learn how to resolve conflict with each other, through this strengthening of communication, by reading body language/signals and verbal cues.
* *Emotional Development* – developing empathy and sympathy through our emotion coaching and relationship building skills.
* *Physical Development –* Balance, proprioceptive development (sense of space), vestibular development (inner ear), motor planning, gross and fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, stamina, strength and agility are all developed through the physical nature of Forest School sessions, by allowing the children time and space to climb, jump, roll, run and use various tools, equipment and resources.

Updated: Jan 2020

Next Review: Jan 2021

1. Bendrigg Trust - <https://www.bendrigg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/outdoor-learning-giving-evidence-revised-final-report-nov-2015-etc-v21.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)