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Bispham Drive
Junior School
Ad esse optimum

Forest School is a key part of our physical education offer at Bispham Drive Junior School. The fresh air, exercise and confidence the children gained from their sessions last year was highly valued by the children, school staff and parents alike. The following document gives you a picture of what is involved together with some key information to ensure you understand the benefits of the work they do and also that this type of outdoor education does carry an element of risk. We mitigate this using a constantly reviewed risk assessment.

Please ensure you read this information fully, if you wish for your child to not take part in our Forest School programme please contact the office.

What is Forest School?

Forest School is a child centred all-inclusive inspirational learning process that offers the opportunity for holistic growth through child led play with the aim of improving children's wellbeing, resilience, social skills, independence, self-esteem, confidence, imagination, empathy and creativity. We allow children the time and space to develop these skills alongside personal skills which are considered highly valuable, such as teamwork and problem solving. This happens through a range of hands-on learning and practical experiences as well as their own explorations. Children have access to measured risk and adults respect their rights to play and create their own learning in a natural woodland environment whilst teaching all to know, respect and value nature and its inhabitants. Forest School lays the foundation for positive learning, development, and further life skills to ensure children are emotionally equipped for their future.

What things will my child do?

In Forest School we have circle time where we review our day so far and perhaps talk about our feelings, observe the weather and any changes or reflect on what we enjoyed doing or what we learned during our last session. Children then have access to experiences if they wish to, these may be based on season, jobs for woodland management or a development from a current interest. We also play games at Forest School, we use these to support teamwork and problem solving, often letting the children run the games and discuss the rules with each other once they understand the basics. Games are sometimes also used to help reiterate the rules and boundaries of Forest School with the children.

Near the end of each session we have a reflection time where we encourage the children to reflect on the things they have seen, learned, enjoyed etc. We explore

different ways to reflect with the children. Sometimes we talk in a group, sometimes we have a quick thumbs up thumbs down and other times we use creative exploration for the children to think about their reflection.

At Forest School we will sometimes have fires. We talk about fire safety every time we have a fire and the children are always reminded of the fire circle rules.

Opportunities for the children to work towards building a small fire may be available, when the children display respect and knowledge of fire rules and safety. The children will get the chance to use a flint to make a spark, and then once they are confident, they will be able to make a very small fire (this is done one to one), slowly building to helping the leader create a fire for a little snack or drink, or else to share our reflection time around. Children will learn the correct positions to use when building fires, respect for the environment and how to use fires appropriately with regard to nature, weather and each other.

The children will access a range of tools at Forest School including vegetable peelers, hammers, screw drivers, small saws, an auger (hand drill), nails and screws. These can be used in creating things with objects they have found or for woodland management. These tools are not one to one but are supervised carefully with limited children able to access the tool area at any one time. We will then in time introduce our other tools slowly, these include a bow saw, loppers, a bill hook and a sheath knife. These tools are used with safety gloves and are one to one with the Forest School lead to begin with and close supervision thereafter. With each of these tools comes a tool talk, children will have the opportunity to develop their confidence and skill with each tool and can work towards using them independently or with a friend. This will be monitored by the Forest School lead and children will only be able to access this experience when demonstrating care, knowledge of the tool talk and respect for the tool and the rule.

We review the tool rules with the children at the beginning of each session and with the larger tools, before each use.

Why is healthy risk taking important?

Risky play can be defined as a thrilling and exciting activity that involves a risk of physical injury, and play that provides opportunities for challenge, testing limits, exploring boundaries and learning about injury risk (Sandseter (2007; Little & Wyver, 2008).Feb 25, 2015)

Risky play helps to develop important life skills such as;

- Building resilience and persistence
- Balance and coordination
- Awareness of the capabilities and limits of their own bodies
- The ability to assess and make judgements about risk
- Handling tools safely and with purpose
- Understanding consequence to action
- Confidence and independence
- Resourcefulness
- Creativity and inventiveness
- Curiosity and wonder

- Problem solving

The 'wild' and yet controlled, safe environment of Forest School ensures that children taking part naturally learn to assess risk and are encouraged to make sensible and informed decisions about how to deal with unfamiliar and unpredictable situations (such as exploring or climbing trees, using tools to build shelters and dens). Much of the learning for a child comes as a result of the opportunities they have for testing their own abilities in a real-life context.

We at Bispham are excited about and believe that introducing this Forest School program will be an integral part of our Drive curriculum. Forest School embodies our key principles of instilling motivation and enthusiasm for learning and will support in our Drive to help the children see themselves as determined to better themselves and the world, building resilience in life, thinking innovatively, showing empathy, understanding cultures and beliefs and valuing each other's viewpoints and ideas.

What will your child need and what do we need from you?

We go out in all weathers except high winds and storms – it is very rare your child will not spend their session in the outdoor areas, which means we need to be prepared for this. We have a recommended kit list for you to supply for your child on their session day to ensure they are well equipped to explore all weathers.

This also means we need from you the understanding that clothes and children may become extremely muddy! There may be times when clothes become ripped or get holes in them and accidents during play at Forest School may happen. You can help by making sure your child is suitably dressed (covering legs and arms is safest).

Forest School kit list

General

Towel – so your child can get dry and clean before changing if they have become very wet and muddy.

Long sleeves and long trousers – even in warmer weather light long sleeved and legged clothing if possible.

Coat and waterproof trousers/all in one splash suit.

Warm weather

Sun hats.

Sun cream – please apply at home in the morning if your child struggles to apply it on their own.

Old shoes suitable for climbing and running (no sandals or flip flops).

Cold weather

Lots of warm layers – thermal under layers will help to stay warm.

Wellies and Welly socks, or walking boots.

Waterproofs – trousers and coats or all in one coveralls.

Hat, gloves and scarf.

These are just suggestions, you can provide your own alternatives as long as they are safe and adequate for outdoor physical play and activities. We also ask that children have a warm, dry set of clothes to change into after their Forest School session.

In fact a change of clothes is advisable to send each day your child has Forest School, in case it rains and we get very wet – remember this can happen any time of year!

Please note that if your child does not have their change of clothes with them and it is a very wet day, they will not be able to join in with that Forest School session.

Forest School sessions are held outdoors wherever possible, though we will have an indoor space we can access when the weather means we cannot be outside due to safety. This does mean the children may be exposed to bites and stings, scratches, nettle stings etc.

Please make us aware of ANY allergies or medications including food, skin and inhalers.

We have a risk assessment in place which weighs the benefits to children's development of having access to the resources and environment against any risk posed by them. This is reviewed termly to ensure everyone's safety.

Please ensure you have read this information fully as this is what we assume. If you wish for your child not to take part in our Forest School programme, or a specific part of it, please contact the office. No contact from you means you consent fully to their participation.