

Why do we do Forest School at Millfields?

At Millfields we invest a lot of time and money into our Forest School. We do this as we believe that Forest School has a far-reaching impact on our children.

There has been much research into the impact of Forest school on children's health and mental well-being. Wellbeing in children promotes their resilience and confidence. Physical and psychological health are critical components that enhance coping capability and self confidence in children as well as in adults. It is therefore important for us, as a school, to put appropriate measures and policies that promote wellbeing, to ensure that children acquire self-confidence and resilience.

Our Forest School aims to:

- Build self-esteem, resilience, confidence, independence, motivation to learn whilst always maintaining a safe environment.
- Promote awareness, respect and care for other individuals and for the natural environment.
- Reinforce collaborative behaviour.
- Develop awareness of acceptable behaviour and responsible behaviour in an outdoor environment.
- Develop in children a pride in their achievements.
- Enhance the children's physical health and mental well-being

Tiplady, L. (2018) in her research paper "Impacting on young people's emotional wellbeing through Forest School: The Breeze Project, pilot year", found that there was evidence of young people developing their social relationships and skills whilst at Forest School and of these skills being transferred back into the classroom. She found that where young people have difficulties with behaviour, Forest School appears to be an environment in which they are able to manage their behaviour more successfully.

The Derbyshire Public Health Prevention Fund 2016 – 2018 Forest School Project Final Report November 2018 found that of the under 8 year old Forest School programme participants, who were measured using the Leuven Scale, 83% showed a positive increase in well-being and 85% showed a positive increase in involvement at Forest School sessions compared to a regular classroom or school session.

The report shows that Forest School provides an opportunity to deliver on all five of the Government's Five Ways to Well Being:

- connect • be active • take notice • keep learning • give

Connecting - with the natural world and each other

Being active - in the outdoors regularly and repeatedly in a different way

Noticing - each other, the changing seasons, our own growth and development, the natural world

Learning - about each other and the natural world, learning new skills

Giving – time and attention to each other as well as giving something back to the natural spaces used through caring, planting, managing and understanding them.

T. Maynard 'Forest schools in Great Britain: an initial exploration' found that learners in Forest Schools are able to discover themselves and the environment surrounding them in a better way than those in classroom setting. For instance, children can experiment with a wide variety of activities and natural objects while outdoors without the fear of being criticised for being noisy or untidy. In addition he found that free movement in children enables them to develop better control of their bodies, especially in relation to the development of more refined motor control. This skill is required to handle delicate movements such as manipulating a pencil while writing, staying calm and being attentive for longer periods.

S. Blackwell in her paper "Impacts of Long Term Forest School Programmes on Children's Resilience, Confidence and Wellbeing" found that long-term Forest School programmes have positive impacts on the children's resilience, confidence and wellbeing.

Resilience: Long term Forest School programmes enhanced resilience in children by providing self-directed learning opportunities, where children participate in making their own decisions and engaging in activities which they enjoy and those within their capabilities.

Confidence: Long term forest programmes improved the confidence of the participating children. Children with high self-confidence are characterised by willingness to take calculated risks and try new things

Wellbeing: Wellbeing arises from an interplay of carefully designed activities and curriculum that focuses on holistic development of the child. Research has demonstrated that playing in the outdoors is essential for physical development of the child and offers ideal physical exercises that help in reducing obesity, promoting development of a strong body and also enhancing physical agility. Interaction with green space and a wide range of fauna and flora have been found to enhance psychological health.

Different research studies have demonstrated that learning in the outdoors has positive impacts on the health of learners. The notable health benefits include lowering of blood pressure, stress and cholesterol levels.

Learners in Forest Schools are able to discover themselves and the environment surrounding them in a better way than those in classroom setting. For instance, children can experiment with a wide variety of activities and natural objects while outdoors without the fear of being criticised for being noisy or untidy. The outdoor environment provides children with adequate space for moving around freely. Free

movement in children is the most natural and crucial method used by children to learn. Free movement also contributes positively to development of critical physical attributes such as stamina, agility, psycho-motor coordination and muscle strength. It enables children to develop better control of their bodies, especially in relation to the development of more refined motor control. This skill is required to handle delicate movements such as manipulating a pencil while writing, staying calm and being attentive for longer periods.

Children have a natural inclination to taking risks and an eagerness to learn how to deal with various hazards, which are important life skills. In our Forest School setting children are able to undertake calculated risks in a carefully supervised way.

The children at Millfields look forward to their forest school sessions. A large proportion of the children who leave Millfields at Year 4, when asked what they have enjoyed most during their time with us, cite Forest School.

All children from Reception to Year 4 attend Forest School weekly, for a whole morning or afternoon. This happens in all but extreme weather. Many of them enjoy the freedom of being allowed to get wet and muddy. They wear waterproofs and wellies and change in our purpose-built Forest School changing room. The children in our pre-school also experience Forest School on a regular basis. Our Forest School staff are highly trained and are committed to giving the children rewarding and enjoyable experiences.

The drivers which underlie our curriculum are “Ambition and Opportunity,” we believe that the Forest School experience aligns well with this and helps to give our children experiences which they may otherwise never have.

We believe that all of the above are very good reasons for investing in and enabling children to experience Forest School at Millfields.