

Why do we teach forest school?

Forest school is an outdoor educational programme and intervention that focuses on giving pupils opportunities to learn and develop in natural spaces. The learning process is built upon practical active learning, and pupils explore the wonders of nature through a hands-on approach. Forest school can help to develop a love of the outdoors alongside a lifelong appreciation of the natural world.

ACE Schools place high importance on holistic development at forest school and pupils benefit from participation in many ways through the curriculum offer. Examples include the learning of traditional forest school/outdoors skills such as fire lighting, foraging, knot tying etc. Furthermore, pupils learn life skills such as cooking and first aid. Forest school is also fantastic in ensuring both EHCP and Pupil Profile strategies and targets are met. Pupils with SEMH needs, communication and interaction needs, and physical and sensory needs can all benefit from their time at forest school and as a result, the experience allows them to flourish in other parts of their education.

Intent

At forest school, we endeavour to develop a range of skills such as spiritual, intellectual, physical and communication. The delivery of the forest school curriculum is broad and ambitious. Staff adopt a relational approach, are aspirational in relation to achievable goals and learners who attend make good progress. Positive experiences ensure that pupils can associate forest school with optimistic thoughts, feelings, and emotions and the aim is that they replicate this in other parts of their education. The Ace Schools Three Strand Curriculum ensures that staff who support forest school to offer specialist support, guide learning and development and prepare pupils for next steps.

Implementation

Skills progression

Pupils participate in an outdoor skills progression framework known as the wild passport which covers five outdoor skills areas: Tools and woodwork, Shelters, Fire, Rope, and Nature. There are 25 different learning objectives in each skill category that students can master, across 5 different levels of ability: beginner, advanced beginner, intermediate, proficient, and expert.

Interpersonal skills – Pupils are set up to succeed and achieve early on. Feelings of positivity are fostered, and students will experience this with their peers and members of staff. Progress is tracked and easily identifiable. Forest school requires socialisation and interactions through all aspects of the provision which requires pupils to learn and demonstrate qualities such as patience, sharing, confidence, teamwork, leadership etc.

Staffing – The provision is run by a Forest School Teacher and Forest School Leader, both level 3 forest school qualified. Students who attend can also attend with a learning mentor to help facilitate a more specific and individualised approach for them. Lead forest school staff empower support staff to help their pupils get the most out of the provision.

Impact

Pupils finish their forest school placement feeling more positive and motivated about other educational provisions they are a part of. The activities on offer ensure that:

- Pupils develop a deeper love of learning and have more confidence in themselves.
- Pupils enjoy the outdoors more and become more likely to engage in outdoor clubs and activities outside of school hours.
- EHCP and Pupil Profile targets are met and students with SEND achieve best possible outcomes.
- Pupils can navigate through personal relationships with more ease, being able to form, build and maintain positive relationships with others.
- Pupils are equipped with important life skills, outdoor skills, and transferrable skills.
- Pupils have greater levels of resilience and can work better in teams.
- Pupils experience how forest school links with other aspects of the national curriculum and can use this information to apply that knowledge better.