

MVFS Forest School Curriculum

Intent

At MVFS, we understand that regular opportunities to be outdoors and explore the natural environment are essential in order to maintain physical and mental wellbeing, and to shape well-rounded and creative individuals. Forest School fosters a holistic child-focused (and, at times, child-led) approach to learning, whereby children are actively encouraged and supported to gauge and take safe risks to further their own knowledge, understanding and skills.

Forest School offers exploration, play and choice; which are essential elements in the learning process and vital to healthy development and wellbeing. The practical experiences offered in Forest School help children to build the confidence to explore and discover their surroundings at their own pace. This encourages a sense of positive autonomy and helps to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural world. Forest School also facilitates inspiring opportunities for problem-solving, team-building and self-discovery – lifelong skills which are transferable to the classroom and beyond.

We want our children to become lifelong learners, and to have no limits to their ambitions and aspirations. We want them to feel empowered by their knowledge, and to grow up believing that they can adapt and succeed in any environment.

Our Key Aims: At MVFS, we strive to...

- inspire a deep interest and curiosity about the natural world which continuously drives our children to want to find out and understand more
- encourage respect for all living things, and instil a sense of responsibility in our children as custodians of our fragile planet and its finite resources
- empower our children by helping them to build independence, confidence, self-esteem, resilience and determination; along with skills of planning, collaboration and compromise
- support exploration and introduce the idea of positive risk management and risk benefit
- provide exciting hands-on experiences that encourage questioning and discussion, and make learning meaningful and memorable
- engineer and facilitate opportunities that challenge our children's pre-conceived ideas about the world (and their place in it) – stimulating a sense of wonder and excitement, and a thirst for knowledge



Implementation

At MVFS we have devised a bespoke curriculum which is carefully sequenced and interconnected; and which enables our children to develop their knowledge and understanding as they move through our school. As with all areas of our curriculum, it is important to remember that all of our children have significant gaps in their learning due to the experiences that have brought them to MVFS – indeed; all of our children have not been able to access the full curriculum for at least a year before joining us. As explained in our Curriculum Policy, this means that many of our children are working at a level below their chronological age whilst we support them to re-engage with education and enjoy high levels of interest and success; which, in turn, helps them to rebuild their self-esteem and start to value their own social and academic achievements.

Our beautiful rural location (including our farm, mature woodland and stream) provides the ideal setting for outdoor learning, and Forest School is an integral part of our school curriculum. Sessions are implemented in line with the Forest School ethos and the belief that children should develop a strong relationship with nature by responding and reacting to what is happening around them. This means that, whilst carefully sequenced sessions are thoroughly planned and scheduled, sessions will naturally evolve to follow the children's interest and enquiry. The extensive knowledge of our Forest School Leader also means that sessions can embrace spontaneous events (i.e. a sudden hailstorm or the appearance of a new species) and use these moments to impart knowledge and inspire awe and wonder in the natural world.

We hold true to the adage that *'there's no such things as bad weather, only the wrong type of clothing'*. Every class has at least two hours of Forest School each week – all year round, whatever the weather. [To ensure that we meet our children's comfort requirements and sensory needs, we ensure that they have suitable outdoor clothing for each season.] This enables our children to have firsthand experience of each season, and to share in the joys (and challenges) that they present. Each term, the children explore five key themes in our forest: Nature Arts and Crafts, Tools and Construction, Fire and Cooking, Teamwork and Navigation and Nature and Living Things.

Within each of these themes, the children take part in initial sessions, planned and delivered by our Forest School Leader, before engaging in follow-up sessions which are more child-led. The initial sessions introduce the children to new knowledge, skills and vocabulary through practical demonstrations and modelling, and make connections with prior learning and experiences. The role of the follow-up sessions is to encourage the children to think *'What if... ?'*, to explore, test and embed their new knowledge and skills, and develop their own lines of interest and enquiry to inspire further learning.



Our progression map shows how these themes develop as our children move through the school; and, where relevant, progression statements reflect those in our Natural World or Expressive Arts and Design curriculum. Unlike many other areas of our curriculum, Forest School does not follow a two year cycle. Instead, we use a spiral approach, whereby our children revisit the key themes throughout their journey with us, each time with increasing complexity, depth and challenge.

As well as exploring our five key themes, the children also take part in enrichment visits each term to other local sites of natural beauty or interest (such as Burbage Common, Bradgate Park and Rutland Water). This enables them to compare and contrast different environments and habitats, and to also develop an appreciation of the majesty of nature in their local surroundings.

NB: Please note that, whilst our progression map outlines our scheduled progression for using tools, tools will only ever be used when children are physically, emotionally and mentally ready to do so.

Impact

Through our bespoke approach and quality first teaching, we will see the impact of this subject in different ways. Our children will be engaged in Forest School sessions and will be excited to find out more. They will be able to talk about and demonstrate the knowledge, skills and vocabulary that they have acquired; and will show increasing levels of confidence, enquiry, flexibility, independence, creativity and precision when exploring and working.

Evidence collected will show that a range of topics are being covered, and that our carefully sequenced and inter-connected approach to learning is enabling our children to develop a solid base of skills to help them explore, understand and appreciate the world.

Ultimately, our children will be empowered by their growing knowledge to explore and discuss the world; and they will appreciate how they can have a positive impact upon it.

