

Forest School at Westfield



Intent

'Forest School is an inspirational process that offers learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.' Forest School England

At Westfield, Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners. In doing so, the programme develops the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of our pupils.

In particular, for pupils at Westfield, the Forest School programme aims to develop:

- **Communication skills** - supporting pupils to use language effectively to communicate their ideas, reasoning and conclusions
- **Social skills** such as negotiation and resolution, recognising others' needs and wants.
- **Independence skills** such as self organisation, self-regulation, making choices and identifying risks.
- **Enquiry skills** supporting pupils to generate, classify, sequence, reason, plan & evaluate.
- **Working memory** supporting pupils to manipulate information, skills and knowledge from memory to complete a goal.
- **Attention Control** – identify relevant information and hold it in mind to achieve a goal.
- **Inhibitory Control** – use their 'stop buttons' to maintain their attention and take part in activities successfully

For pupils at Westfield, the Forest School programme aims to support the **Specialist Social and Emotional curriculum** focusing on developing each child's ability to recognise and respond to the emotions in self and others, recognising causes and consequences of emotions and behaviours and planning and using effective strategies and behaviours to self-regulate.



Implementation

At Westfield, pupils attend Forest School on site weekly in all seasons and weather conditions. Our Forest School programme is not only messy, exciting and fun for our pupils but greatly enhances their progress in terms of their communication, interaction, social skills and much more.

A beech avenue leads to the purpose-built site.....a world of adventure! The 100m/30m site includes orchards of apple, pear, plum and cherry, willow tunnels, a digging pit, a mud kitchen, mounds, a fire-pit, a bog garden, a balance area with sawn tree trunks and boulders, a den area, a tree house, a sensory den, a rope-swing/hammock area, bark and mown trails, wildlife areas, animal habitats and plants chosen to attract insects and butterflies and for sensory interest.

The Forest School ethos encourages child-led learning through play. We feel choice increases enjoyment, participation and motivation. Children are set up to achieve: the natural environment provides stimulus for all senses, areas of development and learning styles.

Regular activities enjoyed by pupils include digging, rope swings, physical challenges, mud-sliding, balancing, nature ID/sketching, natural artwork, wildlife protection, cooking on the fire, role-play, den/shelter building, sensory exploration and 'cooking' in the mud kitchen.

Forest School helps children to discover new talents and abilities, learn new skills, take supported risks, solve problems, experience the benefits of team-work, resolve issues and value each other's contributions.

Pupils at Westfield find transitioning between activities and spaces anxiety-inducing, so having Forest School on site reinforces the idea that it is another learning space within the school that is predictable and safe to them, with consistency of expectations. Keeping Forest School on site also means that it can be an integral part of the Westfield curriculum and somewhere learning is generalised from and to.



Impact

Impact is measured through observation, record keeping, tracking and target setting.

This programme and our purpose-built on-site wild area is having a huge impact on our pupils. We regularly observe pupils more relaxed, using more language, interacting in prosocial ways, taking risks, solving problems independently, challenging themselves physically and having fun.

