



Banchory-Devenick School

A Practice Statement for:

Outdoor Learning in the Forest



Rationale

At Banchory-Devenick School, we are proud to have learning in the forest as part of our identity as we firmly believe in the benefits that this brings to our learners by enriching their experiences and promoting Health and Wellbeing. The forest provides an ideal environment in which to nurture holistic development (physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and spiritual) and to foster a relationship with nature, adults and peers.

Research tells us that spending time in the outdoors has a direct, positive impact on health. Connecting with nature helps to ground us and can have a calming or restorative effect on our emotional wellbeing.

Our school values can be practised in full during activities in the forest. We are teaching **Respect, Kindness** and **Responsibility** for, and to, the environment with activities which promote **Teamwork** and **Resilience**.



As with all areas of education at Banchory-Devenick School, we work within the Scottish **Curriculum for Excellence** to develop learners in the four Capacities of **Confident Individuals, Successful Learners, Effective Communicators** and **Responsible Citizens**. We believe our regular visits to the forest contribute greatly to their development.

- **Confident Individuals**

The evidence...

An evaluation of three Forest School programmes (Murray & O'Brien, 2005) noted that positive outcomes included greater self-confidence and self-belief, as well as a better ability to work cooperatively with others.

(Robb, Marina '5 Surprising Facts About Outdoor Learning Every Teacher Should Know')

The forest environment and forest school activities also provide opportunities for exposure to risk and to engagement in risky play. Research and evidence tell us that the benefits of risky play is huge. Benefits such as providing a chance to succeed or fail, cope with stress, not become risk averse, recognise boundaries, improve creativity, talk about experiences, feel thrilled, have fun, make decisions are just a few. However, the way society is today, children's opportunities for this type of play have greatly reduced. The activities which we can provide in the forest give us the chance to fill that gap.

- **Successful Learners**

Teaching and learning in the forest and outdoors allows for a break from traditional learning styles, intensive reading & writing, screens etc and provides the ideal environment for active, visual and kinaesthetic learning styles. Learners get the opportunity to explore, discover and engage in a variety of different ways.

Children who experience school grounds with diverse natural settings are more physically active, more aware of nutrition, more civil to one another, and more creative. (Bell et al., 2006)

We believe that learning is not so much about the mere consumption of knowledge, but more about developing thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, creativity, analysing, evaluating and social skills which prepare pupils for life beyond the classroom.

Forest School activities also lend themselves well to teaching an 'invisible curriculum' where learning occurs naturally with skills such as fine and gross motor, social skills, teamwork, problem solving being developed. The forest environment is a fantastic resource to support the teaching of curricular areas particularly Social Studies, Sciences, Health & Wellbeing, Technologies and Expressive Arts.

- **Effective Communicators**

The nature of activities and the style of learning in the outdoors relies heavily on co-operation and teamwork, which in turn gives pupils the opportunity to develop their communication skills. Opportunities for free play allows for the further development of social skills with peers.

The rich environment around us gives way to conversations which can challenge thinking and enrich vocabulary.

- **Responsible Citizens**

Pupils spending time in an outdoor environment will foster an affinity and appreciation of their local area and the wider environment. It is through this that they will gain knowledge and understanding of the impact (positive and negative) that humans can have on the environment around them.



THE GLOBAL GOALS

The Global Goals are a plan agreed by all world leaders to build a greener, fairer, better world by 2030, and we all have a role in achieving them.

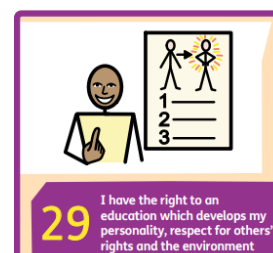
The type of education we can provide in the forest and outdoors, will directly contribute to the development of these Global Goals, and in particular:



We believe that when the pupils connect with the outside environment and form a positive relationship with it, not only will they reap the rewards of good mental health, they will also take responsible action to look after that resource.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

As a **Gold** Rights Respecting School, time in the outdoors enables us to meet articles 29 and 31 in particular. We believe, taking learning out of the classroom and involving pupils in planning activities naturally leads to developing an individual personality, their respect for one another and for the environment, both local and beyond.





Being a school in a rural area, we are aware that opportunities for children to play together regularly can be challenging due to the spread of houses across the community.

Guidelines for Teaching and Learning in the Forest

General

Staff should defer to our Forest School Risk Assessments to ensure the safety of pupils. Specific Risk Assessments have been created for key activities such as Fires & Cooking, Using Tools, Ropework etc. When assessing risks, it is important to understand that we are not trying to remove all risk, rather weigh up the benefits of the activity versus the risk and put into place as many measures to reduce risk as possible. This mindset is supported by the Health and Safety Executive in their high-level statement, 'Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach'. Dynamic Risk Assessments should also be conducted by staff leading the activities on the day taking into account weather, group needs and staff ratios.

Sense Meditation

As a Mindsafe school, we recognise the importance of mindfulness on our well-being. Sessions usually begin with an exercise which helps to tune everyone into their surroundings and become fully present. Similar to our Mindfulness sessions, we are giving permission to take a moment, breathe and take everything in. The group will be guided to pay attention to their senses (hearing, taste, smell, sight, touch) as well as their emotions. It can also be a time to reflect on gratitude.



Lessons

While we understand traditional Forest School practice to be very free-flow, nature and environment focussed and about teaching specific skills such as bushcraft, as an educational establishment with a busy curriculum to cover, we have chosen to adopt a hybrid approach.

We see Forest Learning as an opportunity for our teachers and learners to get creative in how they do things, therefore we believe that this should not simply be taking what and how we teach something in the classroom and moving it outdoors. Where possible, the environment should play a key role in the lessons planned. Lessons will most often include activities which can best be learned by being in the outdoors such activities relating to weather, seasons, nature & the environment. Certain Contexts for Learning such as The Place I Live, John Muir, Rainforests lend themselves well to being tackled in the forest.

With more classroom-based Contexts for Learning, it is also appropriate to utilise the outdoor environment for learning in other areas such as Maths or Literacy since being in the outdoors provides many health benefits.

Built into all of this is the addition of experiences which are considered more 'Forest School' style and these will include:



- Working with fire
- Using tools
- Cooking on the campfire
- Foraging
- Shelter Building
- Ropework

Free Play

Opportunities for free play are an important part of Forest School. When children play, they are making sense of the world. It is a way of learning which is engaging, motivating and challenging because it starts from where the child is at and where their interests lie.

Planning

Teachers will conduct a cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review to link each session. Planning should also be reactive and flexible to take into account the weather, pupil interests, safety, the environment and any opportunities for learning which pop up. It is entirely appropriate to retrospectively plan.

Assessment

Assessment is an ongoing process. The teacher's main tool for assessment in Forest Learning is through observation. Pupils can be assessed in any appropriate curricular area and are not assessed specifically on Forest Learning.

Policy Created:

January 2024