

“Time in nature is not leisure time; it’s an essential investment in our children’s health.” – Richard Louv

Intent

At St Thomas à Becket C of E Primary School, our Forest School provision reflects our core Christian values of friendship, respect, perseverance, truth, forgiveness and thankfulness, and supports our overarching mission to give every child *“roots to grow, wings to fly.”* It is designed to nurture the whole child – spiritually, emotionally, socially, physically and cognitively – through regular, meaningful engagement with the natural environment.

We believe that every child is entitled to a rich outdoor learning experience where they can explore, take measured risks, make choices, and discover their strengths and interests. Forest School at our school:

- Promotes wellbeing by supporting positive mental health, resilience, confidence and a sense of belonging through hands-on learning in the outdoors.
- Enriches learning and continuous provision, linking naturally with our wider curriculum and offering opportunities for cross-curricular exploration, problem-solving and enquiry-based experiences.
- Fosters stewardship of God’s creation, encouraging curiosity about the local environment, respect for wildlife and natural resources, and an intrinsic motivation to care for the world around us.
- Strengthens community and social skills, as children work collaboratively, communicate effectively and support one another in shared tasks and challenges.
- Supports attendance and engagement, recognising that joyful, purposeful learning in nature encourages positive attitudes to school and promotes regular participation.
- Underpins wellbeing and personal development, providing an environment where risk-taking is appropriate and supported, allowing children to grow in confidence and self-awareness.

Our intent is that every child will attend Forest School on a weekly basis, ensuring continuity of experience, progression of skills and sustained impact on wellbeing, resilience and lifelong learning dispositions.

Implementation

At St Thomas à Becket, Forest School is delivered through weekly sessions throughout the year, carefully planned for each pupil and closely linked to the curriculum learning taking place in the classroom. Our trained practitioners, who are also class teachers, lead these sessions to ensure depth, breadth, and richness of learning, bridging classroom knowledge with practical, hands-on experiences in the outdoors. Planning is flexible, allowing sessions to respond to children's interests and unexpected learning opportunities, with many activities incorporating child-led elements to promote curiosity, problem-solving, creativity, and independent thinking.

Forest School fosters both collaboration and independence: children learn to work together through sharing tools, play, and group challenges, while also appreciating when tasks require concentration and reflection alone. Reflection is an integral part of every session, supporting children to consolidate their learning, build resilience, and persevere through practical challenges such as den building or tool-based tasks. Respect and responsibility are central values, with children learning to care for themselves, each other, and the environment from the earliest stages.

A high ratio of adults to pupils ensures that practical skills—including sawing, rope tying, and fire lighting—are taught safely and effectively, while trained staff adopt a “hands-off” approach to allow children the freedom to explore independently in a secure setting. Forest School provides rich sensory experiences that promote language development, communication skills, and self-esteem, and it offers valuable opportunities for staff and pupils to strengthen relationships through shared activities and informal interactions.

Tasks are structured to be small, achievable, and appropriately challenging, ensuring that all children can access learning, develop confidence, and feel pride in their accomplishments. This practical, outdoor approach often benefits pupils who find classroom-based learning more difficult, boosting engagement, motivation, and behaviour, with positive effects that transfer back into the classroom. Learning is purposeful, but sessions remain fun, playful, and exploratory, maintaining high levels of attention, curiosity, and participation.

A detailed progression document from Pre-School to Year 6 guides planning, outlining learning in areas such as rules, safety awareness, tool use, fire lighting, food preparation, knots, flora and fauna knowledge, and DT/Art skills. Physical activities, including climbing, balancing, and moving materials, develop both gross and fine motor skills, while exposure to fresh air and active learning promotes overall health and wellbeing. Quiet, reflective areas in the school grounds support contemplation, mindfulness, and spiritual development, helping pupils recognise and manage their own needs.

Forest School encourages a deep connection with nature, enabling pupils to observe seasonal changes, explore local wildlife, and develop an enduring appreciation for the natural world. Spontaneous discoveries, such as fungi or insects, often spark the greatest engagement and extend learning beyond planned activities. The benefits of Forest School extend beyond the children: staff gain insight into pupil dynamics, and pupils frequently share their experiences with family and friends, inspiring families to engage in outdoor activities and fostering a lifelong love of learning in nature.

Knowledge and Skills – Forest School Specific

	N/R/1 class		2/3 class		4/5/6 class		
	EY	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Rules and Safety Awareness	1,2,3, Base Camp Fire pit rules No pick, no lick Boundaries Water rules How to carry a stick Dogs, cows, vehicles Dangerous branches Weather considerations Water Stranger danger		How high to climb Tool rules Fire rules for use of steels Climbing Tools Fire – drop and roll How to get out of mud		Extended fire rules for lighting own fires Environmental impact Basic first aid – recovery position, CPR, slings and bandaging, Increased fire consideration		
Substantive Knowledge	- Identify basic features of the natural world: trees, plants, leaves, insects. - Recognise seasonal changes and weather patterns. - Understand the importance of caring for living things and the environment. - Begin developing social awareness and empathy. - Use natural materials for simple art and imaginative play. - Experience outdoor activities in all weathers and reflect on feelings.		- Identify common plants, trees, and animals in the school environment. - Observe habitats and understand basic ecological relationships. - Understand human impact on the environment and the importance of stewardship. - Recognise the value of collaboration, resilience, and perseverance. - Experience changes in seasons and develop deeper observation skills. - Apply creativity in constructing and designing outdoor projects.		- Identify a wide range of plants, trees, insects, and wildlife. - Understand ecosystems, biodiversity, and human environmental impact. - Lead environmental projects such as planting, habitat creation, or litter clearing. - Understand how outdoor learning develops wellbeing, resilience, confidence, and self-regulation. - Experience and appreciate seasonal cycles, natural processes, and spontaneous discoveries. - Recognise the importance of reflection and mindfulness in outdoor learning.		

Disciplinary Skills	- Use age-appropriate tools safely (spades, trowels, brushes). - Build simple dens or shelters with support. - Gross motor: climbing, balancing, running, jumping. - Fine motor: threading, weaving, tying simple knots. - Share, take turns, and work collaboratively. - Reflect on learning experiences and recognise when to work independently.	- Use simple tools with increasing independence (hammers, knives with supervision, saws). - Construct more complex dens or shelters. - Begin safe fire lighting with guidance. - Gross motor: climbing on uneven surfaces, lifting heavier objects. - Fine motor: tying knots, weaving, threading, precise tool use. - Plan and execute small collaborative projects. - Solve problems creatively and reflect on successes/challenges. - Negotiate, collaborate, and share responsibilities in a group.	- Safely use a wide range of tools independently with oversight (saws, knives, hammers, fire lighting). - Plan, construct, and evaluate complex shelters, dens, and outdoor structures. - Cook simple foods outdoors and manage small projects. - Gross motor: complex climbing, balancing, lifting, and coordinated physical tasks. - Fine motor: precise use of tools and materials for design and craft. - Lead group activities and support younger peers. - Solve complex problems collaboratively. - Independently assess personal performance, wellbeing, and risk. - Demonstrate resilience, perseverance, and leadership in challenges.
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Wider Curriculum Substantive Knowledge

Forest School at St Thomas à Becket C of E Primary School plays a significant role in enriching, reinforcing and extending learning across the wider curriculum. The links identified between Forest School and individual subject areas are not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive, nor do they replace high-quality classroom teaching. Instead, they illustrate the many authentic opportunities Forest School provides to deepen understanding, embed skills, and apply learning in meaningful, real-world contexts.

Forest School offers children the chance to revisit and consolidate substantive knowledge—such as scientific concepts, geographical understanding, language development, and creative techniques—through practical, hands-on experiences that make learning memorable and purposeful. At the same time, it develops transferable disciplinary skills including problem-solving, collaboration, communication, observation, reflection, and resilience, all of which support success across subjects.

Learning in the outdoor environment naturally supports cross-curricular connections, allowing pupils to make links between subjects and apply their knowledge in different contexts. For example, mathematical skills are reinforced through measuring, counting and data collection; literacy is strengthened through rich vocabulary, discussion and writing opportunities; scientific enquiry is brought to life through direct observation and investigation; and personal development is enhanced through teamwork, leadership and self-regulation.

Ultimately, Forest School is a high-quality, purposeful use of curriculum time, supporting the whole child and complementing the school's wider curriculum intent. Through flexible, child-centred planning and professional judgement, Forest School enables staff to respond to pupils' needs and interests while reinforcing core learning, values and skills that underpin lifelong learning.

	N/R/1 class		2/3 class		4/5/6 class		
	EY	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Art and Design	Use natural materials (leaves, bark, flowers) to create texture rubbings, observational sketches; explore colour and pattern in nature.		Explore natural forms and patterns for mixed-media work; create environmental sculptures; experiment with natural dyes.		Develop landscape sketching and observational studies; design and create larger site-specific artworks; reflect on artistic choices inspired by the environment.		
Computing	Record observational drawings or photos of nature on tablets; collect simple data (e.g. leaf types).		Use digital tools to document findings; create simple presentations of Forest School investigations.		Analyse environmental data (weather, wildlife counts); use apps for species ID and mapping skills.		

Design and Technology	Design and make simple natural craft (e.g. leaf crowns, twig structures).	Plan and build simple shelters and tools; evaluate effectiveness of constructions.	Apply design thinking to real outdoor problems (shelter design, camp tools); test and refine prototypes; reflect on materials and purpose
English	Use Forest School stories and sensory experiences to inspire vocabulary and oral storytelling; label natural items.	Write descriptive poetry, nature journals, instructional texts (e.g. how to build a shelter).	Plan, draft and edit longer narratives and reports based on outdoor investigations; use precise subject-specific vocabulary.
French	Learn simple phrases to describe nature (e.g. colours, weather).	Describe Forest School activities and natural features in another language; simple dialogues outdoors.	Conduct field interviews or surveys using language skills (e.g. asking peers about their favourite outdoor activity).
Geography	Explore local natural features; use simple positional language; observe weather and seasons	Develop map-making skills; study local ecosystems and human-environment interaction	Undertake fieldwork to collect geographical data; compare physical features of different sites; use orienteering and GIS links
History	Explore changes in the natural landscape and compare past and present environments; seasonal cycles as a timeline.	Investigate the history of local land use and natural resources; link to human activity over time.	Research local historical sites/environments; combine Forest School observations with historical enquiries
Maths	Count natural objects; explore shapes and patterns in nature; measure lengths of sticks.	Collect environmental data (temperatures, leaf sizes), graph and interpret it; use simple scales and maps.	Apply statistics to biodiversity counts; use geometry and measurement in construction projects; map coordinates and distance measures
Music	Use natural sounds for rhythm and sound exploration; simple outdoor sound walks.	Compose nature-inspired sound patterns; explore found sounds (sticks, stones).	Create site-specific compositions and perform collaboratively; explore dynamics and texture using environmental acoustics
PE and Physical Development	Balance, climb, jump and explore uneven terrain; gross motor control via natural obstacle courses.	Develop strength, coordination and stamina; orienteering and team challenges.	Lead active exploration tasks and collaborative physical challenges; refined motor skills through tool use and site navigation
PSHE	Build confidence, self-awareness and friendships through cooperative play outdoors.	Develop resilience by tackling practical tasks; consider wellbeing and emotional responses in nature.	Reflect on wellbeing strategies; build leadership, empathy and teamwork skills in outdoor contexts

FOREST SCHOOL CURRICULUM PROGRESSION



RE	Reflect on awe, wonder and stewardship of creation; connect to thankfulness themes in Christian ethos	Explore spiritual connections to nature in Christian and other faith traditions; reflect on moral responsibilities to care for the world	Deepen theological reflection on stewardship, creation care, community and service through practical/environmental action
Science	Investigate living things, plants and animals; record simple observations.	Conduct field investigations (habitats, plant life cycles, weather); practise observation, classification and recording	Plan and conduct extended scientific enquiries outdoors; analyse data collected from field studies (biodiversity, seasonal change).

