

Forest School visit, Fleet Primary School

8 July 2024

Teacher: Rebecca Coombes

Governor: Kim Issroff

Introduction

Rebecca provided me with extensive written information about the Forest School provision at Fleet. She is clearly very proud of what is provided for the children and is very engaged in and enjoys this aspect of her job.

She explained that Forest School gives the children the opportunity to engage with the natural world and to develop positive relationships with nature.

It gives them the opportunity to learn away from the structured environment of the classroom. Rebecca described a range of benefits including building self-esteem, resilience, and problem solving, cooperation and communication skills. The children can engage with their environment on their own terms and decide themselves how to spend their time. It gives them extended time to explore and play and they are able to take risks and access activities at their own pace and level. In all the sessions children have free choice. There are the added health benefits of being outdoors and some children excel in ways that might not be apparent in the classroom.

Ideally classes are in the outdoor area for 6 weeks and there is a clear curriculum skills progression map which shows development through the key stages.

There are two trained leaders in the school and last year Nursery and Reception had two terms of Forest School. In the last few years, all year groups have had sessions. No child is excluded from sessions and children with SEND are supported as all class staff attend.

Each session has the same structure started at Base Camp with mindfulness, rules and safety reminders and demonstrations of new activities and skills. The children then have free play/exploration/activities followed by an end session with games, music and singing as well as a reflection about the session (and biscuits).

The provision is well resourced with an initial grant, funding from the school and the PTA. Rebecca has made some of the resources and Art Club is developing a living moss wall. Families respond well to requests for donations of natural resources like conkers and acorns.

The sessions take place in autumn and summer and in winter the ground repairs and rejuvenates itself.

I observed a Year 2 session. The children were all happy and relaxed outside. They engaged in all the Basecamp activities and clearly knew what to expect. They were very aware of the health and safety and other rules.

I saw many children trying out different activities and using tools sensibly. They were clearly thriving in the environment and able to manage their own play and learning. There were (too?) many adults working with the class and some of the Tas were clearly supporting individual children in a constructive way. However, this was not true of all the adults and some were more interested in developing their own skills than supporting the children.

Some children worked in small groups while others were happier to explore and create on their own. All the children I talked to loved Forest School particularly making things. One little boy was very focused on catching and observing centipedes. I was impressed by the way in which he persevered and remained calm as he chased the little insects. He was able to tell me a lot about centipedes!

With many thanks to Rebecca for all her preparation for my visit and for allowing me in to this very special part of her job and answering all my questions.