

Forest School at Houghton Conquest Lower School

Our Vision:

All pupils leave school nature connected and with the learning behaviours, knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to equip them for an open-air culture, friluftsliv, or free air life, seen as a way of life in Scandinavia where Forest School began.

Our Aims:

Community – A non-judgmental community rooted in Forest School philosophy where we can express our true nature and belong. A place to celebrate nature and support each other.

Connection – Creating opportunities to connect with nature rather than just having contact with it. Sharing ideas for nature connection and personal reflection. Inspiring individuals to create their own path to knowledge and enjoyment of nature. Nature can provide a place of solace and freedom from stress.

Learner Centred – Forest School is a child-centred inspirational learning process that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. It is a long-term program that supports play, exploration and supported risk taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting.

Risk – To provide a safe and non-threatening environment in which children can take risks, make choices and initiate their own 'whole body' learning.

Process Structure:

Long term and regular

Children gather in the same small groups every year to spend 2 hours every week for 6 weeks at our forest school site on the school grounds. Over their years at HCLS they will experience different seasons and weather so they cover the full range of seasons in this natural wooded setting.

Time

Children develop a skill at their own pace and interest level. They are given 'Wild Passports' to record their progression in bushcraft skills that are jam packed with links to the curriculum. Over their years at HCLS they develop through the levels as they are motivated to, this remains their choice.

Same groups

Children are put into carefully chosen groups of no more than 15 with their peers and appropriate adults to support them. These groups remain the same (as much as possible) through their years at HCLS so that they can build on these relationships.

Choice theory and play

Children have different interests and are free to choose whatever they are intrinsically motivated to do.

Review

Leaders make observations over time to adapt sessions to suit individual learners. Children have the opportunity to review what they have learnt and what their next steps are with their Wild Passport bushcraft task booklets.

Principles of Forest school:

1. A long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.

2. Takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

3. Aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

4. Offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

5. Run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

6. Uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

What learning looks like:

- It is non-judgemental. In place of rewards and sanctions leaders use gratitude and non-violent communication.
- It strives to set learners up to succeed. Many rules and boundaries are communicated and introduced through play. We expect learners to test the boundaries for themselves. Learners will take different timescales on this but it is critical to build the right community dynamic of self-regulation. This self-regulation gives power to the learner and with power comes confidence.
- It offers an inclusive and holistic learning environment catering for social, physical, intellectual, communicative, emotional and spiritual development.
- There is a clear focus on experiential education where non-academic learners can shine.
- It offers the opportunity for children to take supported risks. It is risk aware not risk averse. Children develop independence, perseverance, understanding and resilience through risky play.
- It has learner led outcomes, aims and objectives. It does not follow a curriculum but is jam packed with national curriculum links and value as reflected in the 'Wild Passport' scheme.
- Children look forward to Forest school and feel a sense of freedom and solace there.
- Leaders are listening, observing and reflecting with the minimum of intervention. Leaders are 'guides on the side' rather than 'sages on the stage'.
- Leaders ask questions designed to encourage children to discover answers for themselves in order to build confidence.
- Children have the chance through their learning experience to grow into someone new.
- Outdoor, imaginative play creates practical situations which lead to actual discovery and verbal reasoning. This encourages more resilient thinking.
- It offers the benefits of 'getting out of your comfort zone' in order for individuals to learn how to look after themselves outdoors in all weathers.