



Bushbats

Forest School

Education in the Outdoors

What is a Forest School?

“A Forest School is an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults regular opportunities to achieve, and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a local woodland.”

FEI Forest School Leaders Pack – Wales, 2004

“Children are set small, manageable tasks at which they are unlikely to fail, and are given genuine praise, and so develop a good foundation for future learning. The idea is that they discover independence, grow in confidence and discover their abilities without fear of criticism or failure.”

The Western Mail, 11 April 2003

As the above quotations indicate, a Forest School is more a ‘concept’ than a ‘place’, though obviously the Forest School Activities will need a location in which to take place. This actual location may vary greatly depending on the local resources available.

We at Bushbats Forest School subscribe fully to the above philosophy, describing our activities as ‘Education in the Outdoors’ and regarding the outdoors as our ‘classroom’.

Forest Schools are now developing in many areas of the UK. The Forest Education Initiative (details below) supports the development of local Forest School settings through its network of local cluster groups, bringing together interested parties from the environmental and educational sectors.

Forest Education Initiative (FEI) spans Great Britain and benefits from the expertise and resources of its seven partners: British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), Field Studies Council, Forestry Commission, Groundwork, Timber Trade Federation (Forests Forever), The Tree Council and The Woodland Trust. More information is available at the FEI website: www.foresteducation.org.

Bushbats Forest School

Bushbats Forest School operates in The Crawley/Gatwick area of West Sussex, and its teachers/leaders are members of the local 'Surrey and Sussex FEI Cluster Group'.

In accordance with FEI criteria for Forest Schools, Bushbats Forest School:

- is sited in local woodland settings, thereby creating links with the learner's local community.
- is led by CRB-checked staff trained in or training for Forest School qualifications (BTEC) and holding appropriate first aid qualifications.
- provides comprehensive risk assessments for every forest school site used and activities undertaken.
- carries out on-going ecological impact assessment of the woodland sites used for forest school activities.
- holds an up-to-date Health and Safety manual including guidelines on child protection, emergency procedures, risk assessment and equipment.
- has a commitment to external reviews and sharing best practice within the FEI cluster group and network.

The Curriculum programmes offered fall within Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 and are tailored to suit the identified and assessed needs of the group concerned. All programmes are planned and delivered or supervised by highly qualified teachers with wide experience of special educational needs, of teaching in mainstream and special schools/units and of the requirements of the National Curriculum. Programmes can be short-term, or take place regularly over an extended period, for example once a week for an academic year.

The activities through which the curriculum is delivered are tailored to the age/experience and individual needs of the group concerned and are based on elements of natural crafts, wood/bush crafts, art and drama, storytelling, outdoor cooking, natural history, games and teamwork, environmental studies and countryside lore. As such they are unlike traditional 'outdoor pursuits' where there is generally a sport/physical education emphasis. An important aspect of the activities is to enable pupils to acquire age/experience appropriate skills including keeping safe in the outdoor environment, using hand tools for crafts and the safe use of fire. All activities take place at ground level (for example, no climbing in trees) and safety equipment (for example gloves or eye protection) is used as appropriate and indicated in risk assessments. Pupil group sizes are small to ensure good individualised teaching and supervision, with a minimum staff/pupil ratio of 1 to 6 but frequently higher (for example, 1 to 4) and at least two staff per group however small.

Bushbats Forest School is jointly run by its three principals:
Tina Hutchinson BSc (Hons), PGCE, PGDAES (Special Educational Needs),
Mary Peach BEd (Hons), Dawn Callow BA (Hons); all three are trained Forest School leaders.