

Intent of Outdoor Learning & Forest School

“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.” Fred Rogers.

“Play is the highest form of research.” Albert Einstein.



‘Scientists have recently determined that it takes approximately 400 repetitions to create a new synapse in the brain, unless it is done in PLAY, in which case, it only takes 10-20 repetitions.’

Dr. Karyn Purvis

At Medeshamstede Academy, we view outdoor learning through play as a vehicle for high quality first teaching and learning which involves:

- building nerve connections in the brain
- the development of motor skills
- language development
- ‘scientific thinking’ and problem solving
- mindful activities which are beneficial for all children
- enjoyment and health
- social skills and building relationships with others
- independence and self-esteem
- the ability to learn and create

Thoughtfully planned and well-structured outdoor activities are delivered to meet pupil's needs enhancing our provision within the areas of:

- sensory and physical development
- social, emotional and mental health
- cognition and learning
- communication and interaction

Early Developmental stages of play

Sensori - motor	Experiencing the world through senses and actions, eg: touching, mouthing, exploring with all senses.
Solitary play	Child will play on their own in an environment full of others, however may choose to play an activity on their own.
Spectator play	Child will observe other children playing.
Parallel play	Children play next to each other but will not share the same activity.
Associate play	Children will be playing the same game or activity but will not be working together or making connections with peers
Cooperative play	Children learn to play with their peers. They start to use social skills and interact with their friends.

Themed Play

Theme of play	Developmental purpose of play activity
Pre-formal stage: All 7 areas of the EYFS framework are represented.	The 'outdoor classroom' reflects children's developmental stages through continuous provision of activities linked to the 7 EYFS areas of learning. There is a balance of adult-led and child-initiated learning. Continuous provision includes an outdoor sensory circuit.
Investigation (sensory exploration and fine motor development)	A hands on investigation station arranged with objects as an 'invitation to learn' through an element of discovery. Pupils engage through fascination, sensory exploration and scientific enquiry (eg: natural resources, floating/sinking, magnets, magnifying glasses, shells, twigs, objects frozen in ice blocks, etc). Adults offer thought provoking questions such as how does it smell, feel, does it make a sound, what do you notice, etc.
Small world (interactive play developing communication and language)	Small world play creates a life scene using miniature items (eg: farm, fire truck and people, street scene, train, etc). The goal is for the child to act out ideas from real life experiences or re-enact stories they know in developing understanding of the world and communication and language skills.
Role play (imaginative and pretend play)	Involves open-ended and ever-evolving narratives core to child development for creativity, communication, physical development, problem solving and confidence. Allows children to rehearse and make sense of real life roles and scenarios or take on fictional characters (eg: dressing up, pretend café, shop, police station, etc.).
Gross motor games that follow rules for play	Creates opportunity for physically immersive play to develop sensory perception, language, turn taking, rules, fairness and motor skills. (eg: circle games/traditional playground games/ bat and ball/skipping games).

Physical development

(gross motor planning skills using wheeled/ride on toys)

Pupils learn balance and core stability important for later application to writing activities. Develops proprioception and vestibular senses, how to negotiate space and movements of others, developing sensory processing skills in order to make sense of and organise own physical responses.

How adults support outdoor learning

Our staff ensure they:

- engage and interact with pupils through modelling and role-play
- visual choice boards of activities to play and visual schedules of 'now and next'
- use play as an opportunity to model the critical language of 'Zones of Regulation' and 'Think Social' as our social thinking and self-regulation curriculums
- Support children who may encounter conflict or difference of opinions/ideas to resolve this amicably
- organise and facilitate planned and well-resourced activities
- follow the possible lines of development and ideas of pupils as play unfolds
- maintain equipment and resources so that they are fit for purpose
- teach pupils to put away and tidy up resources at the end of an activity
- are able to support play to meet the developmental needs of all pupils
- embed our shared values through play
- reward pupils for positive play behaviour such as sharing, inclusion, problem solving, good manners and being helpful.
- allow children appropriate 'downtime' through relaxation and the opportunity for a child not to be involved in play if this is their choice



Adults respect that play is an opportunity for children to lead their own learning and to apply critical skills. Adults involve themselves sensitively in children's play, allowing children scope for their own ideas and creativity; following possible lines of development in order to scaffold the play as it unfolds. Adults model, observe, ask open ended questions and appropriately engage children in applying thinking and problem-solving skills aligned to their stages of development and allow a calculated element of risk in play.



Continuous Provision for outdoor play

- Sand and water play
- Investigation station
- Small world play
- Role play and dressing up
- Circle games
- Traditional playground games (e.g: What's the Time Mr Wolf?)
- Parachute games
- Wheeled toys eg: hobby bikes, scooter boards, push/pull toys
- Chasing and tag games
- Large construction toys
- Trampolines
- Outdoor sensory circuits
- Relay games
- Skipping games (French skipping)
- Ball games
- Bat and ball games
- Target games
- Kites, streamers, hoops, quoites, etc.
- Mud kitchen

- Role play themes and pretend play (e.g: garden centre/shop role play)

Forest School

Forest School is outdoor, nature-based learning that focuses on the holistic development of the child. Rather than being adult-led, each child chooses and tailors the activity to suit them, while adults observe their preferences and development.

Forest School can take place in any natural outdoor environment and helps children develop many skills that are hard to teach in the classroom. It is physical so it encourages children to be active, with lots of activities to develop both fine and gross motor skills.

Our intent for Forest School at Medeshamstede Academy is to support children to learn to be self-sufficient and develop independence, which boosts their confidence and self-esteem. Through trial and error they learn to deal with failure and develop the resilience to keep trying: a vital skill in the classroom as well as outside. Resilience is a core value at Medeshamstede.



Forest school connects to many areas of the National Curriculum. For example, being outdoors year-round helps children learn about weather and the seasons, which are part of the programme of study in geography, studying mini beasts and plant life relates to the science curriculum, and working on tasks like den building and woodwork links with design and technology.



Research has shown that children benefit from being outdoors and this improves mental and spiritual health, communication skills and social relationships. Connecting with nature helps children feel part of the world and is calming.

Because forest school learning is child-centred, the scope of the activities that can take place is vast. Typical activities include:

- Sensory walks
- Foraging
- Shelter building
- Mini beast hunts
- Tree climbing
- Campfire cooking
- Woodwork
- Nature art
- Games like Hide and Seek
- Fire building and lighting
- Puddle and mud jumping