

Woodland Wonders

As you are all aware, Covid19 has meant that families and therefore children of all ages have had their life on pause for six months and have missed a whole term of learning. Even though we were supporting learning at home, not all families engaged and the curriculum was officially on hold until September.

Covid19 Recovery

We planned for settling our children back into school life and we thought that we might have lots of children suffering from separation anxiety. Due to the careful SEMH forward planning and well thought out provision, all of our children have come back to school amazingly, including our new starters who had the choice to walk or slide into school.

Since starting back at the beginning of September, we have been observing our children and identifying the areas we need to focus on in order to ensure all of our children thrive. The focus areas we are already identifying range from life and learning skills, such as being able to follow a sequence of instructions and increasing personal attention spans, through to phonic development or reading, writing and mathematics core skills. We have been able to return to a full curriculum for all of our children and we want this to continue because we know that a broad and balanced curriculum is important for our children.



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As a team, we have been planning for how we can best support our children so that we can take everybody on from where they are. We believe that all of our teachers are the experts on what the children need and we also believe that through Quality First Teaching (QFT) in small groups the children will benefit greatly. However, we also know that we have to plan for continuing to develop the children's social, emotional and mental health (SEMH), along with the important life and learning skills.

Therefore, after half term we will be starting our 'Woodland Wonders' programme, beginning with Year Two and then moving on to Year One later in the year. This means that every week, all children in Year Two will get one afternoon in our woodland area with our Learning Mentor and two teaching assistants focusing on SEMH development; developing a deep connection with nature; along with improving their life and learning skills. They will go into the woods in groups of 15, leaving 15 children back in the classroom where the teacher and a teaching assistant will be able to work tightly with the remainder of the children on identified focused teaching. The children will be grouped fluidly so that all of the needs are met in all of the focus areas.

We are really excited about our new adventure in learning, especially as there have been studies into the impact a deep connection with nature has on brain development and mental health. One such study, focused on 50 geniuses looking for what they had in common. The overriding factor was their connection with the outdoors and nature by the age of 11 years.

On a practical level, we will be providing all of the children with waterproof trousers and raincoats for their time in the woods, but everyone in Year Two must have their wellies in school all of the time so that they can go into the woods at any point during the week. They also always need to have a warm coat in school that they can wear under their raincoat, along with a warm hat and gloves. The children will go into the woods in all weathers, unless high winds make it dangerous, in which case their session will take place in our Learning Mentor's room otherwise known as 'The Nest'. We are setting up two large bell tents that will be used during the session as shelter.

The team have been voluntarily spending the last couple of Saturdays in our woodland area and have cleared it of brambles and have created much more space.



Catch Up Money

The government have allocated £80.00 per child from Reception through to Year Eleven (so for us £80.00 x 170 children on roll - Reception to Year Two) and so we will be funded the total of £13600.00 and this will come down to us in two payments. Unlike most other per pupil funding we do not need to spend this money across all children, we have flexibility to spend it where we feel the need is. Having spoken with the team, we feel that our Reception children will not have the same gaps in learning that the children in Year One and Two. We believe that our EYFS curriculum will more than cater for the children's SEMH needs and then we are only just starting our school learning journey with them and so will as always take them from where they are. We are however, ensuring that our Reception and Nursery children also get time in the woods during the last half of the summer term, so that they also benefit from being in the wild.

We have baselined all of our children during the first half term so that we have a sense of where our children are at during this early stage and then we can also chart progression and our value added as we collect more data at our regular data drops.

This catch up money will cover the cost of three members of staff dedicated to the project from half term until the end of the academic year. It will also cover planning time needed for this to be set up properly, both class teacher and woodland wonders team time. We of course also incur set up costs as we need to expand our resources for this project to be successful and all weather.