



St Anthony's Catholic Primary School

An Academy within The Catholic Academy Trust in South Hampshire

'Children in our heart, Christ at the centre'
'We love, we learn and we live'



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Headteacher	Katrina Straker
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Outdoor Learning Policy



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**'Children in our heart, Christ at the centre'
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The St Anthony's mission statement is 'Children in our heart, Christ at the centre. We love, we learn and we live.' To live out this mission, we are guided and led by our Catholic ethos that places the Catholic Social Teaching principles of Human Dignity and the Common Good at the heart of our school. We recognise that each of us is unique and loved by God and we are called to lead by example, as Christ did, to show respect and love to every person because each of us is made in the image of God.

Introduction

Our Outdoor Learning Policy aims to foster children's love of learning. At St. Anthony's Catholic Primary School, we believe that all children have the right to experience the unique and special nature of being outdoors. We further believe that it is important to enable children to use the outside environment as a context for learning. The Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Manifesto, launched by the government in 2006 stated that 'Every young person should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and personal development whatever their age, ability and circumstances.'

Intent

Outdoor Learning at St Anthony's Catholic Primary School is a vital part of our broad and balanced curriculum. It encompasses outdoor play, school grounds projects, environmental education, recreational and adventure activities and personal and social development. While Outdoor Learning does not have a clearly defined boundary, it has a common core: it offers a dramatic contrast to the indoor classroom and provides powerful, motivating experiences that bring learning to life.

We believe that all children have the right to experience the unique and special nature of being outdoors. Direct experience in nature leads to deeper understanding of concepts that span traditional subject boundaries and which are often difficult to teach effectively indoors. It supports a wide range of learning styles, particularly kinaesthetic learners and fosters skills such as enquiry, experimentation, feedback, reflection, communication, problem solving and cooperation. Outdoor Learning also provides opportunities for pupils to respond positively to challenge, manage risk and develop resilience.

Our curriculum is structured around five key strands: Woodcraft, Shelter, Fire, Nature and Rope Work. Each strand includes progressive learning outcomes across five levels: Beginner, Advanced Beginner, Intermediate, Proficient and Expert. Pupils begin with foundational skills such as using a peeler or tying simple knots and progress to advanced tasks including constructing freestanding shelters, lighting fires using traditional methods and identifying wildlife through classification keys. This progression is carefully sequenced from Preschool to Year 6, beginning with Outdoor Explorers in the Early Years and culminating in expert-level competencies by the end of Key Stage 2.

The curriculum is underpinned by current educational research. Natural England (2022)¹ found that learning in natural environments improves academic performance, reduces stress and increases engagement. Waite et al. (2021)² concluded that outdoor learning fosters resilience, independence and a sense of responsibility when embedded across the curriculum. The Forest School Association (2023)³ highlights the holistic benefits of child-led experiences in nature, while the Education Endowment Foundation⁴ notes that outdoor learning can be particularly effective for disadvantaged pupils when linked to structured skill development and reflection.

The school is committed to implementing robust safety measures to effectively manage and minimise risk during outdoor learning. At the same time, we recognise—and ask parents to acknowledge—that a degree of residual risk is inherent in such activities. To support this shared understanding, we engage parents in discussions about the nature of outdoor learning and the varying levels of risk involved. Pupils are explicitly taught how to assess and manage risks, and are regularly reminded of the importance of staying safe. Through this approach, a collective responsibility is fostered, ensuring all pupils understand how to safeguard themselves and others during outdoor experiences.

Outdoor Learning at St Anthony’s is deeply rooted in our Catholic ethos and mission statement: “Children in our heart, Christ at the centre. We love, we learn and we live.” This approach reflects our dedication to nurturing the whole child—spiritually, morally, intellectually, physically and socially. Through meaningful experiences in nature, pupils are encouraged to grow in ways that align with the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, particularly Human Dignity, Stewardship and the Common Good. In addition, Outdoor Learning contributes to the development of British values by fostering awe and wonder in the natural world, promoting respect, responsibility and a sense of belonging.

The subject leader has identified the following curriculum intentions:

- Raise the profile of Outdoor Learning across the school
- Empower children to take ownership of their learning and allow their minds and bodies to thrive
- Encourage children to develop the skills to solve problems and become resilient and reflective learners
- Develop communication, cooperation and collaborative learning
- Provide a challenging, safe and secure environment where children can take and manage risks
- Strengthen links with parents and the wider school community in celebrating our outdoor space and the rich learning it offers
- Encourage children to care for and respect their environment

Implementation

At St Anthony’s, Outdoor Learning is delivered through a carefully structured and inclusive curriculum that reflects our Catholic ethos and commitment to personal development. Staff use a range of teaching approaches to engage pupils in meaningful experiences that promote curiosity, independence and collaboration. These include enquiry-based learning, child-led exploration, collaborative working and hands-on experiential activities. Lessons are designed to encourage pupils to take ownership of their learning and to develop confidence in applying their skills in real-world contexts.

¹ Natural England (2022) *Children and Nature: A Natural England Evidence Review*.

² Waite, S., Rogers, S., & Evans, J. (2021). *Outdoor Learning Research Report*. Plymouth University.

³ Forest School Association. (2023). *Principles and Benefits of Forest School*.

⁴ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/outdoor-adventure-learning>

The curriculum is sequenced to ensure continuity and progression from Preschool to Year 6. Pupils begin with the Outdoor Explorers programme in the Early Years and move through the Wild Passport levels as they progress through school. Each year builds on prior learning with pupils revisiting and refining skills across the five strands. Teachers plan lessons that allow for repetition, mastery and challenge so that all pupils can access and succeed in outdoor learning.

A minimum of two discrete outdoor learning sessions are timetabled for each half term giving each class twelve opportunities for high-quality outdoor learning per year. These sessions are complemented by additional opportunities to learn outside the classroom as part of our broad and balanced curriculum. Forest School principles underpin our approach supporting holistic development through child-led experiences that promote social and emotional growth.

Teachers use a range of resources to support learning including natural materials, tools, visual aids, prompt cards and digital tools for identification and recording. Learning takes place in our forest school area, farm facilities, prayer garden and extensive natural grounds. Staff also seek opportunities to expand outdoor learning into the wider community and local environment to enrich pupils' experiences and deepen their connection to the world around them.

Roles and Responsibilities

Outdoor Learning Leader:

- Allocate and monitor the effective use of resources within a delegated budget
- Monitor standards to ensure high-quality teaching and learning through pupil discussion, work scrutiny and moderation
- Involve staff in the development of the subject across the school
- Keep staff informed of developments within outdoor learning
- Evaluate the needs of the school and develop plans to meet those needs
- Support staff in developing confidence and skills in outdoor learning
- Evaluate and promote appropriate use of resources by children
- Promote a positive attitude to outdoor learning across the school
- Integrate resources into the curriculum and train staff to ensure confidence in their use
- Be accountable for the standards within the subject

Class Teachers:

- Identify opportunities to embed outdoor learning across the curriculum
- Provide opportunities for all pupils to use a range of equipment and resources
- Ensure reasonable adjustments are made so all pupils can access the outdoor learning curriculum
- Evidence teaching and learning as appropriate
- Carry out risk assessments as required using Wild Passport resources
- Make informed judgements of pupil attainment in outdoor learning

Residential Visits

Outdoor Learning is further enhanced through educational visits and residential experiences. Teachers are encouraged to plan opportunities for pupils to engage in learning beyond the school grounds. Each year group follows a programme of visits that complement and extend classroom learning. For example, to support the teaching of forces in Science pupils visit a local theme park to experience these concepts in action. Residential visits provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop independence, resilience and teamwork. These include a one-night sleepover at school, environmental studies at Stubbington Study Centre and outdoor adventure activities at YMCA Fairthorne Manor.

Adaptive Teaching

Outdoor Learning is inclusive and adapted to meet the needs of all pupils. Outdoor environments often provide therapeutic and sensory experiences that support the social and emotional development of pupils who may find the classroom setting more challenging. Staff use explicit instruction, scaffolding, multi-sensory learning and flexible grouping to support learners with SEND. Adaptations include visual prompts, modified tools, simplified builds and alternative recording methods. Risk assessments are completed where appropriate to ensure that all pupils including those with additional needs can access outdoor learning safely and meaningfully.

Outdoor Learning also provides opportunities to extend and enrich learning for more able pupils. It encourages deeper thinking through research, enquiry and philosophical discussion. It supports the development of higher-order thinking skills and offers a meaningful context for exploring complex ideas such as sustainability, ethics and global citizenship.

Health and Safety

At St Anthony's, staff ensure that the outdoor environment provides appropriate challenge while guiding pupils to manage risks and keep themselves and others safe. Risk is assessed as part of lesson planning, and teachers refer to the school's Health and Safety and Risk Assessment policies when activities require support beyond typical classroom practice. Although robust safety measures are in place to minimise risk, the school recognises that a degree of residual risk remains. Parents are informed of this and are made aware of the nature of outdoor activities their children may take part in. Pupils are supported to understand and follow safety expectations, and they are regularly reminded of the importance of staying safe during outdoor learning.

The following expectations are understood by all pupils:

- Outdoor Learning is an important part of our learning journey.
- We must uphold our school expectation to be safe at all times when we participate in outdoor learning.
- We must always walk on the path at the front of school and be aware that cars may approach through the front gate.
- We must never walk across the car park area.
- We must stay with our group.
- We must be sensible and ensure that we achieve our learning intentions.
- If we follow the expectations above, we will enjoy learning and stay safe.

Impact

The impact of our Outdoor Learning curriculum is seen not only in the skills pupils acquire but in the confident, reflective and responsible individuals they become. Rooted in our Catholic ethos and guided by the principles of Human Dignity and the Common Good, Outdoor Learning supports our mission to nurture kind leaders of the future who care for God's creation and lead by example.

As pupils progress through the curriculum, they develop a wide range of practical competencies across the five strands. By the end of Year 6, children can safely use tools such as knives and axes, construct shelters using natural materials and light fires using traditional methods including flint and steel and bow drill. They are able to identify trees, fungi and wildlife, track animals and birds and create classification keys and habitats. In rope work, pupils master more complex knots and lashings and build rope-based structures such as swings and ladders. These outcomes reflect not only technical skill but also resilience, teamwork and environmental awareness.

Pupils are explicitly taught how to manage risks and are supported in developing a shared understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe during outdoor learning. They demonstrate responsibility and maturity when working in outdoor environments and consistently uphold the school's expectations for safe behaviour. These attitudes are embedded through regular reminders and practical experiences that reinforce the importance of safety and self-awareness.

Progress is monitored using the Wild Passport framework, supported by regular observation, questioning and pupil reflection. Photographic evidence and pupil portfolios provide a record of achievement and help to inform planning. Transition notes passed between year groups ensure continuity and allow any gaps in learning to be addressed.

Outdoor Learning supports long-term retention through repeated, hands-on experiences. For example, fire safety introduced in Year 1 is revisited and developed into fire lighting in Year 2 and culminates in traditional techniques by Year 6. Similarly, shelter-building begins with simple dens and evolves into complex survival structures. This structured progression ensures that pupils retain and apply their learning with increasing independence and confidence.

The curriculum also enhances learning across other subjects. In Science, pupils investigate habitats, forces and materials through practical exploration. In English, nature experiences inspire descriptive writing and storytelling. In RE, children reflect on stewardship and the beauty of God's creation. In PSHE, outdoor challenges promote emotional wellbeing, cooperation and resilience. These cross-curricular links help pupils to apply their learning in meaningful and varied contexts.

Pupil voice is a valued part of our evaluation process. Children consistently express enjoyment and pride in their outdoor learning experiences and speak confidently about the skills they have developed and the challenges they have overcome. We continue to reflect on and develop our provision to ensure it remains responsive to the needs of our pupils and staff. Current priorities include building staff confidence, promoting consistency in delivery and strengthening assessment practices. Outdoor Learning continues to be a dynamic and essential part of our curriculum, supporting our vision to provide an excellent all-round education that prepares pupils to thrive and contribute positively to the world around them.