

Please find below some further information with regard to Forest School, including the use of the stream:

- The School Team (whilst setting up Forest School) discussed, at length, the risk versus benefits of using the stream and concluded that the benefits outweighed the risk. We also discussed environmental factors which would lead to us suspending the use of the stream.
- *NHS advice on Weil's disease is this: "Rates of leptospirosis are very low in the UK, so there's no reason why you should not participate in freshwater activities such as swimming, sailing, water-skiing or windsurfing. However, it is a sensible precaution to cover any cuts and grazes with a waterproof dressing and wash afterwards. This will also help protect against other waterborne infections, such as hepatitis A or giardiasis."*
- The children were not made to go in the stream; there were children who chose not to go in the stream at all. Forest school is always a child led / directed activity.
- Although this goes against the philosophy of Forest School, the Team **will** set some further guidelines with regard to using the stream – for example, not sitting in the water. Although, we will not be able to guard against children falling over in the water. Children will be taught how to conduct themselves safely in and around water, a key skill.
- The Forest School ethos has a philosophy of child-led learning, with a focus on all the senses. The aim is to foster rich learning experiences, ecological literacy, and healthy living by connecting children to nature. This connection to nature, helps the children not only connect with their local and global environment but also to themselves. No activities are compulsory, instead children are encouraged to choose and develop their own activities, this allows them to develop a wide range of skills including, negotiation, leadership, team building, decision making, self-reliance, alongside connecting with their natural environment. Some of the activities the children may participate in are 'higher-risk activities' (such as campfire cooking or tool use). However, these activities are not available to the children until certain behaviours and boundaries are established. Children are encouraged and supported in recognising and managing risk for themselves, through real life situations and experiences. When behaviour is unsafe then that behaviour is stopped.
- To an observer Forest School may often look like children are just playing and getting dirty and wet, but long term studies have shown that these activities have far reaching benefits on the individual child. For example, the mud slide into the stream, which the children designed and built, allowed the children to use both creative and design skills, they negotiated the rules of use. It facilitated taking turns, and helped them develop an awareness of others by helping each other up the bank, ensuring each other's safety. They were also able to apply some scientific knowledge, working out how to decrease the friction, which was slowing them down.

Risk:

- An adult must be present when children want to be in the stream. The water level and strength must be checked before the stream is used. The children must not go beyond the marked boundaries.
- Before every session an onsite risk assessment is carried out including checking the height and flow and clarity of the water in the stream.
- Children are not allowed in the stream without an adult present and are only allowed between two defined points. Before going in the stream, the children are reminded to stay in the water which is shallower than their wellies.
- The stream is not offered as an activity when the temperature is particularly cold or the wind levels are high.
- The children (before each session) are advised to go into the water that is below the level of the wellies and those who do get themselves wet are regularly checked to ensure they are not feeling cold or uncomfortable. Other children who have expressed they are cold (after being in the stream) have been taken in to change in to PE tracksuit bottoms.
- Before anything is eaten or drunk on site the children have to clean their hands. Children are asked to wash their hands after being on site.

Further interesting information from Rachel:

There has been a wealth of research recently carried out, identifying the positive aspects of playing in wet mud. This particular example can be found in full at: <http://www.letthechildrenplay.net/2011/08/10-reasons-why-we-should-let-children.html>)

- **Playing in the mud can make you happier:**

Scientists have discovered something that children have always known - playing in the mud can lift your mood. Recent studies have revealed that dirt contains good microscopic bacteria called Mycobacterium vaccae which increases the levels of serotonin in our brains, helping to relax, soothe and calm.

- **Playing in the mud connects you with nature:**

If you never know something, it's hard to care about it. Many children these days never know the outdoors beyond the school playground or their own garden, if they even have one. Getting children outside to play (as a place to act out make believe worlds and explore) creates happy memories with the one most primal element in our world: nature.

- **Playing in the mud can be good for your health:**

Research has shown that playing in the dirt - including very wet dirt - is good for a child's immune system.

“So let your child be a child. Dirt is good. If your child isn’t coming in dirty every day, they’re not doing their job. They’re not building their immunological army. So it’s terribly important.” - Mary Ruebush is the author of Why Dirt Is Good: 5 Ways to Make Germs Your Friends

- **Playing in the mud can make you smarter:**

Studies have found that playing in the dirt can make you smarter. The same release of serotonin that occurs when playing in Mud has also been shown to improve cognitive function.

- **Playing in the mud helps children to learn and develop:**

Sensory, hands-on play which mud allows feeds the development of children's brains.

- **Playing in the mud helps develop positive dispositions:**

Having an area outside, set aside for mud play – provides a space for children to retreat to for some time alone in a soothing sensory experience or to play with peers co-operating, communicating, negotiating and sharing.

- **Mud is a responsive art medium:**

Mud can be moulded and decorated and it responds differently than sand, clay or playdough.

- **Mud play welcomes all comers:**

Mud is an open-ended material that meets the different needs and interests of different children.

- **Playing in the mud encourages creative thinking:**

Playing with open-ended materials like mud stimulates creativity and imagination – things that are hard to jump start later in life.

Alongside this playing in / around water, gives children both a unique learning experience but also develops water safety knowledge. By playing in water in the safe environment of Forest School the children learn that water must be respected (for example it's very easy if you aren't careful to get wet and the implication of that is once you stop moving you get cold and that water can be deeper and the current can be stronger than it seems).