

OWL - Outdoor & Wilderness Learning

We are extremely lucky at St John’s to have a green and wooded area on our site.  We will be opening a permanent outdoor learning space for our children in January 2020. The Forest School and allotment area will be brought together to create a unique flexible outdoor space for all of our children to enjoy the benefits of learning outdoors.

St John’s believes learning outdoors can foster resilient, confident, independent and creative learners that go on to use their new skills in the world. In addition, the mental health and wellbeing of our students is a priority and there is a lot of evidence to support being outdoors in green spaces greatly improves mental health and wellbeing.

Children from all classes will use the area as part of their classroom learning. In addition, those children with additional need will be able to access the area on a regular basis. There will also be new lunchtime clubs who will utilise the spaces.

There is a brand new covered outdoor classroom, a greenhouse and a fence and hedgerow to support wildlife and separate the area from the sports field. The growing area features raised beds for the growing of food and plants by all the classes. There will be a small reflection and sensory garden as well as the current Forest School provision. In the very near future we will be hopefully adding solar and wind power, and the addition of a rear locked gate into and out of the area will also allow exploration of the Hogsmill River to be brought more easily into the curriculum.

The space and outdoor curriculum will be overseen by Mrs Hutchinson working with Stephen Simpson and Sam Taylor-Colls to develop the OWL curriculum. Stephen and Sam currently run the Forest School and are both experienced outdoor practitioners and are keen to share their experience with the wider school community.  Stephen has worked for over twenty years with 3-18 year olds in creative indoor and outdoor environments in both state and independent schools. He undertook the Level Three Forest School Leaders course in 2017. He is a passionate believer in using alternative learning methods with children who need help coping with the pressures of the modern classroom. This has led him to outdoor learning and the forest school ethos. Sam is a Research Psychologist in Children and Families who has been working with vulnerable children and families for the last fifteen years. She has successfully written and completed her PhD looking at the relationship between a child’s social environment and their emotional development. Before joining St John’s Sam worked collaboratively with health care professionals, local authorities and educational establishments to nurture and protect children’s emotional well-being.

You can read more about our plans at [www.owlfamily.co.uk](http://www.owlfamily.co.uk)

Take a look at the link below to see how important the University believe outside learning.

https://www.kingston.ac.uk/news/article/2268/12-nov-2019-outdoor-learning-helps-school-pupils-deal-with-anxiety-kingston-university-teaching-expert-says/