

DIGGERS

FOREST SCHOOL

2025 Prospectus





Contents

<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
Introduction & Welcome	3
Ethos	4
The Team	5
Communication	6
Key Person	7
Golden Values	8
Outdoors	9
A typical day	10
OAP	11
Important information	12
Useful information	13



Introduction & Welcome

Dear Parents,

Welcome!

Thank you for taking an interest in Diggers Forest School; on behalf of everyone I would like to offer you a warm welcome.

I started Diggers in 2007 as I wanted to play a part in helping children to have the best possible start in life. At Diggers we aim to achieve this by encouraging and supporting children, in having fun through play and outdoor experiences so that they become happy and confident individuals. We also encourage good manners, positive relationships and managed risk taking so that the children will be well equipped and prepared for what lies ahead.

This prospectus is an introduction and means of providing you with a modest amount of information relating to what we offer as a school for young children, and during your child's time with us.

The first five years are the most important of anyone's life and set the pattern for all that follows. I hope you will consider allowing Diggers to play an important and enjoyable role in those early years.

We look forward to meeting you and showing you around our wonderful setting, and all that we have to offer.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Levitt

Caroline Levitt
Founder



Ethos

whole mind, whole body, whole child

“Every child should have regular access to inspirational and challenging outdoor learning, where they can enjoy first-hand experience of their cultural heritage and natural environment, as part of a full and complete childhood”

The Diggers Ethos is based upon the Forest School Association’s six guiding principles as agreed by the Forest School community in 2011. They are as follows:

- Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.
- Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.
- Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

The ethos of Forest School is based on a fundamental respect for children and young people and for their capacity to investigate, test and maintain curiosity in the world around them. It believes in children’s right to play; the right to access the outdoors (and in particular a woodland environment); the right to assess risk and the vibrant reality of the natural world; and the right to experience a healthy range of emotions, through all the challenges of social interaction, to build a resilience that will enable continued and creative engagement with their peers and their potential. It is an approach to education that makes use of the outdoor environment to create a unique learning vehicle.

Learning experiences outside the classroom are often the most memorable learning experiences, helping children to make sense of the world around them, and the person within.

Time spent at Diggers Forest School provides diverse opportunities for children to benefit from supportive learning experiences enabling them to be happy, confident in themselves and well prepared not only for school but for life.

Please note that in addition to Forest School there is a whole load more taking place at Diggers. Whether it is cooking in the school kitchen or harvesting produce in the vegetable garden or pond dipping in South Gardens there is always something of interest that is fun going on.



The Team

At Diggers we are proud to employ a well-established team of dedicated people led by the amazing Mrs B who possesses vast amounts of experience, energy and passion.

When we show prospective parents around, they always compliment Diggers on the wonderful outdoors space we have access to, yet it is our team which is by far our most valuable asset. Between us all, we have healthy amounts of age and experience, coupled with youth and enthusiasm.

Our team are all DBS checked and between them hold an impressive portfolio of qualifications. Seven are Forest School trained (this could be a record for a setting in the UK) and first aid trained, and half are educated to degree level. At Diggers we update our training matrix each year so that we all have the opportunity to undergo Continual Professional Development along with regular refresher workshops on important matters such as safeguarding.

We are a self-reflecting team at Diggers with everyone involved in the process to continuously improve the school, teaching and learning for each other and for the children who attend. Regular staff meetings give us an opportunity to discuss, plan and strengthen the bonds further.

We know we expect a lot from our team. Add into that, the constant changes in weather, the heavy rucksacks and mud; it makes working at Diggers quite a challenge. The fact that they are always more than keen to be outside whatever the weather makes us appreciate them even more.



Communication

At Diggers we take the view that good communication between us and our parents is an essential ingredient towards building a successful partnership and working towards giving your child the best possible start in life.

You can contact Alex in his role of Provider at the Diggers office 01730 826711 or by email alex@diggersforestschoo.com

You can contact Mrs B the Manager at the School on 01730 825622 or by email sharon@diggersforestschoo.com

We aim to reply to emails within 24 working hours, so not including weekends, bank holidays etc. We read emails between 8am and 5pm so if you email us at 6pm or on a Sunday it will not be read until the following working day.

The Diggers mobile number is 07789 735301. This is switched on during our opening hours only.

There should normally be an opportunity for a brief conversation with your child's key person at drop-off and pick-up. If you require privacy for your conversation, please just ask and it will be arranged.

The best way to find out what your child has been up to each day at Diggers is to ask them. They'll almost certainly answer "nothing" first time around but it's good to have a chat with your child, both on the journey home and on the way to Diggers each day.

You can request a meeting with either Alex or Mrs B or your child's key person at a mutually convenient time. This can be in private if you prefer. We operate an "open door" policy and encourage you not to hesitate should you wish to raise a concern, need support and advice or just have a simple question.

Your child's key person will make a brief entry into your child's link book each day. In addition, we encourage you to also make the most of the book and share any relevant information from home, whether it is a change in routine or a "wow" moment.

Throughout a child's time at Diggers, we will produce 2-year checks and personal profiles which give an indication of your child's progression along with key person comments.

The year before your child heads off to school is obviously vital and at the start of this year, we share a school readiness document with you and hold a parents' evening when we can discuss school readiness and any questions you may have.

Once a year we send home a Parent Questionnaire which we ask you to complete and return. This is a good opportunity for you to provide us with feedback so that we can improve what we offer and how we do things. Please do make the most of this as the information you provide is invaluable to us in raising standards.

The most bitter-sweet moment of the year is when we invite you to our School Leavers Do to say goodbye to you and your child.



Key Person

Every child in early years is required to be assigned a key person. The key person's role is to develop a bond and help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with the child's parents.

At your child's first settling-in session, you will be introduced to their key person. They will ask you to complete a "My story" form. This provides really useful information to help settle your child and give details of their interests and skills. Diggers provide a "link book" in which the key person will write a brief summary at the end of each session attended.

The key person is the first point of contact for each parent. It is important that there is a two-way flow of information between you, so that even basic information such as a bad night's sleep for your child is shared. The key person is there to support you when necessary and to work with you to ensure consistency with regards to matters such as positive behaviour and routine.

Your child's key person will play a vital role whilst your child attends Diggers. They will plan activities around a child's interests and development and extend their play over time. For further information please read the OAP section on page 11.

Our team pride themselves on the way they perform the key person role. The cards, gifts and compliments they receive each Christmas and when children head off to school is evidence of their success in fulfilling this important element of their role.



Golden Values

At Diggers we are keen on using the word RESPECT. We encourage the children to respect themselves, their friends, the team at Diggers in addition to nature.

We talk to the children on a daily basis about our Golden Values. The Diggers' Golden Values are as follows:

Kind words

Kind hands

Looking eyes

Listening ears

Quiet voices



The Golden Values are designed to be used in a positive way with the children. Rather than saying "stop snatching" we would say "please use your kind hands". Rather than saying "shh", or "be quiet" we would say "listening ears". These examples give the children the expectation of behaviour, so they are aware of what is expected of them. We then praise them for the good behaviour by saying "good walking", "good helping" and so on.

We also talk to the children about using walking feet when near water such as at the ponds or stream at Kennels. In addition, we encourage the child to stop when they reach a "stopping snail" and not to go past the "mushroom boundaries" at The School, Diggers Den and Kennels Cottage.



Outdoors

There are many reasons why we believe that children should spend as much time as possible outdoors. Whether it is the British Heart Foundation advising that three and four-year-old children should spend 3 or 4 hours outside each day, or common sense telling us that fresh air and exercise is more beneficial than being sat indoors in front of a screen.

Here is a brief item you may be interested in reading:

What is Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD)?

NDD is not a medical condition but a social trend that describes the cumulative effect of withdrawing nature from children's experiences, but not just individual children. Families too can show the symptoms; increased feelings of stress, trouble paying attention, feelings of not being rooted in the world.

Research & facts

Some scientists now believe that just as children need good nutrition and adequate sleep, they also need regular contact with nature.

Paediatricians nowadays see fewer children with broken bones from climbing trees and more children with longer-lasting repetitive-stress injuries, which are related to playing video games and typing at keyboards.

In the experience of all too many children, the electrical outlets are the determining reality. Some children are so seduced by entertainment and information technologies that many believe that without electricity, experience is virtually impossible.

Research shows that interaction with the natural environment plays an important role in children's development, including building, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, as well as fostering creativity. Research on attention-deficit disorder (ADD) shows that exposure to nature was shown to decrease ADD symptoms.

What is the cure for nature deficit disorder?

It's absolutely easy! The most obvious answer is simply: more exposure to the beauty of the natural world. Get children outside and let them explore. The effects of nature will speak for themselves.

What we notice at Diggers Forest School

At Diggers, our own experiences have shown that children leave our sessions calm, happy and enlightened with renewed energy – as though they have been re-charged, but not in a hyperactive way. These children may have started the session lethargic, grumpy, and generally in a lacklustre mood, especially if the weather or other factors have prohibited them from getting outside to play since their last visit to Diggers.

One example of the small part Diggers Forest School play in combatting NDD

Free, unstructured play is entwined within every Diggers day. It is very interesting to see the general confidence and self-awareness of each child, expand and blossom throughout the seasons. At first the children new to Diggers can sometimes lack confidence and are unsure even nervous when it comes to venturing in the woods. However, they soon grow in confidence and it's wonderful for us to see them playing happily whether on a bear hunt, magic carpet ride or any other activity that grips their imagination no matter what the weather.

What role does Diggers Forest School play in treating Nature Deficit Disorder?

Our role to combat NDD, at Diggers, is to provide the foundation and nurturing staff to let children become inspired by nature and experience unstructured, free play outdoors; preferably in a woodland environment, whilst taking measured risks - releasing worries and anxieties. By encouraging outdoor experiences whilst being realistic about the 'pull' of the gaming, virtual reality world, our aim is to sow a seed of inspiration within these children. One day the seed will grow and develop into a need for nature, strong enough for these youngsters to have the discipline to leave the electronic equipment behind and immerse themselves in nature just as our ancestors have done throughout the centuries – going forward as a whole person - at one with themselves and having the inner strength, to cope with whatever life throws at them!

Caroline Levitt 2012



A Typical Day at Diggers

We are so fortunate that between the school and all the outdoor areas we have access to, there is never a shortage of things to do and such a variety of things on offer.

Each morning when you drop off your child, they will receive a warm welcome. We really do make every effort to spend as much time outside as possible. It is not always easy for a key person to prepare six children to head off outdoors in the winter months. It would be much simpler to choose the easy option and stay indoors, but that is not the Diggers way. The team deserve a lot of respect and credit for the calm way in which they load up their rucksacks each morning with resources and equipment before heading off into the woods or to Kennels Cottage with fun activities planned for the children. Outdoors activities include making fairy homes, exploring, lighting fires, treasure hunts, scavenger hunts and much more besides, there is always a "Plan B" and it's nice to see where the children's own curiosity and desire to explore and take risks leads them.

There is always a mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack on offer, plus each day the children talk about the Golden Values.

When inside we can still offer Forest School Sessions using natural materials. We also ensure each area of the school contains sufficient resources for each group of children. We possess an abundance of mark making equipment and often make use of the kitchen on occasions such as Chinese New Year and Shrove Tuesday.

The children love a good outing, and we have in the past visited Harting Stores, the mobile library, Lordington Lavender and spent a whole week as guests at Harting Primary School.

We often have parents volunteer to visit and talk to the children – we've had visits from doctors, nurses, farmers, policemen, musicians and more besides. We ask parents to visit and read to the children on World Book Day, and one of you will be asked to dress up as Santa!



Observation, Assessment and Planning

The 'How, Why and What?' regarding planning activities for your children at Diggers

It is important to remember that all children develop at different rates, and they all have different interests, but one thing is not only the same for all, it is fundamentally the most important component in every child's day – PLAY! And children learn through their play.

When your child first joins Diggers you will be required to complete a My Story form. This will be used to help your key person support your child from the start. The information will be used to map your child's stage of development within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to understand your child's current play interests and to find out if you think your child needs any support with their development.

The key person will complete observations of your child during their play including their style of play and look for emerging skills within the EYFS. The key person will discuss these with the manager on a regular basis to create a play plan of ideas to scaffold your child's learning and support them reaching the next step in their individual learning. Observations can be written, photo evidence or just through a focus day of physically observing your child.

The key person will choose play activities which will interest the child with support specific learning in mind, for example children interested in dinosaurs that are learning to take turns; the key person may introduce a game where each child needs to roll the dice in turn to move a dinosaur around the board. Or for a child to have hand strength to grasp and hold a pencil (pre-writing skills) who loves to climb; offer them the banks to scramble up, grabbing the roots and they climb up.

If the key person feels that your child is not meeting milestones which are age and stage appropriate, they will talk to the manager in the first instance. The manager may then observe your child for a second opinion, before arranging to discuss the matter with the parents. This is not necessarily cause for concern and more likely additional support may be needed such as an individually tailored play plan or a referral for external support such as speech and language therapy. All of which will be conducted in partnership with parents.



Important Information

We take children from around 20 months of age.

We are open from 8:00 am to 5:00pm, Monday to Friday except on bank holidays, the week between Christmas and New Year plus the Friday and Tuesday either side of the August Bank holiday.

Drop off times are: 8:00, 8:30 or 9:00

Collection times are: 1:00, 4:00, 4:30 or 5:00

Fees for 2024 – fees are reviewed annually, and changes apply from 1st January each year

Based on £8.40 per hour

9am – 1pm Morning session £33.60

9am – 4pm Full day session £58.80

8am – 5pm Extended day session £75.60

Fees include mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks and drinks.

Breakfast is available and served at 8:15, and tea at 4:15. Both cost £1:50.

We are registered with West Sussex CC and accept Free Entitlement hours for children aged 2 years onwards. We accept either 15 or 30 hours and childcare vouchers. If a child lives outside of West Sussex they will still qualify for Free Entitlement.

Please note that, for each hour of Free Entitlement claimed and used by a child, we charge a Forest School supplement of £1.50 per hour. So, if a child receives 11 hours of funding per week, you will be charged £16.50. This charge is to cover the cost of continued professional training for all our staff, the ongoing maintenance of the outdoors spaces, plus the purchasing of equipment and resources that we use.

Terms and Conditions are available separately, as is a copy of our SEND Local Offer which is on the Diggers Forest School website along with a copy of the West Sussex County Council Privacy Notice.

If you wish to send your child to Diggers at no cost whatsoever to yourself, we offer sessions from 1:00 to 4:00pm each day, when you can make use of Free Entitlement and no Forest School Supplement is charged. Please be advised that places for these sessions are limited.



Useful Information

Please never forget we are closed on all Bank Holidays and between Christmas and New Year

School Address: The Scout Hut, South Gardens, South Harting GU31 5QJ

Registered Office and Delivery Address only: Kennels Cottage, Church Farm, South Harting GU31 5QG

Ofsted Unique Registration Number: **EY491076**

If you ever fancy some reading to gain an insight into how the government require us to operate and what rules we follow, then please have a look at the EYFS Statutory Framework.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65aa5e42ed27ca001327b2c7/EYFS_statutory_framework_for_group_and_school_based_providers.pdf

If you would like to read and understand more about how children develop and how both Diggers and parents can support that development, then you may wish to read the following:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/944603/Development_Matters_-_non-statutory_cirriculum_guidance_for_EYFS.pdf

There is plenty of fantastic information available on how you can assist your child with “brain-building”. This website is a good starting point:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1S7ZbfWdy10yRjc6ZRvJ2Xc/top-10-tips-to-building-a-babys-brain>

If you require help and support from West Sussex County Council, you can use this link in the first instance:

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/social-care-and-health-information-for-professionals/children/early-help/support-for-parents-and-families/>

Thank you for reading this to the end,

The Diggers Forest School Team

