

The Children's Garden 'Small School in the Woods' FAQs

The world of childhood is about discovery and exploration.

This is how children learn about the world and themselves. Young children especially, learn and develop through physical movement and all forms of 'play' are more powerful and have more possibilities outside. (*more and more research is proving a direct link between movement & brain development in children; for example <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3147174/>). Fostering a strong connection with the natural world at an early age helps children to make sense of the connectedness of our world and the need to respect and care for it.

Children are innately capable learners and we should enable them to harness their curiosity and desire to make connections, try things out and understand why things don't work - and then why they do! Our role as adult(s) is as mentor and guide; facilitator and enabler. Our children are not empty vessels that need filling by us.

The UK is one of the few countries to introduce formal schooling at such a young age. We strongly believe that 4 is far too young for children to be put through uniforms, classrooms and mainly teacher-led activities. At this age, children are becoming more physically-capable, more curious about the world and more able to challenge themselves and make sense of the world around them. The most important thing we can do for them is to give them an environment which enables them to act on these instincts and put them into practice.

We believe that this should be predominantly an outdoors' environment; although there is real value in well-prepared, open-ended indoor spaces. We see our Foresters thriving as 3 and 4 year olds, especially through our extended Forest School Experience programme. We wave them off to 'school' sadly knowing that they still have so much more to gain from this environment - so we wanted to give children the opportunity of remaining in this magical setting for their Reception year.

We fully recognise that primary schools and teachers are working within a constrained system and we know that many would like to do things differently but are unable to. We also know that what we wish to offer is not for everyone - for a variety of reasons. Yet we are determined to offer an alternative for parents/carers and those already home-schooling.

Below is a brief FAQ which we hope will answer some of your questions. However, if you are interested in finding out more, or if you have a specific question, then do please get in touch via ed@norwich.tcgnursery.co.uk

Ed Kenyon - Forest School Leader & co-founder of TCG

- **What is the legal position on children starting school?** By law, children must be in some form of education the term AFTER their 5th birthday. This includes non-maintained options eg private or home-school.
- **What would we need to do if we wanted our child to spend their Reception Year at TCG Small School in the Woods?** Inform the Admissions Authority and make it clear if you were wishing to apply for a deferred or part-time place (see below) at a maintained school in the County OR if you would be waiting to apply for your child to join a maintained school in Year 1. **PLEASE NOTE:** we are an early years setting and are not registered as a school. Therefore, if you wish your child to continue attending TCG AFTER THEY TURN 5 then you will need to have registered your child as being Home-Schooled with the LEA.
- **Can we defer or go part-time with a maintained school?** Yes you can, although your request is not guaranteed. It still depends on the particular school and the Head. However, this is becoming increasingly common in Norfolk. Schools now have a duty to consider the best interests of the child when looking at the way they start school. This applies to all children, not just those with April - August birthdays.
- **How does defer work?** It is possible to defer for a period of time eg for your child to start Reception at school in the following Summer Term OR you can make a case for deferring for a whole school year (so they would start Reception at school the September after they turn 5). This is especially the case for children with April - August birthdays. You just need to make this clear to the Admission Authority. Once in receipt of a deferral you then apply the following year as normal for a Reception place.
- **How does part-time school work?** You apply as normal for a Reception place but you agree with the school that it is in the best interests of your child that they go 2 or 3 days a week for the first term/year etc. This has been of interest to some of our parents who are interested in their child coming to us as well as spending a few days a week in what will be their primary school.
- **Might my child miss out on our preferred school if we defer?** This is very much down to the Head of the school which you would be wanting your child to attend longterm. It is always worth cultivating a good working relationship with the Head of all the schools you are interested in. But deferrals and part-time places are increasingly common, as is the choice to home-school.

- **What if I am currently home-schooling my child?**

That is wonderful! We are extremely flexible and welcome any child who has not been to our nursery, but who wishes to attend our Small School. Please contact the office to discuss days etc. We set a great value on home education and recognise that a number of days per week (term-time or all-year) in our wonderful setting with a qualified Teacher/Forest School Leader, could really enhance the educational experience of a home-schooled child - as well as giving the parent/carer some time to pursue other things. However, we have a limit on the number of hours we can provide per week (18). So children who are at the term after they turn 5 MUST be registered with the local authority as home-schooling as we are not a registered school. Any additional hours a child receives with us can then be classified as 'wraparound care'.

- **Why should we consider the Small School in the Woods for our child's Reception Year?**

Children up to the age of 7 learn through movement - our children will be physically as well as mentally active and based in a wonderful natural environment. The number of children will also be much lower than maintained primary school. Also if you believe Reception Year should not be part of a mainstream primary school; it is meant to be a play-based curriculum (EYFS 0 - 5 years), yet successive Governments over recent decades have pushed for lowering the age when children begin school. Our approach, which we are extending into a reception year, puts the child at the very centre and believes them to be capable and competent individuals. A child in our Reception will be discovering the world through their own eyes, with support from capable and caring adults and spending a great deal of time moving and being outside!

- **Is it still be a combination of Montessori and Forest School?**

The simple answer is yes. The slightly longer one is that we have created our own approach to early years: which includes the strong self-learning literacy and numeracy capabilities of Montessori, the physicality, creativity and focus on nature of Forest School, together with the premise from Reggio Emilia of the powerful child at its very heart. Through child-led interests and projects, supported by our staff's observations and input, the children will more than cover the requirements of the EYFS.

- **Does Reception group have their own teacher?**

Yes, we have our own outdoors-inspired teacher, Daisy Camplin, who is a qualified Teacher as well as Forest School Leader. From September 2022, our current Deputy Manager, Charlotte Holmes, who is a qualified Early Years Teacher, will be running Small School daily. The children will still be spending time in the Walled Garden to access the art studio, the garden and the chickens with our Garden Educators

etc. as well as time with our Montessori Teacher, Nikki, in the tipi. The maximum number of children will be 12.

- **What are the hours?** Small School operates throughout our usual nursery hours of 7.45am to 6.15pm Monday to Friday.

- **How much does it cost?**

Our standard nursery fees of between £67 - £70.50 per day. *Provided your child has not yet started in a maintained school eg part-time, then they can still access the Govt funding until the beginning of the term after their 5th birthday. So many children will still be able to claim funding for some or all of their Reception Year with us, which will reduce the cost. If your child only attends during term-time the invoices are monthly, in order to spread the cost, and for 11 months of the year (nothing in August). Please contact TCG Norwich accounts on accounts@norwich.tcgnursery.co.uk for further details.

- **When did it start?** We began our Small School journey in September 2019.

- **What does our child need to bring?**

Essentially the same as our children in our Walled Garden pre-school area. We will send you our standard Kit List which details everything for the different seasons. No pencil cases, pens etc required!

W: norwich.tcgnursery.co.uk

E: admin@norwich.tcgnursery.co.uk