

# Forest School Handbook



# What is Forest School?

- ▶ Forest School is “An inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults regular opportunities to achieve, and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands on learning experiences in a woodland environment” Murray and O’Brian (2006)



# Why Forest School?

- ▶ “Children want space at all ages. Space, that is ample space, is almost as much wanted as food and air. To move, to run, to find things out by new movement, to feel one’s life in every limb, that is the life of early childhood.” Margaret McMillian (1930)



# Our Forest School Sites

- ▶ Forest School can take place in any area where there is nature, no matter how big or small. Even the smallest outside space can seem vast and intriguing through a child's eyes and can provide space for children to explore and connect with nature. We are lucky enough to live in a beautiful area where we have different sites to choose from.



# Our Forest School Sites: The Heath

- ▶ The Heath provides a beautiful local site for curious children to explore. We visit ‘the dips’, climb Grandfather Oak tree, build dens, play hide ‘n’ seek in the heather and bracken and go pond dipping at Walton pond to observe different habitats.
- ▶ We teach children about the importance of their local environment, how we should respect and preserve it. We regularly litter pick and we know not to harm living things. We never light a fire on the Heath and we always take all of our belongings back to school with us.



# Our Forest School Sites: Breech Lane

- ▶ Breech Lane is the location of our school playing fields. In 2015 we cleared a corner, planted native trees and set up a log circle and fire pit to create a mini Forest School area.
- ▶ Cooking over the fire is often linked to curriculum topics, for example: Gruffalo crumble with Cygnets, pancakes with Swans, healthy pizzas with Herons, vegetable soup with Year 3, camp fire night s'mores and hot chocolate on Year 4 camp, Greek halloumi and vine leaves with Year 5 and World War 1 survival cooking with Year 6.



# Getting ready - come prepared!

- ▶ Getting Ready is an important part of children's involvement in Forest School. We encourage and support children to get ready independently.

## Summer kit:

- . sun hat and sun cream
- . trainers/hiking boots
- . long sleeve top, thin trousers, long socks ensuring legs and ankles are covered



## Winter kit:

- . waterproofs or warm ski suit, warm coat with hood
- . welly boots with welly socks or snow boots
- . hat, scarf and gloves including waterproof outer gloves



# A typical Forest School session...

- ▶ Getting ready - children get themselves ready as independently as possible.
- ▶ Discuss safety along route to Forest School, especially roads. Walk to site.
- ▶ Safety Circle - talk about how to stay safe in the woods including demarcating boundaries and practice *1,2,3 come to me!*
- ▶ Exploration and Challenges - can be linked to children's individual learning and/or to curriculum.
- ▶ Set up Tool Circle or Fire Circle depending upon location. Introduce adult led task, e.g. whittling wands with knives or cooking over a fire.
- ▶ Children help themselves to own water and healthy snack leaving no litter.
- ▶ Share our challenges. How did we overcome difficulties? Reflection.
- ▶ Walk back to school.





Quality outdoor experiences are so important!

- ▶ We go out all year round as our FS sites are naturally enabling environments.
- ▶ Carefully planned learning where experiences are tailored to children's interests and needs.
- ▶ Flexibility combined with the reassurance of routine and familiarity.
- ▶ Fun!



# A brief history of Forest School

- ▶ Forest Schools originated in Scandinavia in the 1950s and were based upon views that children benefitted from having close contact with nature and the natural world.
- ▶ Forest School practice was introduced in Britain by Bridgwater College in 1995 after an inspirational visit to Denmark.
- ▶ Forest School has branched out across Britain. It is well established in Wales and Scotland but has really begun to take off in England.
- ▶ The Forest School Association is the professional body and UK wide voice for Forest School, promoting best practice, cohesion and ‘quality Forest School for all.’ <https://forestschoollassociation.org/>



# Endless Learning Opportunities

Forest School supports all areas of the EYFS in a fun, environmentally friendly way!

## Prime areas:

- ▶ *Personal, Social, Emotional Development* - sharing resources, helping each other, problem solving, increasing independence, self-esteem, self-confidence and promoting self regulation and positive behaviour...
- ▶ *Physical Development* - moving in variety of ways, using space, uneven terrain, tree climbing, balancing, fine/gross motor control, self-care...
- ▶ *Communication and Language* - developing social skills by speaking, listening and understanding in meaningful situations and activities...

## Specific areas:

- ▶ *Literacy* - retelling stories, using sticks to write in the mud, labelling trees...
- ▶ *Maths* - counting, measuring sticks (stick rules), spatial vocabulary and awareness, shapes, sorting, ordering...
- ▶ *Understanding the world* - environmental awareness beyond EYFS expectations...
- ▶ *Expressive Arts and Design* - role play, sculpture, weaving, malleable materials, collage, music...



# KS1 & KS2 - English and Maths

- ▶ Year 1 & 2: Labels, lists, captions, adjectives (adults collect adjectives used), poetry, expression and tone, recounts, verbs past and present, suffix, riddles, postcard, report, persuasive writing, letters home... Number, addition, subtraction, measurement, sorting, shape, fractions, mental maths...
- ▶ Year 3 & 4 Non-fiction, poetry, characters, story settings, adventure, synonyms, plurals, instructions, bullet points, narrative, adjectives, explanations, persuasive writing... Number, word problems, position, sequence, measure, fractions, shape, direction, mental addition, subtraction, multiplication and division...
- ▶ Year 5 & 6: Narrative, report, letter, non-fiction, persuasive writing, investigation, recount, balanced argument, personification, synonyms, antonyms, I/me, questions/commands, metaphor, simile, passive voice... Number, addition, subtraction, shape, multiplication, division, measure, fractions, problem solving, data - bar charts, line graphs, block graphs...



# EY, KS1 & KS2 - Topics

Forest School can be used as backdrop for curriculum based learning and experiences.

- ▶ Cygnets: All About Me, Celebrations, *The Gruffalo*, Spring Watch, Living Eggs project, Minibeasts...
- ▶ Swans: Senses, Weather, *Where the Wild Things Are*, Growth...
- ▶ Herons: Fireworks and fire safety, Trees, Explorers...
- ▶ Year 3: Light & Shadows, Road Safety (The Hodgeheg), Regional studies (WotH compared to \_\_\_), Life Cycles, Rocks & Minerals, Plants, Forces ...
- ▶ Year 4: Locations, Sculpture and ephemeral art, Rivers, Living things and Habitats, Orienteering, Environment...
- ▶ Year 5: Storytelling - Roald Dahl, Life Cycles, Water, Anglo-Saxons...
- ▶ Year 6: Harry Potter - Forbidden forest suspense story, WW1 - letters from the trenches, Chaperon Rouge - puppet show and stop frame animations in woods, Rainforests, support for SATs prep...



# Learning Values and Nurture

Focusing on the individual is a key part of Forest School. Being outside allows children the space to be themselves and gives teachers the time to discover different ways to connect with each child.

- ▶ **Collaboration** - cooperation, teamwork and unity.
- ▶ **Resilience** - willingness to take risks, acceptance of failure with determination to try again, developing high self-esteem.
- ▶ **Respect** - tolerance, inclusion, diversity. Recognising differences and rights of each other and wider community.
- ▶ **Compassion** - kindness and concern, friendship and love. Communicating effectively, understanding the needs of others. Respect.
- ▶ **Creativity** - valuing imagination and originality, being inquisitive and inspirational.
- ▶ **Curiosity** - active learning, curious, confidence to experience new things. Respect for nature and a love of the great outdoors.



***Global School Vision, Village School Values***

# Supporting SEN Children

- ▶ Forest School fosters communication particularly for children with EAL or SEN.
- ▶ Forest School can help different types of learner - kinaesthetic, visual and auditory
- ▶ Visual stimulation and the ever-changing environment can entrance and inspire children.



# Benefits of Forest School (from research)

- ▶ “A study carried out in Sweden on children from similar backgrounds found that children attending FS kindergartens ... are far happier than children in kindergartens located in the urban environment. The study concluded that children in the FS are more balanced with a greater social capability, have fewer days off sick, are more able to concentrate and are better co-coordinated than the city kindergarten children.” [www.forestschool.com/history-of-forest-schools.php](http://www.forestschool.com/history-of-forest-schools.php) (2001)



# Benefits continued...

Norfolk County Council (2009) summarise 5 main themes:

- ▶ Physical health benefits: increased oxygen levels outside, increase brain function, reduce chance of obesity. Sunlight aids vitamin D production with increased resilience to illness.
- ▶ Mental health benefits: spending time in green spaces reduces cortisol (stress chemical) levels in the brain - calming influence.
- ▶ Social benefits: children who tend to lead in FS settings tend to be the most intelligent and imaginative compared to hard-top play areas where the dominant children are those who are physically fit.
- ▶ Risk awareness: playing outside allows children to learn about risk assessment.
- ▶ Behaviour: improved behaviour - ADHD symptoms are not as apparent when children are playing in a natural space.



# Self-evaluation and reflection

- ▶ The outside environment can provide children with challenges that support their ability to reflect and evaluate.
- ▶ Walking on un-even terrain
- ▶ Tree-climbing
- ▶ Pond dipping
- ▶ Negotiating space around brambles/nettles
- ▶ Balancing on logs
- ▶ Using tools such as a saw or whittling
- ▶ Tree swings
- ▶ Camp fires and cooking



# Risk Taking

- ▶ Natural space can provide children with the opportunity to explore what their bodies can do.
- ▶ Children are able to use the environment for physical challenge, this may be by exploring un-even terrain, rolling/running down hills, balancing along logs, jumping from a height, climbing trees and using tools.
- ▶ Children also learn about how to behave around a fire and follow rules to stay safe.



# Why Risk and Challenge Matter

- ▶ It is important to highlight that although most children will actively seek risk in their play (Stephenson, 2003), they do not set out to fail or hurt themselves. The vast majority of children seek a level of challenge they are developmentally capable of achieving. (Stephenson, 2003; Little and Wyver, 2008)
- ▶ Children “have a right to feel ‘the knot in their stomach’ - that feeling of anticipation and exhilaration when taking risks during play” (Warden, 2011). She also argues how important it is that children experience the possibilities of now and the promise of ‘more to come’.
- ▶ The main challenge lies in adults’ perceptions as Little and Wyver (2008) highlight, “where parents and teachers accept and even encourage children to take risks and challenge themselves mentally, physical risk is often seen as something negative and dangerous and to be avoided.”
- ▶ Sue Palmer (Toxic Childhood, 2007): “All real children’s play involves an element of risk, and the more real play children are allowed the better they become at analysing and managing those risks. If, on the other hand, adults try to eliminate risk from their lives they’re likely to grow up either unduly reckless or hopelessly timid.”



# Valuing parental involvement

A study by the DCFS (20078) found... *“Parental involvement in children’s education from an early age has a significant effect on education achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood.”*

Affects on children’s development include:

- ▶ Enhanced confidence and self-esteem
- ▶ Positive behavioural and attitudinal changes
- ▶ Pleasure from collaborative learning

Benefits for parents include:

- ▶ A greater understanding of child development and how they could support their child’s learning
- ▶ Better relationships with children





Any Questions?

# Useful websites

- ▶ Forest School Association <https://forestschoollassociation.org/>
- ▶ RHS campaign for schools gardening <https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/home>
- ▶ Council for learning outside the classroom <https://www.lotc.org.uk/>
- ▶ Play England <https://www.playengland.org.uk/>
- ▶ Surrey Wildlife Trust Wilder School Project  
<https://www.surreywildlifetrust.org/what-we-do/schools-educators/wilder-schools>
- ▶ Field Study Council (free Opal packs) <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/opal/>
- ▶ Nature Detectives (The Woodland Trust)  
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/03/nature-detectives/>
- ▶ Eco Schools <https://www.eco-schools.org.uk/about/>
- ▶ Surrey Outdoor Learning <https://www.surreyoutdoorlearning.uk/>
- ▶ Banstead Commons Conservators <https://bansteadcommons.org.uk/>
- ▶ Walton-on-the-hill Primary School <https://www.walton-on-the-hill.surrey.sch.uk/>