

Woodthorpe J.I. School

Forest School Policy

Aims

We aim to give children and practitioners a shared understanding of the ethos of a Forest School experience. The Forest school ethos encompasses practical activities in the natural environment designed to promote the development of self-esteem and emotional intelligence leading to improved self-confidence. This powerful approach enables young children to be independent, self-motivated, courageous, considerate and sets them up for lifelong learning. There are many important issues to be considered here and we aim to remain true to the Forest School ethos and approach.

Environmental Considerations

Forest School has environmental awareness at the heart of its ethos. Wherever possible, environmentally friendly products and recycled materials should be used when appropriate. Good practice should be modelled by adults showing children that the world in which we live in should be cared for. Involving children in site checks and planning environmental games will help support this.

Health and Safety Considerations

The Forest School programme will support young children to develop responsibility for themselves and others. It will even encourage early risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others.

In our forest school programme we will ensure that all those leading forest school sessions are fully qualified (Level 3 Forest School Leaders) and that all necessary and appropriate risk assessments have been completed prior to any sessions. In addition all forest school leaders will carry out dynamic risk assessment during all sessions they lead or are involved in.

Our Level 3 forest school trained staff are: Mrs M Preston and Mrs S Mason

During any Forest school session the safety and well-being of children and adults is paramount. There is always a qualified first aider on site during a forest school session and appropriate first aid kits are kept at the site base. All forest school leaders carry mobile phones and walkie talkies to ensure contact with colleagues inside the school building if and when necessary.

Policy statements on Practical Activities and Considerations

Fire – the use of fire is an integral part of the forest school experience. When used safely a fire is a magical experience and a fantastic stimulus for learning and reflection. We have fires for a variety of reasons including warmth, cooking and as a learning resource. Fires will only be lit when there are accredited level 3 Forest Leaders present. For fire safety procedures see forest school fire safety policy.

Tools- Teaching children to use tools correctly and effectively can have a huge impact on the child's self-esteem. They learn to take responsibility and know that they are trusted by the adults around them. By selecting and using appropriate tools safely, children are able to make a vast range of resources and creations from the natural environment to support their learning. See forest school tool policy for safety procedures.

Children and Child Protection

Forest School Leaders and practitioners should regard their duty of care when working with young persons as extremely important. To ensure all individuals (children, workers, and volunteers) are safe and protected we strongly recommend the following:

- Everyone involved in Forest School is fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities. Staff and volunteers should be made aware of the relevant school policies and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them. Non school based staff will be given specific briefing covering these areas by the forest leader.
- Any concerns about a child's wellbeing should be shared with the school's DSL so that the school's safe guarding policy can then be followed. Non school staff will be briefed by the Forest school Leader on the school's child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures.
- We regard safety and good practice as extremely important and it is the responsibility of individual staff and volunteers to ensure general safety during working.
- Confidentiality should be maintained at all times. Any concerns should only be shared with those who need to know such as the Forest School Leader or Class Teacher who can then ensure the correct people are then informed.

Considerations for Equality and Inclusion

In Forest School sessions all persons should be treated equally.

We aim to and are committed to:

- providing a secure environment in which children can flourish and in which all contributions are valued;
- including and value the contribution of all children and adults to our understanding of equality and diversity;
- make inclusion a thread which runs through all of the activities of Forest School.

The legal framework for this guidance is:

- Equality Act 2010
- Children and families Act 2014
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Links to other policies: This policy has links to and is used in line with the following school policies: Safeguarding, Equality scheme, Health and Safety scheme, Behaviour/Anti-bullying, Whistleblowing, Confidentiality, Complaints, First aid and SEND and Inclusion

Cancellation Procedure

There may be times when Forest School sessions have to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. These may be:-

- Staff illness – which prevents staff / child ratios being met.
- Severe weather conditions.
- Any situation that poses a health and safety risk.

In the event of this situation arising we will endeavour to reschedule the session as soon as is reasonably practicable.

We will endeavour to run Forest School sessions whenever possible, however reserve the right to cancel on the day.

Evaluation Procedure

In order to develop the Forest School program and to ensure good practice is maintained, a number of evaluation tools will be used.

Evaluation of activities undertaken.

1. Evaluation of session by forest school leaders – looking at what dispositions and attitudes are being developed.
2. Evaluation from children.
3. Evaluation from all staff involved in Forest School

The Rights of Every Child

Woodthorpe JI School uses the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child to ensure that every policy supports the improvement of life chances for children.

Related articles: 1, 2, 3, 5, 28, 29.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the related policies in Appendix One

Signed:

Approved: 4 October 2018

Review: October 2021

APPENDIX ONE

Forest School Play Policy

Rationale:

* Forest School should provide opportunities for children to engage in planned and freely chosen play experiences and should offer risk, challenge, variety and fun'.

* Outdoor play is a vital element of young children's Physical, Social and Emotional development and as every practitioner knows, play is a young child's mechanism and medium for learning Therefore making the most out of outdoor play is essential, providing rich and varied experiences for children and early years settings are in unique position to offer these.

(Learning Through Landscapes)

Aim:

To enable children to experience the outdoor environment;

- For the outdoor environment to be a continuation of the indoor environment with continuous provision available for all children in the nursery including those with special needs.
- For the outdoor environment to be made available throughout the whole session providing a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led experiences.
- To provide appropriate waterproof clothing encouraging children to experience the outdoors in all weathers.

Objectives:

We aim to:

- Provide free access to outdoor environment throughout the whole designated afternoon. (Weather permitting)
- Provide continuous provision in order to encourage independent learners in the outdoor environment.
- Plan for a good balance between child-led and adult-led initiated experiences.
- Observe, access and record children's learning in the outdoor environment to inform future planning.
- Ensure the outdoor environment is seen as a continuation of the indoor environment.

Method

The staff will ask parents to:

- Provide appropriate clothing for example outdoor coats, long sleeve tops and long trousers such as jog bottoms or jeans, walking boots or wellies.
In winter: gloves, hats and extra layers. In summer: sun cream and hats.
- Plan for a wide range of exiting and stimulating experiences, planning to meet all children's interests
- Encourage children to be independent learners and to freely access the indoor and outdoor environment.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This will include:

- * Staff observations, discussions and feedback.
- * Annually discussing and reviewing the validity of the policy to ensure it is meeting the needs of the children.
- * Discussion and feedback from children and parents.

Success Criteria

To underpin the planning and organisation of the outdoor environment, ensuring all needs and interests are met.

Health and Safety (see Health and Safety Scheme)

- Site supervisor to check grounds before each session and carry out litter pickup
- Regular grounds maintenance
- Staff to do a visual check before children access outdoors
- Child – Adult ratio maintained
- Appropriate risk assessments to be carried out
- Regular on-going safeguarding checks.

Equal Opportunities

All children will have access to the outdoor play curriculum regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion etc

Activity Policy

All activities carried out at Forest School will have a detailed procedure to include specific teaching on hazards and how to perform activities safely.

Activities will include, but are not limited to:

- climbing trees
- rope climbing
- low rope balancing
- shelter building
- tying knots and lashings
- negotiating uneven ground
- Using tools
- Cooking on an open fire.

Eating and Drinking Policy

Woodthorpe Forest School recognises that raising awareness of the woodland environment increases children's interest in edible berries and fruits which may be found outside.

However, there is no safe way of ensuring that children will always eat correct berries and/or fruit, or that appropriate berries and/or fruit will be clean.

There is also the possibility that by promoting the correct ingestion of berries and/or fruit in Forest School sessions may lead to incorrect identification by children when out of school.

Children will be taught, at an age appropriate time, reasons why berries and/or fruit from the woodland may not be eaten during Forest School sessions. They will be reassured that fruit from the woodland can be safe to eat, but can equally be dangerous and that adult (i.e. parent) supervision is very important in ensuring only the correct berries are eaten.

With these considerations in mind, Woodthorpe Forest School adopts the following Policy on the eating of food during Forest School sessions:

- Hot drinks made in storm kettles for the group, from commercially available products such as hot chocolate.
- Popcorn, marshmallows, biscuits, bread made with flour and water and pizza (vegetarian) will all be made by the children using fresh ingredients.
- Children will be reminded to bring their drinking bottles containing water with them.

In all cases, the Forest School Leader will be responsible for checking that no member of the group has a listed allergy to any of the products and to be aware of religious needs prohibiting eating of certain foods in certain ways. The Forest School Leader will use their discretion as to whether a substitute product or different activity is most appropriate.

Emergency Procedure

All participants will be briefed in what to do in cases of emergency.

A whistle will be blown as a signal to stop activities, gather with a member of staff, be silent and wait for instructions. The Forest School Leader will assess the situation, the nature and extent of the emergency. They will ensure that the rest of the group are safe from danger and are adequately supervised. They will attend to the casualty, giving first aid if necessary. An incident report will be completed later.

If anyone sustains an injury or illness which cannot be treated by first aid on site and requires medical assistance:

- 999/112 will be dialled using a mobile phone carried by the Forest School Leader. The school will be notified. The school will be responsible for notifying the parent. The school's Emergency Procedure will be followed.
- The rest of the group will be supervised away from the incident and if in danger, will be moved to safety.

Fire Safety Policy

Campfires and the use of storm kettles are an important part of Forest School and are used in many sessions. Woodthorpe Forest School aims to ensure that all children and adults participating in Forest School sessions with fires and/or storm kettles will do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible.

Location

- Only previously agreed areas will be used for campfires
- Campfire areas are enclosed by logs or large stones to prevent the spread of fire.

Positioning of Children and Adults

- Fire areas are surrounded by seating logs at least 1.5 metres from the fire pit.
- When the campfire is in use, children are not permitted to access the area without permission.
- When allowed to access the campfire, children must walk around the outside of the seating logs and wait for permission to step over. Once permission has been given, they must sit, ensuring legs are drawn into the log and not outstretched.
- Once seated around the campfire, the children must remain seated until directed by an adult to move.
- Children will be taught how to change seats by standing, stepping over the log and then walking around the outside of the seating area. They must never cross the inner area.
- Children are not permitted to throw anything onto the fire.
- Advice on the appropriate way for dealing with smoke will be given to the children: they are advised to turn their head to one side, placing their hand across the face, to close their eyes and count to 30 (or ask an adult/peer to count for them)
- If there is a clear wind direction, seating in the line of smoke is to be avoided.

Type of Fire

Training is provided for leaders regarding the best fire lay to use for a session:

- Criss-cross fires are used to provide a large amount of heat and light and are fast burning.
- Long Log fires are good for cooking as they are slow burning and require little fuel.

Safety and Responsibility

- Children are permitted to light fires under the direct supervision of the Forest School Leader.
- Fires are lit using cotton wool, petroleum jelly and a fire steel.
- No flammable liquids are to be used to light or accelerate fires.
- No plastics are to be burnt.
- If sessions involve children adding fuel to the fire, this must be done with one to one adult supervision.
- Sticks/wood must be placed, not thrown, from the side of the fire. The hand should never go over the fire. Children and adults will wear fire gloves to feed the fire.
- Children will be taught the 'respect' position. This is the safe kneeling position modelled by adults at all times around the fire.

Extinguishing

- All fires must be extinguished at the end of a session.
- Water should always be to hand during campfire sessions. A fire bucket filled with clean water is located just outside the fire circle in a designated position. Children are made aware of this before the fire is lit.
- Whenever possible, all fuels should be burnt off to ash.
- Forest School Leaders should ensure that any large remains of wood, especially when using a long log fire, are separated from one another.
- At the end of the session, the fire must be doused down with water and stirred until all smoke and steam has ceased.
- Large build ups of potash, from several fires, need to be dispersed. This must only be done when it has totally cooled, preferably the following day. It should be finely scattered throughout the woodland to enable natural decomposition.

Storm (Kelly) kettles

- Children must be directly supervised by a Forest School Leader (see Safety and Responsibility section)
- The storm kettle must be placed in the designated fire area within the log square within the fire circle. Any woodchip or leaf litter must be brushed away before use.
- Children must be seated at least 1.5 metres away from the storm kettle.
- Children can feed the fire with one to one supervision but they must have been shown how to do so safely. (Fire gloves to be worn, stick held at the end and placed on the lip of the top of the kettle, to the side; hand should never be placed over the top of the kettle)

- Fuel should burn itself out, but if it doesn't it must be extinguished with water (see above)
- Storm kettles should never be boiled with the cork in.

Health and Safety Policy

The Forest School Health and Safety Policy is an addendum to the School's Health and Safety Policies and does not change the school's position on health and safety matters set out in the original document.

In order that Forest School sessions may be run safely, the Forest School Leader will:

Have regard to the Local Authority Publication Outdoor Education, Visits and Off-site Activities

Ensure that at least one appropriately qualified Forest School first aider is on-site

Establish and maintain a safe and healthy environment by:

- Establishing, maintaining and evaluating appropriate procedures, policies and risk assessments, as set out in the Forest School Handbook
- Ensure the provision of sufficient information and instruction for all adults so that they can contribute to their own health and safety and that of the children they are working with
- Establish and be familiar with, all emergency procedures including the reporting and recording of accidents
- Ensure that risk assessments and pre-site visits take place before children are permitted on to the site. Risk assessments will be held in the master risk assessment file, located in the Head teacher's office.
- Ensure alternative plans are in place should a planned activity be compromised by health and safety concerns
- Ensure that Forest School Volunteers are aware of their responsibilities towards the children
- Investigate any accidents and use information gathered to inform future risk assessment and policy making
- Teach all members of the group to maintain their own and others' health and safety by involving them in the risk assessment process at appropriate opportunities
- Maintain the legal adult-child ratio

- Ensure that safety equipment is in good working order and is used appropriately. Forest School Leaders assume responsibility for the maintenance of the First Aid Kit, Kit Bag(s) and any tools brought into the Forest School area.
- All participants, adults and children, will wear appropriate footwear either sturdy walking boots or wellington boots. Fashion boots or trainers will not be permitted.

Insurance Policy

The Forest School is insured under the Public Liability School Insurance through the Local Authority as it is on school property.

Contact: Risk Management Partners Ltd/QBE Insurance (Europe) Ltd

April 18-April19

Policy no: Y087956QBE0118A

Parental Help/Volunteers Policy

The role of parents/carers is very important in our school. It is positive that our school is open to parents/carers and that they feel they can offer something to the children. Organising parents/carers in the Forest School and being clear about their role and work will benefit the children and give all adults a clear sense of purpose as Woodthorpe Forest School Volunteers (FSVRs).

Forest School Volunteers

The school recognises that responsibilities placed on FSVRs in the outdoor environment are often more rigorous than might be found at other locations.

It is important that FSVRs understand that they cannot be passive but that they have a responsibility under the guidance and direction of the Forest School Leader to ensure guidelines, policies, risk assessments and procedures are followed consistently all the time. They should be reassured that ultimate responsibility rests with the Forest School Leader but that by becoming a FSVR, there will be an expectation for them to contribute actively in the wellbeing and safety of the group.

Overall Site Use Policy

The 'Burrow' Woodthorpe Forest School site will be used for:

Fires – deadwood and tinder (cotton wool and lint) will be used, in line with the Birmingham City Council Smoke-Free Policy for fire burning in the city.

Principle guidelines of Forest School:

- Children will always be supervised
- Children will be able to feed the fire
- Children will be able to cook and heat water with supervision
- Children will have a talk at the beginning of every session to understand how to walk and sit around the fire circle.
- Children will be taught how to maintain the fire circle area. (See Fire Policy)

Exploring - Playing games, climbing trees, gardening, sitting and talking.

Tool Use - Tools will be used to make items, decorate and maintain the area.

Children will be given the appropriate tool talk before each use. (See Tool Policy)

Risk Assessment Policy

All activities carried out in the Forest School will be risk assessed following the standard 5 step approach:

1. Look for hazards
2. Decide who may be harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing controls are adequate or whether more should be done. Forest School activities may only proceed if the remaining risk is deemed to be low
4. Record findings, including daily amendments to standing risk assessments based on site visits or observations
5. Review assessments on a regular basis (or if circumstances change which may affect the rigour of the assessment) and revise if necessary.

Specifically, we will carry out the following:

- Note risks related to a specific activity on the appropriate lesson plan.
- Inform staff, volunteers and children of potential hazards and methods of working in order to minimise their risk further.
- Involve staff, volunteers and children in risk assessment, as appropriate, as part of learning.
- Ensure legal guidelines regarding on-site activities, such as adequate insurance and parental permission are met.
- Ensure that all staff, volunteers and children are aware of the emergency procedures for either site.
- Be responsible for teaching children adequate skills in order to keep themselves safe, particularly in relation to the use of hand tools and fire.

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities of the Forest School Leader

To plan and lead all Forest School activities

To ensure that planned activities are within the capabilities of the children taking part, amending plans to provide an inclusive curriculum in its broadest sense.

To take responsibility for discipline during Forest School sessions (see Behaviour Policy)

To have an up to date Forest School First Aid qualification

To ensure all inhalers and epi-pens are taken out for each session and stored in the central location with the first aid kit in the shed.

To ensure that all participants wear suitable outdoor clothing and footwear

To carry out weekly risk assessments as described in the Risk Assessment Policy

To assist with the toileting of children if they request help

To ensure all Forest School policies are regularly reviewed and that review is informed by observations and developing knowledge of the Forest School setting

Responsibilities of Accompanying Staff and Forest School Volunteers

To take an active role in Forest School activities and assist with any discipline issues within the group (see Behaviour Policy)

To assist with the Forest School Leader in ensuring equipment meets safety standards and to report any concerns about the state of equipment immediately

To assist the Forest School Leader in teaching children to maintain their own and others' health and safety

To report accidents or hazards to the Forest School Leader immediately

To take responsibility for making themselves aware of safety issues, such as the whereabouts of the first aid kit

To provide their own suitable outdoor clothing and footwear

Responsibilities of the Children

To take personal responsibility for their own safety as well as the safety of others

To listen to and follow safety information given to them

To bring appropriate clothing and footwear to Forest School sessions

Sustainability Use Policy

There are two levels of sustainability for our Forest School.

These are:

Firstly, to use the Forest School weekly with 10 children will have an impact on the environment which we need to consider each week in our evaluation and site check.

Secondly, long term sustainability.

Please refer to 5 year plan.

Toileting Policy

Before a Forest School session, children will be given the opportunity to go to the toilet.

Children requiring the toilet during a Forest School session will be able to use the outside toilet located within the Forest School site.

Children will be supervised when using tools

Tools Policy for Bow saw

Safety Tool Talk to be given each time the tool is used whilst children are sitting in the tool area (Not a through fare):

This is a bow saw

This is the handle

This is the blade

This is the blade cover

I take the cover off like this

This is the cutting edge

When I have finished sawing I put the blade cover on like this

I hold the bow saw like this

I walk with the bow saw like this

I pass the bow saw like this

When I am not using the bow saw I put it down with the blade facing in and the handle facing out like this

I use the bow saw to cut anything bigger than a 2 pence piece

When I use the bow saw I use it with two arms and a tool away like this

When I have finished using the bow saw I put it in the designated place or back in the tool box provided.

No glove on non-sawing hand.

Tool Policy for Loppers

Safety Tool Talk to be given each time the tool is used whilst children are sitting in the tool area (Not a through fare):

This is a pair of loppers

This is the handle

This is the blade

This is the cutting edge

I hold the loppers like this

I walk with the loppers like this

I pass the loppers like this

When I am not using the loppers I put them on the ground with the handles facing forward and the blade facing behind me.

I use the loppers to cut anything smaller than a 2pence piece.

I use the loppers two arms and a tool away from anyone else.

When I have finished using the loppers I put them back in the designated place or the tool box provided.

No glove on tool

Tool Policy for Axe/Billhook

Safety Tool Talk to be given each time the tool is used whilst children are sitting in the tool area (Not a through fare):

This is an axe

This is the axe cover

This is the handle

This is the blade

This is the cutting edge

I hold the axe like this

I walk with the axe like this

I pass the axe like this

When I am not using the axe I put it on top of the cover with the blade facing inwards and the handle facing forwards.

I use the axe to cleave (split) wood

When I use the axe I use it two arms and a tool away from anyone else

When I have finished using the axe I put it back in its cover and put it in the designated area or the toolbox provided.

No gloves on tool

Tool Policy for Sheath Knife

Safety Tool Talk to be given each time the tool is used whilst children are sitting in the tool area (Not a through fare):

This is the sheath knife

This is the handle

This is the sheath

I open by gently twisting and wiggling the handle and pulling gently.

This is the blade

This is the cutting edge

I always use on the outside of my body with the blade facing away from me.

When not using it I put it back in the sheath like this

I hold it like this

I carry it like this

I pass it like this

When I use the sheath knife for cutting string/whittling I always cut down onto a hard surface

I always use it two arms and a tool length away from anyone else.

When I have finished using the sheath knife I put it back in its cover and put it in the designated area or the toolbox provided

Tool glove on non-knife hand.

Tool Policy

Using small hand tools is an important part of Forest School as it enables children to develop new, practical skills that help them develop self-confidence. Hand tools are to be maintained in good order by the Forest School Leader(s) and will be inspected before each session to ensure safety. Children and adults will be taught how to handle tools properly and to treat them with respect.

Whilst using hand tools the staff to child ratio will be as follows:

- Staff to child ratio 1:2 for bow saws, bill hooks and knives and for KS1 children, all hand tool work
- Staff to child ratio 1:8 (KS2) with hacksaws and peelers

The following will be adhered to at all times:

- Bow saws, loopers and hand drills will be kept in the Forest School tool bags and only removed by the Forest School staff or volunteers

Knives will be kept in a locked box in a locked cupboard and only accessible by forest school leaders

- Running with tools is prohibited
- Pointing with tools is prohibited
- Children will lose permission to use tools if the guidelines are not followed
- Bill hooks should not be swung or used with gloved hands
- Bow saws must have a blade guard on them when not in use. Blade guards to be removed and put back only by Forest School staff, TAs or volunteers until children have been shown how to do this properly and safely
- Wood being sawn must be supported on a saw horse or a natural sawing break – hands must be kept away from the blade.
- When using sheath knives to whittle, this must be done at the side of, and downwards of the body
- All tools must be counted back into the tool box at the end of the session
- Volunteer helpers must receive basic training on the use of individual hand tools before being allowed to use them with children.

Waste Policy

“Carry it in, carry it out”

Bags will be provided to remove any waste products when we leave the site each time.

All food waste will be collected and children reminded that we do not want to encourage rats by leaving any scraps of food. Therefore, bags for disposal will be provided and removed after each session.

Water - children bring drinking water bottles each session and will be reminded to remove them after each session.

Fresh water will be added to the Fire Safety Bucket at the beginning of each session and the Fire Safety Bucket water will be emptied onto the fire after each session.

Hot and cold running water is available from the on-site sink located in the toilet. Soap and paper towels are provided.