

Forest School Policy

Statement of Intent

Forest School offers children regular opportunities to undertake learning and play in local woodland. It is complementary, not separate to learning in a traditional classroom or playschool environment. Sessions in Forest School are not timetable or workbook-led, but driven by the learners themselves, drawing on their interests and imagination. Through Forest School children are able to develop a lifelong love and understanding of the natural environment, whilst developing the core purposes of the Forest School ethos, namely, development of self-esteem, confidence and social skills.

Philosophy

The philosophy which underpins the Forest School movement is to encourage and inspire individuals of any age from 2½ years upwards, through mastery of small, achievable tasks in a woodland environment, to grow in confidence and independence so that they are able to develop a sense of self-worth. Children will acquire new skills as they are ready for them so that activities can maintain a degree of challenge and excitement, whilst remaining safe and controlled.

Children see natural outdoor Pre-schools as free from adult agendas and influences. This encourages unrestricted play and the right balance between challenge and discovery will help develop many different skills for life. Playing outdoors, in natural places, supports and develops a child's sense of awareness. They recognise their independence and connection with nature and the outside world.

Experience

Experience in other Pre-schools has shown Forest School to be inspirational, opinion changing and challenging. It raises expectations and develops insights into individual learning styles and schemas. It is personally and socially uplifting so laying the foundations for other learning. Unlike other forms of outdoor education which generally concentrate on team-building, challenging activities or competitiveness, the Forest School embraces an entirely different approach through the nurturing, support and development of the self-esteem of participants.

Location

Every activity carried out in the outdoors will have an impact on the immediate environment. We plan to keep this impact to a minimum. Activities will include: den building, willow weaving, pond dipping, insect safaris, mud sculpting, natural art, whittling etc.

Clothing

It is important that all children have appropriate clothing suitable for all weather conditions. Parents to supply waterproof jackets, trousers and wellies. Regardless of the weather all children are expected to wear long sleeves, long trousers and closed shoes at all times. This will protect them from the sun, stinging plants etc. Wellies should be worn on wet days. Sun hats and sun cream are necessary for sunny days.

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Environmental Considerations

Forest School has environmental awareness at the heart of its ethos- wherever possible environmentally friendly products and recycle materials will 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 *(please see separate Health & Safety Policy)*

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.

Child and Vulnerable Persons

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
- Key members of staff will have Safeguarding Children Training.
- Forest School Leaders delivering training will have an enhanced level DBS check. It is strongly recommended that any regular volunteer attending Forest School should also have this. Where a volunteer or member of staff does not hold a current DBS certificate then they should not be left unsupervised with children.
- 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 Preschool Leader who can then ensure the correct channels 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;

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- 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

Adult: Child Ratio & Supervision

- The adult to child ratio is 1:4 subject to the nature of the activity and the risk assessment.
- Children will remain under close supervision at all times.
- Named children are assigned to individual staff to ensure each child is individually supervised and to ensure that no child gets lost and that there is no unauthorised access to children, if parents are not present.
- A register will be taken at the beginning and end of the visit or outing. Additionally, regular head counts will be taken by staff.
- A list of all members of staff and children participating in the visit or outing, along with relevant phone numbers, will be left with the member of the management at preschool office.
- The Forest School Leader will ensure that a full First Aid kit is on hand, in compliance with the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981
- Staff will have access to a mobile phone at all times. These numbers are recorded on the staff telephone list at the preschool office.
- Staff take a nominated mobile phone on Forest School sessions for emergency use and an emergency contact list of telephone numbers and supplies of tissues, wipes, pants etc as well as a mini first aid pack, a snack and water. The amount of equipment will vary and be consistent with the session and the number of children as well as how long they will be out for.
- All risk assessment/permission slips for visits and other visit details are kept in a file in preschool office and taken on the trip.

Procedure in the event of a lost child:

- In the event a child becoming lost while at Forest School, procedures will be followed which ensure that a systematic approach to find the child is taken and consideration is given to the levels of risk to the child.
- In the event that a child is lost, we will ensure a search is made for the child as soon as possible, parents will be notified at the appropriate stage, and a high level of care will be maintained to other children while procedures are followed.
- A quick search of surrounding areas will take place. While the initial search is made, the Forest School leader will make enquiries of all adults to establish the last sighting and time, clothes that the child was wearing, and the mental state of the child (happy, upset etc.)
- Notify Pre-school that there is a missing child (by mobile). Notify the parents of the missing child.
- If necessary, notify the Police that there is a missing child. The Forest School Leader gathers as much information about the circumstances surrounding the incident.

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Medical & Allergy Needs

- Staff will ensure individual children's medication is taken for each outing.
- Designated Children's medicine in Forest School rucksack.
- Parents of children with specific medical or allergy needs are required to complete a separate healthcare form, permission to administer medicine and provide written evidence from a doctor/hospital of the care required.
- Parents are required to keep the Preschool fully informed of any changes to children's health.

In the unlikely event of a medical emergency the children will be gathered together, the register completed and head count of children and adults taken. The injured party will be looked after until the ambulance arrives and the other children and staff will return to the Preschool.

The Forest School Leader will ring the preschool on **01371 831902** ext 4

The Address of West wood nature reserve:

West Wood Nature Reserve
off B1051 between Thaxted and Great Sampford
Thaxted
Essex
CB10 2SA

Ordinance Survey Grid Reference **TL 624 332**

The drive barrier code at the entrance to the wood is: **1858**

Mobile Signal: There is good mobile signal in the wood.

Emergency contacts:

- Ring 999 in case of an Emergency.
- The Pre-school has emergency contacts for all the children and staff.
- Ring the Pre-school inform them of situation.
- The Pre-school will ring the parent/carers if there is an accident.

First Aid:

- First Aid kit will always remain in the main Forest School rucksack which is carried by the Forest School Leader.
- 1x Outdoor First Aider at each session
- All the other staff are Paediatric First Aid qualified.

Our First Aid kit:

- Complies with the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981
- Is checked regularly by a designated member of staff (Health & Safety Officer) and re-stocked as necessary.
- Is easily accessible to adults.
- Is kept out of reach of children.

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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 inform all parties involved:

- Cancellation decisions are made as soon as possible and that the school, staff and volunteers are contacted via telephone.
- We will endeavour to run Forest School sessions whenever possible, however reserve the right to cancel on the day, but will aim to inform everyone as soon as possible.

Evaluation Procedure

In order to develop the Forest School program and to ensure good practice is maintained a number of evaluation tools maybe undertaken:

- Evaluation of activities undertaken.
- Evaluation of session – looking at what dispositions and attitudes are being developed.
- Evaluation from children.
- Evaluation from all staff involved in Forest School.

In addition, the following procedures and documentation in relation to Forest School are in place:

Our Preschool Policies

- Health & Safety
- Risk Assessment
- Child Protection

The legal framework for this guidance is:

- Race Relations Act 1976;
- Race Relations Amendment Act 2000;
- Sex Discrimination Act 1986;
- Children Act 1989; and
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, 2014

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