

Forest School Handbook



Abbie Holliman

What Is Forest school?

Forest school is a holistic learner led process, in a natural environment for a 'hands on' experience. It focuses on children's development as a whole no matter what their academic or physical ability. Forest School allows children to experience a healthy engagement with risk and problem solving. There is an emphasis on self-reflection, development of social and emotional skills, which will support them through school and into their adulthood. The skills that children learn and develop in Forest School will assist them in other areas of their school curriculum and has a positive impact on their learning behaviours.

Six guiding principles

There are six guiding principles to forest school as explored below.

1. Sessions are delivered on a long-term basis

Having forest school sessions on a long-term basis allows for an establishment of boundaries to make the children feel safe and secure and develop a sense of trust in the natural environment. Also by having forest school weekly through the year the children can experience all seasons which develops their observational skills and knowledge. Through the weekly sessions, the children are able to 'build on' and refine skills and learning from previous sessions.

2. Sessions should be risk aware not risk averse

The ethos of Forest school is learning through play and having the freedom to try new things. All children will be encouraged to learn through taking risk and overcoming problems. They will use tools such as drills, hammers, whittling knives and firelighters with adult guidance. The children will learn how to light fires and be around tools and campfires safely. As well as physical risk the children are supported to learn how to approach social and emotional situations such as working collaboratively, compromising, confronting fears and experiencing all seasons and types of weather.

3. Forest school is invested in holistic development

These areas include

- ***Emotional development***

Children will have time for reflection whilst exploring how they feel and expanding on emotional vocab.

- ***Spiritual development***

The children will gain a sense of belonging and being part of something bigger than themselves and having a connection to nature.

- ***Intellectual development***

All children will be provided with activities, which inspire them to learn or the opportunities to explore their own interests and ideas further

- ***Social development***

The children will gain social connections through shared experiences and joint goals.

- ***Physical development***

Through a variety of opportunities and activities the children's fine and gross motor skills are developed in the natural environment in many ways such as using tools, climbing trees and navigating a wooded path. By regular sessions the children are able to develop their stamina including having positive experiences during bad weather.

- ***Communication and language development***

The children have opportunities for working together and sharing thoughts and ideas will encourage expression and listening skills

Forest School Leaders aim to develop all these areas in a low intervention manner allowing children to self-discover and self-regulate.

4. Forest Schools take place in a natural wooded environment

Embedded in the ethos of Forest School is the appreciation and awareness of the natural environment a space ideally with trees where the space is contained but not restricted. We are very lucky to have a wooded area and a wild field on our school grounds.

5. **Forest School must be run by a qualified forest school practitioner**

The Forest School lead plans, facilitates and assesses the complex learning opportunities which, can be provided to all children over the course of the year. All lessons in the Forest school environment are carefully planned and delivered to each year group, ensuring that it is purposes full and encompasses the holistic Forest School ethos at all times. As a result all sessions are led by a Level 3 qualified Forest School lead, as this equips them will the right skills to provide quality teaching. The Forest School lead must also have a first aid qualification and practical skills, teaching skills, risk benefit analysis and how to perform site checks and environmental impacts. As good practise Forest School leaders are required to be reflective of themselves and continually adapt and change with the interests of the group.

Mrs Holliman is a Level 3 trained forest school leader.

6. **Forest School is learner centred**

With 'learner based' outcomes there is no curriculum in Forest School. All learning is intended to be cooperative between the teacher and the children through a system of observation. Progress in Forest School is process based not goal based.