Otterburn Primary School



Forest School Policy

Introduction & Background

The forest school approach to learning is that the natural environment can be used to promote and inspire learning and a lifelong love of the outdoors. Although there is always a plan to what may be achieved, there is always the potential that something different may result due to the children’s interests, the weather or simply what the environment has provided. Being outside allows things to be done on a different scale and in a different way.

All children can be included in forest school, no matter what age or ability or special need they may have. Everyone can achieve by working at a level and in an area that interests them. All different learning styles can be catered for and activities can be adapted to suit different people.

The activities that are carried out outdoors lend themselves to personal, social and emotional development and teamwork as well as many practical skills that are needed in everyday life.

There are many opportunities to provide children with risks, challenges and new experiences where there are rules to follow and safety aspects to remember such as lighting fires and using tools. Children increase their self-confidence and self-belief and have the pride of having created something from scratch using natural materials and tools.

Forest school provides the chance for children to spend an extended amount of time outdoors, learning about the natural environment and how to use and care for it. They get to observe the changes in the seasons and see how this affects the plants and wildlife around them.

Our Ethos

We believe in creating a safe and sustainable outdoor environment where our children can explore and take risks. We want them to develop a love and understanding of nature and the world around them and for them to be able to use this to help them in their learning. They will be given the opportunity to develop their curiosity, confidence, self-esteem, creativity, empathy, communication skills, knowledge of the natural environment and the ability to assess risks.

Activities

Children will take part in activities appropriate to their age, ability and experience. This may include:

· Being a nature detective

· Building dens and other structures

· Fires and cooking

· Games and imaginative play

· Natural crafts

· Using tools such as knives and saws

· Scavenger hunts and adventures

Environmental Policy and Environmental Impact Assessment

| Area Impacted on | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Activity | Ground Layer | Field Layer | Shrub Layer | Canopy Layer |
| Fire lighting | Some removed.  Fire pit off the ground.  -ve medium term. | Some removed.  -ve medium term. | None expected | None expected |
| Mini den building | Some removed.  Leaf litter disturbed.  -ve medium term. | Some removed.  -ve medium term. | None expected | None expected |
| Outdoor art | Some removed.  Leaf litter disturbed.  -ve medium term. | Some removed depending on season and abundance.  -ve medium term. | None expected | None expected |
| Large den building | None expected | Some removed.  -ve medium term. | Some removed as part of forest management and pathway clearing.  -ve medium term. | None expected.  Previously cut wood to be used. |
| Stick shapes | Some removed  -ve medium term | None expected | None expected | None expected |
| Nature detectives | Some removed.  Leaf litter disturbed.  -ve medium term. | Some removed depending on season and abundance.  -ve medium term. | None expected | None expected |

Health & Safety

Health & Safety Policy

See Forest School Health and Safety Policy.

Risks

Risk assessments are available for Forest school, the site, the weather and using tools

During forest school children are sometimes exposed to greater risks than normal due to the nature of the activities. At Otterburn First School we not only consider the risks but the potential benefits too. We do however need to minimise any risks and this is done by carrying out risk assessments and identifying any potential hazards. These hazards can then be removed or strategies to avoid them put in place.

Risk/Benefit Analysis

Encouraging children to take risks helps to prepare them for real life. In our school life we are constantly writing risk assessments and making sure we are keeping the children safe. As a result we do not often expose children to risks, so when they come face to face with one in real life they do not know what to do. In forest school there are many risks, but these can be managed and used to the advantage of the children. They can be taught to look carefully at the situation, think about what might go wrong and take steps to complete the task in the safest possible way.

Risks can be grouped into six different types:

· Play with great heights such as tree climbing.

· Play with high speed such as rolling, running or sledging down hills.

· Play with harmful tools such as bow saws and knives.

· Play near dangerous elements such as lakes, rivers and streams.

· Rough-and-tumble play such as playing soldiers and other play fighting games.

· Play where children can ‘disappear’ or get lost such as in the middle of the forest.

All of these can pose a problem but when they are managed appropriately, the benefits can outweigh the risks involved. There are three factors to consider when looking at a potential risk.

· The chance of coming to harm.

· How severe that harm would be.

· The rewards or outcomes of the activity.

Managing these risks means that rather than activities or areas being out of bounds, children can experience these new things in a safe way. Things they may have not been allowed to do before because they were deemed too dangerous are now accessible. Forest school allows children to become aware of the risks around them and helps them to develop skills and strategies to overcome them and confidence when managing risks. This will set them up well for their future lives where there are risks all around them every day.

On Site Risk Assessment Procedures

The forest school site is inspected before any visit. During this visit we identify any significant hazards such as hung branches or difficult ground conditions. When hazards are identified the staff then decide if the hazard needs to be removed or if the children need to be made aware of it. If the hazard is too great then the session will be adjusted accordingly or, if absolutely necessary, cancelled.

Emergency & Serious Incident Procedure

· Secure the group members and keep together in a safe area.

· Assess the incident and prioritise actions/injuries.

· Contact staff inside school using the walking talkie and explain the situation and what needs to be done next

· Seek help if necessary – staff inside to call an ambulance if needed

· Know the grid ref / postcode of your location.

· If necessary and you are appropriately trained offer first aid.

· Keep casualty comfortable and warm.

· Check the rest of the group.

· Make sure individuals are comfortable and safe.

· Move casualty inside if it is appropriate to do so to seek first aid treatment

· Move other children inside if casualty waits outside for an ambulance

· Inform parents

DO NOT SPEAK TO THE MEDIA.

Lost or Missing Person Procedure

Boundaries are set within the forest school site and children are made aware of this. They are counted out of the building, counted back in at the end and several times in between. Staff place themselves strategically where they will have a good line of sight around the area.

If it is thought that someone has gone missing the following procedures will be followed:

· All group members will be called back and counted so missing people can be determined.

· The safety of the remaining group will be ensured and staff will make radio contact with school and ask for extra staff.

· The remaining children will be escorted inside while staff members search for the missing child.

· If the missing person is not found in 5 minutes then the group leader will call 999 and the emergency plan will begin.

Tools, Fire and Activity Guidance

Tools Use Procedure

Tools are an important resource in forest school and enable the children to learn new skills and develop self-confidence. Tools that may be used are: potato peelers, scissors, knives, saws, loppers, drills and bill hooks.

Before tools are used the forest school leader will:

· Check all tools and make sure they are fit for use.

· Count the number of each type of tool.

During the session the forest school leader will:

· Count out and in the tools.

· Demonstrate the correct and safe use of the tools.

· Supervise the children closely while they use the tools.

· Keep the tools in a designated area.

· Ensure sheaths and covers are immediately replaced once a tool has been finished with.

· Ensure safe working distances and suitable ratios are maintained.

See use of tools policy.

Fire Procedure

See the fire policy.

Fire will be used when appropriate and may be led by the forest school leader with one fire or may be used in a teaching session where the children light fires. Fires will either be lit using a fire pit or fire circle or in designated clear areas.

· Only dead wood will be used for firewood.

· Smoke inhalation will be reduced by moving children out of the direction of the smoke if possible.

· Fires will only be lit in designated areas.

· Children will only light fires under direct supervision.

· They will be given clear guidelines and instructions about how to sit and move around the fire.

· Lit fires will be supervised by an adult at all times.

· The correct safety equipment will be present at any time that a fire is lit.

· Fires will be correctly extinguished and all traces removed.

Food Hygiene Policy

See Food Hygiene Policy.

Food Storage

* All perishable food must be stored in a cool box / bag and wrapped in appropriate packaging to avoid attracting insects and vermin.
* Food must never be left uncovered at any time.
* Raw meats must be stored separately to cooked meats in a chilled container.
* Make sure products are used within the ‘use by’ date.

Hygiene

* All cleaning products must be kept out of the reach of children.
* Hands must be cleaned before handling food and utensils.
* Do not handle food items if suffering from colds or similar infections.
* Cover all cuts and grazes in the appropriate manner.
* Clean all food utensils and place in storage.

Water

* All water provided By Forest School must be fresh and suitable for drinking.

Packed lunches

* Children are only permitted to eat at designated times.
* All children coming to Forest School must have a dry place in which to store their lunch bags.
* All rubbish from packed lunches must be taken away by the participant.

Disposal of waste

Policy

Whilst cooking in forest school we will make every effort to ensure there is no food wasted or left behind. Where possible we will use fresh ingredients with minimal packaging to reduce the impact on the environment.

Procedures

· Vegetable peelings can be added to the school compost bins.

· Paper and cardboard packaging can be used to light the next fire.

· Cooked food, grey water and any plastic or foil packaging should be taken off the forest school site to be disposed of or recycled appropriately.

Dishwashing and handwashing water can be poured away on site providing it is sieved to remove rubbish.

General Session Safety & Group Guidance

Session Safety Resources

The forest school leader will ensure that appropriate safety resources are available for the session. This may include gloves and shelter when working with tools and a fire kit if lighting fires. There will always be a first aid kit available.

Weather & Clothing

| Season | Clothing and Personal Protective Equipment |
| --- | --- |
| Spring | Long trousers and long sleeves  Extra layers for warmth including gloves and hat  Waterproofs and boots  Protective gloves if working with tools or clearing areas  Insect repellent |
| Summer | Long trousers and long sleeves  Waterproofs (if appropriate) and boots  Protective gloves if working with tools or clearing areas  Sun hat, sun cream, insect repellent |
| Autumn | Long trousers and long sleeves  Extra layers for warmth including gloves and hat  Waterproofs and boots  Protective gloves if working with tools or clearing areas |
| Winter | Long trousers and long sleeves  Extra layers for warmth including gloves and hat  Waterproofs and boots  Protective gloves if working with tools or clearing areas |

Toileting

There are no toilets on Forest School sites. Children will be escorted back to the school to use the toilet if needed.

There is no running water, but for each Forest School session there will be a container of water on site. Hand wash, towels and antiseptic wipes will also be available.

Hazardous Plants and Fungi

There are some plants that can be poisonous or dangerous to the children taking part in forest school. The identification of these means that they can be removed if absolutely necessary, avoided if needed or only used as appropriate. There will be continuous hazards of nettles and brambles, some may be best removed from the path areas. Berries can be poisonous when eaten and their identification would allow for appropriate action to be taken should this happen, although children will be told not to ingest anything during forest school and handwashing will be enforced.

Biting and Stinging Insects

The area is likely to contain midges during the spring and summer. This will be communicated to parents and if they feel their child is particularly susceptible to being bitten badly then they may provide insect repellent for their child’s use only.

There will always be a risk of stings from other insects. Children will be taught how to behave appropriately around these insects to minimise this risk.

Reporting: Incidents and Accidents

Any accidents will be recorded by the first aider in accordance with the schools usual policy and routines. Any incidents will be reported to the head teacher and the appropriate authorities if deemed necessary.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding Policy

The school's safeguarding policy will be followed at all times.

Staff and Assistants

During Forest School sessions for Nursery/Primary school children, they will be fully supervised by a Forest School Leader and one other adult. Additional helpers may accompany the group and will be taken through the Forest School Induction Pack. Although adults are not left alone with children and young people, it is essential that adults who regularly help as volunteers are police checked.

Ratios

An appropriate ratio of adults to children will be observed according to the setting. The number of adults to children will be increased if necessary to accommodate larger groups and children with special educational or other needs.

Equal Opportunities and Inclusion

The schools equal opportunities and inclusion policy will be followed at all times.

Behaviour Policy

The school's behaviour policy will be followed at all times.

Below are some of the methods of managing behaviour that may work well in a forest school situation.

· Be a role model.

· Catch the child being ‘good’.

· Get down to the child’s level.

· Listen actively.

· Keep things simple and positive.

· Give children responsibility – and consequences.

· Prepare for challenging situations.

Learning & Development

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Session Routines

Before the session the forest school leader will:

· Check the site for any hazards.

· Check for any increased risks due to the weather.

· Carry out safety checks in line with the risk assessment.

· Put up a shelter if needed.

· Remove any eye level branches.

· Ensure everyone is dressed appropriately.

· Take a head count of people.

At the end of the session the forest school leader will:

· Collect in and count any tools.

· Remove the shelter and any litter from the site.

· Carry out a headcount.

· Clean and store all tools appropriately.

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