



# Forest School Policy



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# Contents

- Introduction
- Purpose & Aims
- Environmental Considerations and Conservation
- Legislation
- Links with existing School Policies
- Health and Safety
- Emergency Action Plan
- Risk Assessments and Risk management
- Policy and Procedures for Lighting Fires
- Communication
- The Role of the Forest schools (Forest School) Leader
- Forest schools Rules
- Routines and Procedures for Forest schools
- Essential Equipment for Forest schools
- Clothing Requirements
- Toileting Consideration
- Insurance Requirements

## **Introduction**

Forest School is a unique method of Outdoor Education that allows children to develop confidence, independence, self-esteem and awareness and knowledge of the natural environment. This fully supports our Mission Statement:

*"Bridgewater's vision is to provide high quality childcare, education and community services for all, ensuring that from birth every child has the best possible start in life.*

*We strive to build a successful, inclusive, purposeful and happy community within a safe environment.*

*We are strongly committed to ensure that each child achieves their best.*

*We encourage each child to take responsibility and become independent learners."*

This is achieved by setting small achievable tasks. The child is never put in a position where he/she will fail so success is attained. It is a child centred and child led programme that provides the opportunity for the children to use their personal learning style to complete their chosen tasks.

## **Purpose/Aims of Forest School**

- To provide children with experiences that encourages an appreciation, awareness and knowledge of the natural environment.
- To learn to respect and care for their own local environment.
- To abide by rules and set standards of behaviour, to work cooperatively in groups and to respect each other.
- Develop children's self-esteem and self confidence through the setting of small achievable tasks.

## **Environmental Considerations and Conservation**

One of the principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. The children are taught about respect and responsibility for the world around them. Both the children and adults are encouraged to respect their environment and to be aware of conservation issues of the wild area around them.

Encouraging children to care for the environment is an essential part of Forest schools. In order to encourage the children to look after the site we will always

leave it tidy and never damage anything growing in it. We will only collect things that are on the ground and leave the area as we found it when we leave.

## **Legislation and Forest School**

Legislation of importance to Forest School includes the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

This act makes it a statutory that an employer has a duty to ensure the Health, Safety and Welfare at work of their employees (in the case of schools adults and children) and any equipment used by them, and that employees are responsible for the Health and Safety of themselves and others they may be affected by their acts.

The Children's Act 1989, makes it important to consider adult ratios for all activities, equal opportunities and access, clear communication with parents and DBS checks for staff and regular volunteers.

## **School Policies and Forest Schools**

Staff attending Forest schools sessions should be familiar with the following school policies:

- \*Health and Safety Policy
- \*First Aid policy,
- \*Risk Assessment Policy
- \*Asthma Policy if asthmatics are attending sessions
- \*Food Policy
- \*Safeguarding Policy
- \*Equality & Inclusion Policy
- \*Behaviour Policy

Particular attention is paid to the following areas:

### **Health and Safety**

The Forest schools curriculum supports children to develop responsibility for themselves and others. It will encourage early risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others. A site risk assessment has been carried out and a copy is held in the main office along with the other policies. The Forest schools Leader has an up-to-date certificate in ITC Outdoor First Aid and is in charge of first aid arrangement. All staff have first aid training. A first aid kit is taken on all sessions. In the case of an accident requiring further assistance, an emergency contact form is kept in the Office and a mobile phone is carried. The school will contact the parents. Fires are a valuable part of the Forest School experience but will only be lit according to the procedures below.

## **Safeguarding**

Forest schools sessions are led by a trained Forest School Leader, supported by members of staff.

Everyone involved is fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities. Staff and volunteers are made aware of the relevant school policies and procedures and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them. All Bridgewater staff have current CRB checks.

Any concerns about a child's physical or mental well-being will be shared with our named Safeguarding Officers and a Cause for Concern sheet will be filled in as soon as possible, so that our school's Safeguarding Policy can then be followed. Confidentiality should be maintained at all times. Any concerns should only be shared with those who need to know such as the class teacher who can then ensure the correct channels are then informed.

## **Equality and Inclusion**

During Forest schools all persons are treated equally. We aim to provide a secure environment in which children can flourish and in which all contributions are valued.

## **Behaviour**

At Forest schools we operate within the Behaviour Policy of Bridgewater. We praise and reward good behaviour using the established school systems. When a child's behaviour threatens the well being of him/herself or others, and he/she does not respond to a verbal warning, he/she may be returned to school.

## **Medical and Emergency Contact Details**

All Medical Care Plans and Emergency contact details are held in the School Office.

## **Risk Assessments and Risk Management**

Risk assessments are in place to cover the following:

- Forest schools Site Assessment
- Forest schools sessions: including Sensory Activities, Minibeasts and Shelter building
- Tool use
- Campfire Activities

These Risk Assessments can be found in the Forest schools Handbook and in the Coordinator's File.

## **Safety Sweep and checklists**

The Forest School leader will carry out a thorough sweep of the site for hazards and risks before the group enter the site and appropriate measures will be put in place, e.g. the removal of an object, or warning the group of specific dangers related to the site.

## **Policy and Procedures for Use of Tools and equipment at Forest schools**

Tools and safe use of tools are an important part of Forest schools. Their use will be carefully managed by the Forest schools Leader with an area of the site set aside for tool use.

- Introduction to each tool will be by an official 'Tool talk'. (These can be found in the Forest schools File).
- Good practice will be demonstrated by the Forest schools Leaders at all times.
- Tools will be introduced to the children only when the Forest schools Leader feels the children are ready.
- All tools will be used on a 1:1 adult to child ratio when using them.
- Risk assessments of tool use are carried out in addition to other Forest schools activities and reviewed on a regular basis.
  - All tools will be returned to the tool bag and locked away at the end of each session. This is the Forest schools Leaders responsibility.
- All resources and equipment are checked regularly.
- Any unsafe, worn out, dirty or damaged equipment is repaired and cleaned, or replaced.

## **Policy and Procedures for Lighting Fires at Forest schools**

Before lighting a fire at Forest School, the following should be in place:

Children must have a secure knowledge of log circle safety:

**Stand behind the log**

**Step over and sit down on log**

**Stand up, turn around and step over log**

**Children are not allowed to cross the circle or step into the circle**

In addition to the other resources, we will take a large container full of water.

### **When lighting a fire:**

- Only a trained Forest School Practitioner will take responsibility for the

fire. This will be their sole responsibility for the session. They shall be responsible for lighting it, manning it while it is burning and putting it out at the end of the session.

- The fire shall be contained within the area marked out within the centre of the log circle. The ground around shall be cleared of flammable material.
- Check for low overhanging trees.
- Have a container of water beside the fire to put it out and deal with burns.
- The flames of the fire should never reach higher than the knee.
- While the fire is being lit, the children will be engaged in activities elsewhere.
- The fire will be extinguished before the session ends.
- NO fires will be lit during peak fire risk periods.

All adults are aware of the following when cooking and eating at Forest schools:

- Everyone should wipe their hands before handling food and drink.
- All foods are stored in air tight containers.
- Only clean equipment is used.
- Everyone is aware of any special dietary needs of the children who have food allergies and any medication
- Food will be cooked correctly.
- All equipment and waste is cleared away.

The Forest School Leader will follow the Effective Group Management Procedures outlined in the Forest schools Handbook.

## **The role of the Forest schools Leaders**

- The Forest schools Leader is a trained Level 3 Forest School Practitioner and holds an up to date ITC Outdoor First Aid certificate. They are responsible for organising the planning and running all Forest School sessions.
- The Forest School leader has the safety of the children uppermost at all times. The leader will carry out a detailed safety check before each session and comply with health and safety risk assessments.
- The leader will ensure that all documentation is relevant and up to date.
- The leader will carry an emergency pack at all times.
- The leader is responsible for all equipment and will ensure that it is checked before use and returned to the resource area after use.
- The Forest School leader will keep an accident book and keep parents fully informed of any incidents that may occur during a session, eg, trips, falls, stings, etc.

## **Forest schools Rules**

- Keep your hands away from your mouth
- Don't eat anything unless the forest school leader has given it to you
- Leave things to grow



- Keep within the set boundaries
- Follow the 1,2,3 rule

## **Routines and Procedures For Forest schools**

Preparation - The Forest schools Leader will do a sweep of the site prior to the weekly sessions.

First Aid kit, inhalers, wipes and spare hats and gloves (children's and adults) are kept in the box. The tool bag, water containers and other equipment will be taken as appropriate. The Designated Leader will carry the rucksack to the site. Waterproofs will be taken to the classroom prior to session. Spare wellies are kept in the shed.

Prior to the session children will be toileted, put on their waterproofs. FS safety rules will be shared with the group. Children will put wellies on the outside the classroom door and walk in pairs to the site.

During the session children participate in a variety of activities which are totally inclusive, thus catering for all ability levels. They are taught a variety of woodland skills through practical hands on activities. They also learn how to light fires safely. The children learn the care and safe use of a wide range of tools. This is a tightly supervised activity on a 1:4 ratio of adult to children. It is introduced gradually in small steps. Children are encouraged to listen attentively to instructions and to take responsibility for their actions. This is achieved by games that also encourage respect for the environment.

Back at school children will remove wellies out doors before entering the classroom.

**After the session** Equipment will be washed and stored as appropriate.

Waterproofs will be dried and hung on rails. Flasks and water containers will be emptied and cleaned out. Tools (if taken) will be cleaned and locked away in the resources area.

### **Cancelling Forest schools**

FS may need to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions, e.g. high winds, or blizzards. Adapted classroom activities will take place instead.

Forest schools may not be able to go ahead if there are not enough adults to accompany us. If no replacement adult can be found then the session will be cancelled. The session may also be cancelled if the Forest schools leader is unable to attend. Campfires cannot take place without a Qualified Forest School Leader.

## **Essential Equipment Needed at Forest schools sessions**

A box - containing the following essential items will always accompany the group:

- EAP (Emergency Action Plan)
- Mobile phone
- Medical Care Plans
- Newspaper
- Matches (Campfire sessions only)
- Wet wipes
- Protective gloves
- Sun cream
- First Aid Kit
- Inhalers
- Carry bag for dirty / wet items
- We would also take a ground sheet and string to erect a shelter as needed.

## **Clothing Requirements for Forest schools**

The following clothing requirements are for everyone attending a Forest School session

- Woolly hat/sunhat
- Gloves
- Jacket/waterproof coat
- Fleece/sweatshirt
- Waterproof trousers
- Spare socks
- Stout shoes/wellies/boots

## **Toileting considerations**

All children will visit the toilet before leaving the Classroom. Any children needing the toilet during the session will use the nearest school toilets. KS1 or EYS and they must be accompanied by an adult.

This Forest schools Policy has been written in agreement with the Head Teacher, Staff and Governors of Bridgewater School. It will be reviewed annually.

## **Equality Statement**

A disability equality assessment has been carried out on the policy and the guidance contained in it. Implementing this policy ensures that the same opportunities are provided to all pupils and supports Equality and Diversity.

**Policy agreed:** Spring 2024

**Next review:** Spring 2026