



Lillington Nursery & Primary School

Forest School Handbook

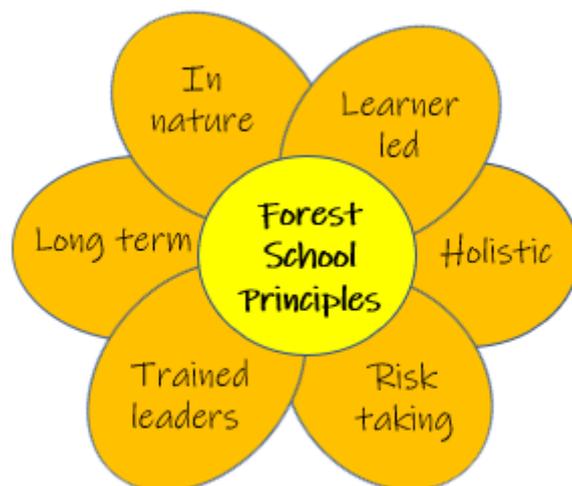


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1. The Forest School Ethos



Forest School is an inspiring, child-focused educational approach that nurtures holistic development. It champions the right of children to play, explore the outdoors, assess risks, and immerse themselves in nature, fostering resilience that encourages ongoing, creative interactions with peers and their own potential.

At Forest School, play, exploration, and measured risk-taking are supported to help build confidence and self-esteem through child-led, hands-on experiences in a natural environment.

The idea of Forest School originated in Scandinavia, initially designed for preschoolers. Research found that children in Forest School settings exhibited enhanced social and communication skills, improved teamwork abilities, greater self-esteem, and a stronger belief in their skills compared to their peers who did not participate. This approach has since been broadened to encompass all ages, up to young adults, and continues to demonstrate the same positive outcomes.

2. Forest School at Lillington Nursery and Primary School

- Foster an environment where children can explore and engage in self-directed, hands-on learning, boosting their motivation and focus.
- Encourage them to take risks, helping to enhance their physical abilities, coordination, and resilience.
- Cultivate a sense of trust and achievement, boosting their self-esteem and confidence.
- Support the development of problem-solving and creative thinking skills.
- Help children build personal, social, and communication abilities that are essential for their growth.
- Encourage practical skills through the use of tools, allowing them to create, build, or manage projects effectively.
- Focus on enhancing concentration skills to aid in their overall learning experience.
- Promote a sense of responsibility for our Forest School environment, teaching children the importance of preserving nature for future generations.

At Lillington Nursery and Primary School, Forest School sessions generally take place within the school grounds in our fabulous courtyard or on our huge field with access to a vast amount of grassland.

Forest School sessions are currently run by Miss Allsopp and Miss Porter who have both completed their Forest School Leader Practitioner course.

3. What do the children do?

Children involved in Forest School sessions embark on an exciting journey of discovery, participating in fun activities every week throughout a half term or term. These sessions take place in the great outdoors, providing a safe and nurturing environment for children to learn, explore, and thrive.

Not only do these adventures deepen their understanding of the natural world, but they also help children develop essential Personal, Social, and Emotional Development (PSED) skills, along with boosting their communication and teamwork abilities. Backed by scientific research, the benefits of Forest School extend to improving overall wellbeing and mental health, making these experiences even more valuable.

In this hands-on learning space, children have the chance to pick up practical skills that are often overlooked in traditional school settings or at home today. From building shelters and using tools to lighting fires and cooking, children navigate a world of managed risks. These experiences empower them to become more adept at handling challenges, ultimately boosting their self-confidence along the way.

Reflection and sharing experiences are cornerstones of this journey, significantly contributing to the social and emotional growth of each participant. The size of the groups are kept small and with mixed age groups this is to help to foster the attention and time needed to focus on skill development and personal growth.

The Forest School leader acts as a guide, facilitating rather than directing the learning process. While activities are thoughtfully planned, they centre around the interests and choices of the children. Flexibility in planning allows these young explorers to chase their curiosities and engage in the activities that spark their imaginations.

The array of activities offered at Forest School is both diverse and plentiful. Remember, our goal is to cultivate independent learners who feel inspired to experiment with their ideas, dive into their interests, and tackle new tasks with enthusiasm!

The following will give some indication of the type of activities that might be undertaken:

- Den and shelter building
- Foraging
- Fire lighting
- Tool use
- Wildlife and Habitat investigation
- Playing team and group games
- Tracking and Trail skills
- Cooking on an open fire
- Rope and string work
- Woodland and traditional crafts
- Obstacle courses

4. Forest School Delivery

Forest school sessions at Lillington Nursery and Primary School generally follow a common pattern.

- At the beginning of each session, we'll have a brief reminder about the expectations for our forest school activities and share any new safety information that's important to keep in mind.
- We usually kick things off with a fun game or activity that helps everyone bond as a team.
- Then, we dive into the main activity or skill of the day, often choosing themes that align with the children's interests. Safety is a top priority, especially when tools are involved. If the activity needs extra supervision, we might divide the group into smaller teams.
- One of the core principles of Forest School is allowing the children to explore the natural environment and guide their own learning. Each session includes time for them to follow their interests, whether that's picking up where they left off or trying something new that caught their attention.
- We wrap up by gathering the group together for a reflection period. This could include discussing the day's activities or sharing thoughts on the individual explorations that took place.

5. Risk Management

Forest School encourages safe risk taking. The Forest School Leader will therefore be responsible for conducting appropriate site sweep and activity risk assessments prior to each session. When unexpected outcomes or ideas come into place a dynamic risk assessment will take place by the pupils and the staff.

Participants, including staff and volunteers, will be informed of potential hazards and methods of working to minimise their risk further. When possible, all participants will be involved in the risk assessment process as part of their learning.

Particularly in relation to the use of hand tools and management of fire, participants will be taught appropriate and adequate skills to keep themselves safe.

Specific risk assessments can be found by staff In Lillington Nursery and Primary School Forest School folder.

6. Emergency Procedure

The Forest School area, located within the school grounds, still has the potential for emergencies due to the nature of the activities.

To address this, the Forest School leader will carry a mobile phone and a Walkie Talkie during sessions. A basic first aid kit will always be brought along for all sessions, and the Forest School leader will also ensure any necessary medication for children is available. A whistle will also be available for attracting attention or to use to stop all children in an emergency.

In sessions involving fire lighting, there will be additional safety measures including a fire bucket with water and a container with clean water for treating burns.

After any emergency, incident and accident reports will be completed according to current legislation and school policies. In the event of a fire, everyone will gather on the school field following the fire evacuation procedures, and a register will be taken.

7. Health and Safety

The following legislations are relevant to Forest School:

- ✦ Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- ✦ Employers' Health and Safety Policy Statements (Exception) Regulations 1975
 - ✦ Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977
 - ✦ Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996
 - ✦ Education (school Premises) Regulations 1999
 - ✦ Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
 - ✦ School Premises (England) Regulations 2012

'We recognise our responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. We will take all reasonably practicable steps to provide and maintain safe and healthy working conditions, equipment and systems of work for all our pupils, school personnel and visitors to the school.'

For Forest School two additional policies and procedures documents have been prepared. These are the '**Safe use of Hand Tools Policy**' and the '**Managed Fire Safety Policy**'. Copies of these can be found at the end of this document.

8. Safe Use of Hand Tools Policy

The incorporation of hand tools is a vital aspect of the Forest School journey. Before engaging participants with tools, we introduce them, provide explanations on their use, and offer clear instructions on how to handle them safely. A tailored tool script guides us in presenting new tools and serves as a helpful reference for participants during their use. This script can be easily modified to accommodate any additional tools introduced. Tools are utilized under careful supervision, with the adult-to-child ratio adjusted based on each child's unique needs. Until participants demonstrate a solid understanding, confidence, and safe handling of the tools, a higher ratio of adults to children will be maintained. The Forest School leader bears the responsibility for ensuring the safe use and upkeep of all tools. When not in use, tools are stored securely.

The following tools are amongst those most likely to be used with children as part of our Forest School sessions.

- Bow saw
- Loppers/Secateurs
- Hand drills
- Sheath knife
- Trowels
- Mallet

Basic risk assessments have been completed for each tool. However, as with any risk assessment it is advisable to review and modify as appropriate dependent upon the individuals involved and specific conditions.



9. Managed Fire Safety Policy and Procedure for Forest Schools



Campfires are a big part of Forest School and are used in many sessions. The Forest School leader's main goal is to make sure that everyone at the sessions stays safe and healthy around the fires.

Location

There will be a specific area designated for the fire, chosen carefully to avoid any potential risks like tree roots or uneven ground. Children will

sit at a safe distance around the fire pit with clear exit points around the area.

Access to the area around the fire pit is restricted when the campfire is in use, and everyone will be taught how to move around the area safely.

Safety

Safety measures include having a first aid kit and a fire bucket with water readily available, as well as considering weather conditions before lighting a fire. Initially only adults can light fires, unless children are directly supervised by the Forest School leader.

Handling wood and lighting the fire should be done carefully, with attention to safety precautions like tying back long hair and securing loose clothing. Fires should never be left unattended, and proper procedures for extinguishing the fires at the end of the session must be followed. Ideally, fires should be allowed to burn out naturally, but if not, they must be doused with water and the ashes stirred to ensure complete extinguishment.

Cooking

We may have opportunities to cook on an open fire, roast marshmallows or create popcorn. We could also make a range of hot drinks such as nettle tea, lemon & honey and Hot Chocolate. It is imperative that children are showing they understand the fire safety rules and follow these before any cooking and hot water will be used.

