



Highfields Academy





Forest School Policy

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1. Forest School Ethos

Intent

Forest School is a unique educational experience and process that offers children the opportunity to succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment. Children engage in motivating and achievable tasks and activities throughout the year and in almost all weathers, with the appropriate footwear and clothing. Children will work with tools, play, learn and begin to understand the boundaries of behaviour, both physical and social. They will grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world.

The Forest School concept originates in Denmark, originally aimed at pre-school children, where it was found that children who had attended forest school then arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, having the ability to work in group effectively, generally had high self-esteem and a confidence in their own abilities. These foundations helped them to raise their academic achievement.

Implementation

At Highfields, each class participates in a half termly slot of Forest School (Around 7 sessions) every Wednesday afternoon for 2 hours. The sessions involve practical hands-on activities which aim to build up participants' skills, abilities and confidence week by week. All sessions are designed and led by a trained Forest School practitioner. However, Forest School strongly encourages participant-led learning, so as the weeks progress, learners are given more freedom and responsibility to explore their interests and therefore initiate and direct their own learning.

Forest School activities can include:

- Shelter building
- Natural Art
- Using knots and lashings
- Fire Lighting
- Animal tracking
- Bug hunts
- Tree Investigations
- Climbing and Balancing
- Woodwork using tools
- Creating bug homes and bird feeders
- Collecting, identifying and sorting natural materials such as leaves
- Team games



Most activities are curriculum-linked and span a number of subjects, including Math's, English, Design & Technology, Science, Music and Art.

Impact

A Forest School encourages children to:

- Develop personal and social skills
- Work through practical problems and challenges
- Use tools to create, build or manage
- Discover how they learn best
- Pursue knowledge that interests them
- Learn how to manage failures
- Build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk
- Develop practical skills
- Understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- Explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- Regularly experience achievement and success
- Reflect on learning and experiences
- Develop their language and communication skills
- Improve their communication
- Explore the world through all the senses available to them.



2. First Aid

Forest School Leader – Mrs Stephanie Cooper

Qualified First Aider – Mrs Stephanie Cooper

The Forest School Leader is a Qualified first aider and carries a recommended first aid kit. Activities are thoroughly risk assessed and continuously monitored of the safety of the group as activities progress. It is the responsibility of the Forest School Lead that appropriate clothing is worn by all children before partaking in Forest School activities.

3. Clothing

No person will be permitted to go to Forest School without appropriate clothing that will protect them from extremes of heat or cold, keep them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes, that fits appropriately for comfort, and that meets any religious requirements. Children and parents are encouraged to think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities, and to be aware they are likely to take some of our mud home with them after a session. In the forest it can often be cooler than expected under the shade of the trees.

Clothing list :

- Waterproof trousers
- Waterproof coat, with a hood
- Long sleeved top
- Full length trousers
- Warm boots (Wellies can be very cold during the winter)
- Warm socks, and a spare pair
- Gloves and a woolly hat (Cold weather)
- Sun hat (Sunny weather)

We work on the principle that ‘There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing’



4. Forest School Site Risk Assessment

| Hazard | Risk | Safety measures |
|---|--------|---|
| Trip hazards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uneven ground / holes • Wet slippery surface • Muddy ground • Icy ground | Medium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal/visual instruction to walk carefully and look where they are walking • Wear appropriate footwear • Mark off area if necessary • Remove obvious trip hazards on pre-visit site check if possible |
| Low branches causing eye injuries | Medium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point out location of low branches |
| Brambles, prickly or thorny plants and stinging nettles | Medium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show location of any brambles and stinging nettles and ask children them to avoid them |
| Insect bites and stings | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal/visual warning not approach or try to catch bees and wasps • Monitor site for nest activity and avoid nest sites • Keep arms and legs covered • Check anyone with severe allergies has their epi-pen and is able to administer it |
| Tasty looking fruit/berries and fungi | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal/visual instruction that some fruit/berries and fungi are poisonous, and should not be eaten • Ensure hands are washed before eating and verbal instruction to keep hands away from face |
| Nuts, e.g. horse chestnut, hazel, acorns | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of children with allergies • Check anyone with severe allergies has their epi-pen and is able to administer it |
| Harmful litter, e.g. metal, glass, hypodermic needles | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove harmful litter during pre-visit site check • Point out location of any harmful litter as activity progresses and remove |
| Contact with harmful substances - soil | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure hands are washed before eating and verbal instruction to keep hands away from face |
| Exposure to the elements – rain, wind, snow, ice | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure that children are wearing appropriate clothing • Use tarpaulins for shelter • In extreme cases work indoors and have alternative activities plan |



| | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|--|
| Exposure to the elements – sun | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work in shade• Wear hats• Check sun screen is being worn• Provide regular drinks |
| High winds | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid areas with trees – work in playing field• In extreme cases work indoors and have alternative activities plan |
| Structural damage to trees | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check branches during pre-visit site check• If area's unsafe, work in meadow or work indoors and have alternative activities plan |
| Animal faeces | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look out for faeces during pre-visit site check and remove• Point out location of faeces during session so it can be avoided• Wash hands thoroughly if anyone comes into contact with faeces |
| Fencing perimeter | Low | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre session checks to assess any gaps in the school fence. |



5. Fire Policy

As part of the Forest School experience it is desirable to have an open fire at times within the woodland to allow the children to enhance their learning and development with some risky activities. Encounters with risk help children to manage their coping strategies and discover and explore the world through real experiences. This policy sets out the guidelines to follow to ensure safe practice is a thread throughout the activity.

Aim: To use fire safely as part of the Forest School experience

Method:

- Fires must only be lit after a risk assessment has been carried out and they must only be within the fire circle area. This includes the use of a Kelly Kettle. There must always be a trained adult present within the fire circle when a fire is lit or hot embers remain, never leave a fire unattended.
- Prior to the fire pit being built the soil or bedrock must have been assessed to avoid a fire being lit on a flammable surface such as peat. The fire should be surrounded by a 1 metre square of double logs to provide a good barrier to the fire in case a learner losing balance. Pegs should be used to prevent the logs being knocked. Fires should not be lit close to overhanging branches or on a really windy day.
- There must be an adequate supply of fire water close to the fire pit to ensure there is enough water available to extinguish the fire if it gets out of control. A fire blanket must be brought into the woodland to wrap round someone if their clothes become alight. Fire proof gauntlets should be kept at the fire area to allow adults to pick up hot items.
- Before visiting the area, the children should have had the opportunity to ask questions and be given information about fire safety. When at the fire circle the rules should be demonstrated for the children to see. There should be no more than 2 people, adults and children, within the fire circle next to the fire at any one time. The best position for cooking is on one knee (the respect position) so you can move backwards easily and remain stable. Long hair should be tied back, tassels and ties tucked away and scarves removed.

Monitoring of policy: This policy will be reviewed annually but may also be influenced earlier by new research and government guidelines.



6. Health and Safety Policies and Procedures

Highfields Academy sets out clear statements of intent regarding the Whole School's approach to the health and safety of its children, staff and visitors to the School and the School Site. Please follow this link to the Policy: http://www.highfieldsacademytrust.co.uk/serve_file/1019919

Provided below is a list of additional points and measures which relate directly to our Forest School sessions.

Forest School sessions are always carried out by the qualified Forest School Leader. Other support staff will be required for a higher ratio of adults to children when carrying out activities using tools or creating fires. This will then allow children to safely experience activities usually considered too risky in other situations. It also means that the Leader can give individual one-to-one attention when needed, and to lead small group work.

All activities are thoroughly risk assessed before the start of each session and Leaders continue to monitor the safety of the group as activities evolve. There is always a trained first aider present at each session and a written emergency plan to follow.

Participants are also involved in completing their own risk assessments throughout the sessions. This gives them ownership of the process and to helps them to be aware of, and calculate, the risks involved in each activity. They are asked to state what risks and hazards they should be aware of and what steps they can take to reduce or mitigate them. For example, they are given flags to mark hazards like brambles and hidden ditches.

Daily Procedures

To ensure the safety of children and adults attending Forest School sessions, there are certain checks that need to be made before, during and at the end of each session. It is the Forest School Leader's responsibility to ensure that all checks have been completed.

This daily health and safety checklist provides a reminder of all daily procedures. This must be used each day.

Pre-visit checks:

- Run through the site risk assessment and amend/update necessary. Remove all visible litter and faeces
- Remove obvious trip hazards and mark off areas as out-of-bounds where appropriate
- Cut any overhanging vegetation from paths and boardwalk
- Ensure risk assessment are completed for all activities
- First Aid kit is stocked
- Check you have all the materials and resources needed for the activities you have planned
- Check that all the tools you plan to use are all in good working order
- Check you have a fully charged school radio



At the start of the session:

- Take register and head count
- Remind children about physical boundaries (use visual cues when needed) and that they must stay within these (Younger children in smaller area)
- Remind children how they should behave and how to stay safe on site (See risk assessment)
- Explain the need for, and principles of, fire safety.

Throughout the session:

- Be vigilant
- Remind children of how to stay safe by highlighting potential hazards (see individual activity risk assessments), reminding them of the boundaries and asking that they make an adult aware of any possible hazards that they spot
- Carry out regular head counts at the start of activities and at break time
- Take photos and make observations of individual children
- Use de-escalating techniques whenever possible when dealing with behavioural issues

At the end of the session:

- Carry out a final head count and escort the group back to the school
- Count and pack up all equipment
- Count and pack up all resources
- Clear fire area and make safe. Remove ash and cover over the site of the fire
- Evaluate the session

Adult Roles and Responsibilities

- The trained and named forest school leader is always the person in charge of Forest School sessions.
- The Forest School Leader has overall duty of care for the children in their charge. However, all adults involved in the Forest School session are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe
- The Forest School Leader or Assistant will always carry and take a first aid kit into the forest at every session.
- The Forest School Leader will always carry a mobile phone and will ensure that there is easy access to a land line.
- In the event of an emergency, The Forest Leader will ensure that the school contacts the emergency services.
- The Forest school leader will review the risk assessment before every trip into the School's forest site.



- When tools are used the adult child ratio will be 1:1. There is one exception to this – when using peelers for whittling the ratio can be 1:2.
- The Forest School Leader is responsible for the maintenance and checking of all tools and equipment to be used at Forest School, prior to their use.
- The Forest School Leader is responsible in training the children in how to use the tools and equipment safely and appropriately.
- The Forest Leader will be responsible for the pre-visit check of the Forest School site prior to Forest School sessions.

Campfire procedure

Forest School at Highfields provides opportunities for children to get closer to nature and the outdoors through a variety of activities, which include learning about fire safety and how to make fires through the use of Kelly Kettles. Children may also get the opportunity to light their own fires. This will only take place under strict supervision, with a one to one adult to child ratio.

All Forest School Leaders are skilled and practised in fire-building and management. Kelly Kettles and fires will only be lit in the centre of the Forest School circle.

All Forest School activities are rigorously risk assessed. Sessions are planned in such a way as to introduce higher risk activities to children over a period of time. This allows leaders to get to know the children in the group and for the children to learn how to behave responsibly and to build knowledge and understanding of the activity.

Boundary Setting

In the first Forest School session, both physical and behavioural boundaries are agreed with the children. At each subsequent session, these boundaries are revisited and reinforced.

Developing Routines

As the sessions are completed yearly with the same children at different times of the year, routines are established in Reception and Year 1. These routines are then revisited during the first and section sessions with all year groups.

- When they arrive at the Forest School site, children are shown how to sit round the Forest School circle.
- The need for, and principles of, fire safety are explained. This will include the rule that when a Kelly Kettle or Fire are being used in the centre of the circle, one child at a time is permitted near the fire, on instruction from the forest school lead.
- The children are shown how to move around the circle (Step over the logs and walk around the circle. For Reception and Year 1, this is shown playing the game duck duck goose.



In subsequent sessions, children will be asked to recall how they should behave at the Forest School circle. Depending on the behaviour and ability of the group, the use of Kelly Kettles and/or lit fires will usually be introduced in much later sessions.

Engendering responsibility

Through practicing these established routines, the children at Forest School will be able to enforce/remind others how to behave. Peers expect responsible behaviour and to a degree will be self-policing.

Forest School Leaders' daily campfire and use of Kelly Kettle and camp fire procedures

To ensure that everyone stays safe on site and that risk is managed effectively, Forest School Leaders will follow a daily campfire and Kelly Kettle procedure.

Forest School Leaders will:

- Keep igniters in a safe location
- Ensure there is a supply of water/soil/sand to douse the fire
- Ascertain the location and size of the fire to be built and plan accordingly, including fuel stocks
- Carry out pre-visit site check and risk assess the site and the activity
- Be prepared to abandon the activity in the event of unforeseen circumstances rendering the activity unsafe and have another activity on standby
- Alert the fire brigade in advance if necessary to avoid false alarm and misidentification of Forest School fires as being uncontrolled.
- Douse fires at completion and check then after 30 minutes to ensure that they have not spread.

When lighting fires, Forest School Leaders will:

- Not wear loose clothing and tie long hair back, and ensure that children have their hair tied back and also have no loose clothing
- Wear gloves
- Allow only one child at a time to help with fire construction/ approach the fire
- Try to keep away from the smoke
- Put out the fire with water when finished.

When using Kelly Kettles, Forest School Leaders will:

- Only light a fire in the tray of the Kelly kettle in the centre of the Forest School circle
- Kneel on one knee for ease of moving backwards
- Never place the kettle on the fire without containing water
- Only fill the kettle with water when cool



- Place the tray of the kettle on a flat surface
- Remove the cork before putting the kettle on the fire
- Keep the spout on the opposite side to themselves and others
- Remove the kettle from fire when the water starts to boil
- Remove the kettle from the fire with the handle held vertically, using the chain to support it in an upright position.

Shelter at the Forest School Site

In case of inclement weather, the Forest School session can be carried out in the Outdoor Classroom (The use of tools and lighting of fires are NOT permitted in this area). During the summer, the forest provides the children with shade. Children are encouraged to take out their water bottles to keep hydrated.

7. Safeguarding Children, Confidentiality and Forest School

Everyone at Highfields Academy has a responsibility in relation to child protection. Please see our policy and procedures document in more detail:

http://www.highfieldsacademytrust.co.uk/serve_file/1019932

We are committed to:

- Taking all reasonable measures to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child and young person (pupil) in our care.
- The practice of safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children and young people
- Protecting each pupil from any form of abuse, whether from an adult or another pupil.

Our Aims:

- To raise awareness of individual responsibilities in identifying and reporting possible cases of abuse
- To provide a systematic means of monitoring, recording and reporting of concerns of cases
- To provide guidance on recognising and dealing with suspected child abuse
- To provide a framework for inter-agency communication and effective liaison
- To ensure that safe recruitment procedures are operated
- To design and operate procedures which promote this policy and which, so far as possible, ensure that teachers and others who are innocent are not prejudiced by false allegations
- To contribute to the operation of appropriate health and safety procedures
- To have regard to and be consistent with relevant statutory and regulatory requirements and guidance



In addition, adults working within Forest School need to appreciate that when children feel comfortable and content, when their instinct to trust and risk take is encouraged, they may be moved to disclose information which they might have otherwise kept to themselves. Any volunteer, or member of staff, who finds that a child is telling them something that concerns them should follow the course of action set out below in simple steps:

- Listen to the pupil but ask NO leading questions. Allow the child to lead the discussion but do not press for details
- Keep calm and offer reassurance. Accept what the child says without challenge
- Make NO promises. You cannot 'keep a secret'. You should make it understood that there are limits to confidentiality at the start of the disclosure
- Inform the Safeguarding lead, or one of the deputy SGL
- Keep an accurate, written record of the conversation, including the date, the time, the place the conversation occurred in and the essence of what was said and done by whom and in whose presence. Keep the record safe and hand to the Safeguarding Lead.

8. Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Forest School

The mission statement of Highfields Academy emphasises the value places on the individuality of all our children. We are committed to giving each child every opportunity to achieve the highest of standards, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, attainment, age, disability, gender or background. We actively seek to remove the barriers to learning and participation that can hinder or exclude individual children or groups of children. Please see our policy in more detail:

http://www.highfieldsacademytrust.co.uk/serve_file/1019928

We aim to provide all children with the opportunity to succeed, and to reach the highest level of personal achievement.

We will:

- Ensure equality of access for all children
- Employ a range of styles, including collaborative learning, so that children can value working together
- Seek to involve all parents in supporting their child's education
- Take account of the performance of all children when planning for future learning and setting challenging targets
- Make best of use of all available resources to support the learning of all groups of children.

Our teachers ensure that our children:

- Feel secure and know that their contributions are valued
- Appreciate and value the differences in others
- Take responsibility for their own actions



- Participate safely, in clothing that is appropriate to their religious beliefs
- Are taught in groupings that allow them all to experience success
- Use materials that reflect a range of cultural backgrounds, learning styles and linguistic needs, without stereotyping
- Have a common curriculum experience that allows for a range of different learning styles
- Have challenging targets that enable them to succeed
- Are encouraged to participate fully, regardless of disabilities or medical needs.