

Forest School Parent Handbook



Beaumont Community
Primary School

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Brief History

Forest School is a concept developed from the Scandinavian approach to learning, where children from the age of 3-7 spend their time in Forest School. In the mid-1990s a group from Bridgewater College, Somerset visited Denmark to observe the Danish Forest School. They found it so inspiring and innovative that they brought the concept back to Britain and set up the first British Forest School. Since then Forest School has continued to grow as an important part of children's education.

The Ethos of Forest School

The ethos of Forest School is to offer a holistic way of learning children where the whole child is considered including. Children go into the forest to play, explore, discover and learn, and to connect with the outside world around them.

The forest school movement stems from the belief that all children have the right to:

play; to access the outdoors (and in particular a woodland environment); to access risk and the vibrant reality of the natural world; to experience a healthy range of emotions, through all the challenges of social interaction and to build a resilience that will enable continued and creative engagement with their peers and their potential. (FSTC)

At forest school all children are viewed as

- equal, unique and valuable
- competent to explore & discover
- entitled to experience appropriate risk and challenge
- entitled to choose, and to initiate and drive their own learning and development
- entitled to experience regular success
- entitled to develop positive relationships with themselves and other people
- entitled to develop a strong, positive relationship with their natural world

The learning experience and process of learning are considered more important than the content of learning. Learning is led and initiated where possible by the children and children are encouraged to direct their own learning. The role of the forest school leader is to facilitate this learning. By carefully observing how the children engage with the forest and how they naturally discover and learn the leader is able to plan sessions which maximize learning opportunities for the children and encourage them to explore their interests.

The space and natural environment of the forest offers endless possibilities for learning and an abundance of resources. Being in the outdoors also has tremendous benefits for children. They are physically more active and have greater freedom. Risk is an active part of working in and moving through the forest and children are encouraged to take supported risks appropriate to the environment, themselves and to their peers. Children are also encouraged to be part of the risk assessment process making sensible and informed decisions about how to deal with unfamiliar and unpredictable situations such as exploring, climbing trees and using tools to build shelters and dens. A high ratio of children to adults is maintained to keep the forest school environment safe enabling these risks to take place. Children have

been shown to be calmer when in an outdoor space and there are many opportunities for social interaction between children.

The environment suits all types of learner's particularly kinesthetic and visual learners who find it more difficult in a classroom environment. Play is a significant part of forest school and a 'flow state' is ideally sought where participants become so engrossed in their play or activities that they lose all sense of time.

'The dynamic nature of an outdoor environment with an infinite source of smells, textures, sounds and tastes; a range of visual stimuli from near to far, high to low, very big to very small; and the infinite layers of historical, cultural, spiritual and mythological significance that speak of our deep relationship with trees and woodland through the ages.' (FSTC) Because of this the forest offers a unique environment for children to learn.

Benefits of Forest School

Regular Forest School sessions have been shown to have many benefits for children including:

- Improved Confidence
- Greater social skills and improved social interaction
- Development of language and communication skills
- Improvements in motivation and concentration
- Greater self-esteem and self belief
- Development of physical skills
- Improvements in behaviour

This is because

- The forest and outdoor environment has a naturally calming effect on children and enables them to connect with nature
- the physical nature of forest school improves children's physical skills and stamina
- The social nature of many forest school activities helps improve children's language and communication
- Forest School provides opportunities for children to test their abilities in a real life context.
- Problem solving activities and learning to use tools and fire in the forest increases children's concentration, confidence and self esteem.
- Improvements in children's confidence and self esteem can have an impact on their emotional and mental well being
- Children often take their forest school experience home and may encourage others in their family to spend more time outdoors

Forest School Experiences

Here are some examples of just some of the things we get up to at Forest School

Playing games:

We play many games including hide-and-seek games to explore the area safely and introduce the idea of boundaries.

Building our own dens:

This is everyone's opportunity to have a go at building their very own den or survival shelter! Working in small teams we will create several dens, or one den all together using the natural objects around us. We will consider where is a good place to build a den, what would make it waterproof, windproof, etc., and what materials we could use? Afterwards we will showcase our dens to the group and have a go in each other's dens to see how they differ,

Making Natural Mobiles:

Discovering objects we find on the ground, in the shrubs and bushes, on the trees all around us, we will construct simple natural badges on string to hang on our coats or to hang in the trees to create a natural woodland mobile. What will you create?

Erecting shelters:

Once we have sat in our fire-circle again and welcomed one another back we will work together to erect a tarpaulin nearby for everybody to shelter under in wet weather and as a base to store our equipment. We will need to work as a team to get the shelter up and in place securely.

Moulding Muddy Faces:

Using mud we can find on site, we'll dig up enough mud and combine it with water to mould our very own muddy faces to stick on the trees, near the buttress roots or to leave on the ground, to bring to life the trees around us.

Filthy Flags:

Using mud we dig up on site, we'll make a pot of gooey mud to paint our own filthy flags which we can fly on our own flag posts to march around the grounds, fly from the trees or combine together to make a banner for the everyone to see.

Scavenger Hunt:

Working in and around the grounds we'll go on a hunt to see what we can find, something small, something tall, something brown, something round. As we explore the area and touch the objects we'll compare and contrast what everybody has found.

Crowns:

Using the objects we've found and discussed, we'll construct our own crowns to wear. Using willow or other supple wood from the grounds, if possible, we could weave our own crowns to decorate, or simply by using some cardboard to glue our objects to we can use the objects we've discovered and proudly display them for everyone to see.

Evaluation

Following the children's Forest School Sessions we evaluate the sessions asking the children involved for their feedback, so the Teachers and Teaching Assistants involved can see for themselves what each child got from the experience and inform future sessions. We will also ask all the adults involved to partake in a quick and easy evaluation process to assess the success and outcomes from the Forest School sessions.

Health and Safety

Any Outdoor Learning involves elements of risk. The benefits of appropriate risk are vital to children's development. Forest School develops learners understanding of risk, involves the learners in the risk management process and supports learners to take acceptable risks. Forest School leaders are trained in relevant Health and Safety issues. All Forest School policies are available in this handbook and copies of risk assessments and other relevant documentation are available upon request.

Health and Safety Aims

To ensure Forest School remains a safe activity for all who participate and help deliver Forest School sessions and to ensure practices and procedures comply with Health and Safety Legislation.

Legislation

Health & Safety at Work Act 1974

This act attempts to provide a comprehensive system of law to cover the health and safety of people at work. The objectives are:

- To raise the standards of safety and health for all persons at work.
- To protect the client group whose health and safety may be put at risk by the activities of the persons at work.

It is a criminal offence not to comply with its provision.

Employers have a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees by:

- Assessing all risks.
- Ensuring emergency procedures are in place.
- Providing adequate sanitary and washing facilities.
- Ensuring that all equipment is safe and in good working order.
- Providing adequate training on substances that may damage health.
- Providing protective clothing.

Employees are responsible for the health and safety of themselves and other people who might be affected by their acts.

Health and Safety Practices and Procedures

The Trained and Named Forest School Leader (Emily Myers) 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.

All adult helpers **MUST** sign and date a form to show that they have read and understood the handbook and the risk assessments appropriate to the session in which they are helping.

They must sign and date the form stating that they comply with the general operating procedures for Forest School (code of conduct).

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 or Assistant will always carry an Emergency Bag into the forest for every session.

The Forest School Leader will ensure that the Emergency Bag contains:

- Essential survival equipment
- A contact list for each child undertaking the activities: and
- The School's telephone number (and location details for the emergency services)

The Forest School Leader will always carry a mobile phone and will ensure that the site is with range.

In the event of an emergency, The Forest Leader will ensure that the School contacts the emergency services. If contact with the school is lost the Leader will contact the emergency services.

The Forest School Leader will review the risk assessments before every trip into the School's Forest Site.

When tools are used the adult child ratio will be 1:1

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 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 a Forest School session.

Children's Act 1989/2004

Key Areas:

- Ratios for offsite activities.
- Equal opportunities.
- Communication with parents and carers.
- Police checks – DBS Forms

Equal Opportunities

Aims

To ensure all children have equal access to Forest School and Forest School Activities

How we will achieve this:

- Forest School Aims to promote self esteem of all children by ensuring no child receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of age /gender / class / sexuality / ethnic origin, nationality, disability, religious or political beliefs

- All children will be respected and their individuality. Their potential will be recognised, valued and nurtured. Forest School activities and the use of Forest School equipment will offer children the opportunity to develop in an environment free from prejudice and discrimination.
- Children with exceptional needs will be admitted to the Forest School programme after consultation between the parents, the Head teacher and the Forest school Leader. The Forest School programme will recognise the wide range of special needs of children and will consider what part it can play in meeting these needs.
- All children should be adequately dressed to ensure that they are able to take a full part in all Forest School activities. The school will provide waterproof clothing for each child taking part in Forest School and appropriately sized personal protective equipment e.g. work gloves, hard hats, and fire mitts and provided.
- Discrimination and exclusion will always be challenged
- Stereotyping will be actively discouraged to ensure children feel free to explore and play as they choose

Child Protection / Safeguarding and Confidentiality Policy

Commitments

To take all reasonable measures to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child and young person (pupil) in our care

To practice safe recruitment by checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children and young people

To protect each pupil from any form of abuse, whether from an adult or another pupil

To ensure any data or information relating to children attending Forest School sessions is treated as strictly confidential and as such is not disclosed or permitted to be disclosed to any other person or agency.

Communication with parents

Every parent is expected to read the parent handbook and complete a parental consent form. It is essential that these forms are correctly filled in before a child takes part in Forest School. The Forest School Leader should have copies of these with them including contact details and medical information. The Forest School Handbook includes details of protective clothing and the need to wear old clothes that parents do not mind the children getting dirty. There is a need for suitable footwear, such as wellies and extra socks for warmth in winter but old trainers may be adequate in summer. The season will denote the need for woollen or sun hats. Permission is needed for the use of sun cream. Please see Forest School Clothing section for more detail.

Parental permission is also required if photographs are to be taken and used later for displays or advertising.

Insurance

Insurance is through the school Insurance and includes Public Liability Insurance to £5,000,000.

Contact forms and Emergency Procedures

Contact forms with details of medical and dietary needs are completed before Forest School Sessions and are carried by the Forest School Leader at all times. The Forest School Leader has in place a detailed Emergency Action Procedure for all sites used for Forest School Sessions and this is carried in the Emergency bag to all Forest School sessions. Any people working or helping at Forest School sessions must read and sign the Emergency Action Procedure and Missing Child Procedure before attending Forest School sessions.

Responsibilities of Forest School Leader

To give parents/carers written details of forest school sessions and dates prior to Forest School.

To provide Parents/carers with details about what children should wear for Forest School Sessions to keep them safe and warm

To provide Parents / Carers with a list of items children should bring to the session, such as a rucksack containing their water bottle.

To ensure that there is the correct ratio of adults to children in each session.

To ensure contact numbers and medical forms are available during each session.

To ensure there has been a sweep of the Forest School area to check for loose branches and litter before entering site.

To ensure adults working at Forest School have DBS clearance.

To ensure tools are in a secure container and are in a clean and usable condition.

Responsibilities of Parents / Carers

To complete the established full parental consent form prior to sessions.

To provide the child / children with appropriate clothing and equipment for Forest School Sessions

Responsibilities and Roles of Children

Working in the Forest

Children are expected to be respectful when in the forest. Any activities undertaken must not harm the forest environment. Children are taught that the environment is shared with other living animals and plants and that it is their responsibility to protect the forest environment for all living things.

Boundaries

At the start of each session children are reminded of how far that they can explore and of the boundary. This is usually done through a game. Any children wanting to explore outside this are must ask an adult and an adult should go with them to explore but allow the children the freedom to explore independently. If any adult loses sight of a child the '1,2,3, where are you?' game is used and the children respond '1,2,3, I'm over here' so they are quickly relocated. If any child is not quickly relocated the Missing Child Policy comes into place.

Collecting wood

Wood is collected for activities and fire lighting purposes. For fires it is collected in four thicknesses – matchstick sized, pencil sized, thumb sized and wrist sized. Children are taught to take care not to take too much wood from one area and be mindful of creature habitats.

Eating and Drinking

We have a Nil by mouth policy for anything found in the Forest, unless it is an activity has been specifically planned for (e.g. blackberry picking). Children are reminded not to put their fingers or hands in their mouths or noses. When consuming drinks and snacks in the forest children's hands are cleaned using wipes and water / antibacterial gel before and after consumption.

At the Fire Circle

Children must always sit 1.5m from the fire square. They are taught that they cannot enter the fire circle perimeter unless invited to do so by an adult. They are taught to walk around the outside of the fire circle when the wish to move around the fire. Even when the fire is unlit we will treat it as if it is lit.

Using Tools

Each tool has its own procedure for use which adults model and the children follow at all times. This includes detail about personal protective equipment to be worn, correct body posture for use, and details of what each tool may be used for. (See Tool Use Policy and Risk Assessments).

Working with sticks

Children enjoy playing with sticks. They can carry sticks shorter than their arm's length but are encouraged to think about how close they are to other children. Children are taught to

safely drag longer sticks over their shoulder or carry larger sticks with the help of another person one at each end. Children are not permitted to throw sticks or to pull sticks from living trees.

Forest School Clothing

To keep everyone safe and comfortable during Forest School sessions it is important that all children and adults taking part have appropriate clothing to match the weather and conditions. Children that do not have appropriate clothing will not be permitted to take part in Forest School Sessions.

Autumn

Warm waterproof coat with a hood.
Hooded top / fleece
Long sleeved top
Vest or under layer
Full length trousers
Sturdy walking boots or wellies
Warm socks and a spare pair in case they get wet
Waterproof trousers _ (these can be provided by the school)

Winter

As above plus
Hat, gloves and scarf.

Spring

Long sleeved T-shirt or top
Long trousers
Fleece or hooded top

Water proof jacket (in wet weather)
Water proof trousers (in wet weather)
Socks
Trainers, shoes or Wellington boots.

Summer

As above and
Sunhat
Sunglasses (if required.)

Bad Weather Procedures

Forest School will not take place if the weather conditions are deemed dangerous. For example high winds, thunder storm and periods of extreme cold. The Forest School Leader will check local weather reports to make judgments about the expected conditions and the final decision as to whether Forest School will take place through discussion with the Head Teacher in accordance with the school's Health and Safety Policy. If the decision is taken not to go into the Forest we may use an area away from the wind if it is too windy

or in extreme cold or thunderstorms we will do activities related to Forest School inside. When the weather is very wet we will ensure a shelter is built quickly to provide a shelter for belongings and the children.

Beaumont School Forest School Consent Form

Please circle forms as appropriate

Name of Child:

I agree/do not agree to my child taking part in Beaumont School Forest School Sessions. I understand my child will need to bring their own wellington boots, waterproof coat and waterproof trousers. I understand that my child may, at an appropriate level, have opportunities to work with hand tools and small fires through the course of their Forest School work.

Photographs/ Video Recordings

I give permission/ do not give permission for my child to be photographed whilst at Forest School and for these to be used in the child's achievement books, records, for press releases or publications and for advertising purposes.

Transport

I give / do not give permission for my child / children to be transported by Forest School in an emergency medical situation.

Sun Cream

I give / do not give permission for my child to have sun cream applied, when necessary

Medical Information

I confirm that the medical information I have supplied to the school is fully up to date.

Insect stings

As an additional precaution, we are required to ask you in more detail about allergies and insect stings.

My child has never been stung by a wasp / bee yes / no

My child has been stung by a wasp / bee and made a normal recovery yes / no

My child has been stung by a wasp / bee and had an allergic reaction yes / no

If you circled yes on the last statement we will get in touch with you to get further details.

Allergies

My child has the following food allergy/allergies (please include details of any medication):

Dietary Requirements

My child does / does not have any specific dietary. Please write details below:

Data Protection

All information provided is covered by the Data Protection Act 1998 and is strictly confidential. I understand and agree to the above being held by Forest School and Capel Pre-School

Please sign to show agreement. _____