



Etchells Forest School Handbook



Nurturing through Nature

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What is Forest School?

Forest School originated in Scandinavia where there is a strong belief that nature, movement and play are critical for children's learning, development and overall wellbeing. The philosophy of Forest School is to provide young children with an education which develops respect for the natural world and encourages responsibility for nature and conservation throughout their lives.

Forest School was introduced to the UK in 1995 when a group of lecturers and nursery nurses from Bridgewater College in Somerset visited a Danish Forest School. During their visit they observed children exploring their environment independently, and as a result developed into confident, self-directed learners who developed respect for the natural world around them. On their return to the UK, these practitioners from Bridgewater Hall developed their own programme based on the Danish model they had seen. Forest School practice has continued to grow in popularity and is embedded nationwide within a variety of settings.

The Six Key Principles which define Forest School:

- ❖ **Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaption, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest school.**
- ❖ **Forest School takes place in a natural environment to support the development of the relationship between the learner and the natural world.**
- ❖ **Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.**
- ❖ **Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.**
- ❖ **Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.**
- ❖ **Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.**

A full comprehensive list of Forest School principles and practices can be found on the Forest School Association's website: <https://forestschoollassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice/>

Our Aims & The Role of the Forest School Leader

Through engaging, motivating and achievable tasks on our well-developed site we aim to incorporate play, natural resources, full sized tools and fire throughout the seasons to help develop:

- ❖ Respect for ourselves, each other and the natural environment
- ❖ Self-awareness & self-regulation
- ❖ Intrinsic motivation
- ❖ Empathy
- ❖ Physical development – Gross and fine motor skills, balance and strength
- ❖ Social and communication skills – ensuring all children have a voice
- ❖ Independence
- ❖ Self-esteem and confidence – developing a growth mindset
- ❖ To understand, take and handle measured risks
- ❖ Problem solving, independently and with peers
- ❖ To build positive and trusting relationships with peers and adults
- ❖ To build positive, supportive communities



Mrs Plumb is our Forest School Lead. She is fully trained to Level 3 and facilitates and observes learning rather than directing learning. An accompanying Forest School Teaching Assistant enables children to access new experiences, challenges and take measured, appropriate risks. We use a cycle of observation and planning to support and scaffold the children's learning. This ensures a child led

approach which is fun and unhurried, builds confidence and self-esteem and ensures all children have a voice. Each class has half a term of Forest School each Year. Our Reception classes have three cycles of FS across the year. This long term programme of learning revisits skills in nature, develops an understanding and respect for self, each other and the natural world. Play is central to this ethos. Forest School provides a unique, hands-on learning environment in which the holistic development of the child is at the very centre of practice.



Our Forest School Site

We have been developing our Forest School site within the school grounds since 2017. We are very lucky at Etchells Primary School to have a lot of space and some wonderful mature trees already on site. In 2017 a team was co-ordinated to fully develop the grounds around the full perimeter of our field and with help from governors, PTA and parents. Our Forest School site soon came together.



Our site now has a variety of large, mature, healthy trees as well as recently planted deciduous saplings through the Northern Forest Project with Manchester City of Trees. We have an improved range of flora and fauna now throughout the seasons.

We have two fully covered log circles on site, both of which accommodate full classes. They are at opposite ends of the field so they can be used at the same time by different groups. We have a willow dome, two willow tunnels and two underground tunnels. We have added mounds and dips to the topography to present physical challenge, whilst maintaining the main central area of the field for regular use by the rest of the school. We have a mud kitchen, a den building area, a bug hotel, two areas for slack lining and areas for hammocks.

Within both log circles there is space for green woodworking, a range of tools are used with all year groups, and a progression of skills has been developed for tool use and craft activities throughout the school. A central fire square is located in each log circle for the safe siting and delivery of fire lighting and fire sessions, which includes making campfire snacks. Tools and fire are built in to each year group's block so that every child accesses them. Access to measured risks is one of the basic principles of FS and they are fundamental elements of any true FS programme. These elements require parental consent for children to access them.

A Typical Forest School Session

Children change into their waterproof/outdoor kit in the classroom, wellies go on by the outside door and we head to the log circle as a group. Each session begins with the children sitting in the log circle. The children 'check in' – this usually has a focus on health and wellbeing. This enables the FS Leader to evaluate how the children are feeling emotionally, understand their needs, and address any issues which may inhibit their learning and progress during the session.



They are introduced to the rules and boundaries of Forest School during this circle time, these rules and boundaries are revisited at the beginning of every session. We explore and share ideas about what these rules look like in practice:

- **Look after yourself**
- **Look after each other**
- **Look after the natural world.**

The children are then introduced to the FS activities that have been designed to meet their developmental needs. These will be a mixture of tool use and craft activities. They can choose to engage with the planned in activities or take part in the free choice activities that the site has to offer - mud kitchen, hammocks, exploring the inclines within the setting, den building, slack lining, litter picking, digging areas, tree/maintenance.

The planned in activities are usually linked to the seasons and the children are encouraged to use the natural environment for inspiration. Seasonal craft activities could include Hapa Zome, felting, willow weaving or land art. There is no expectation to access the planned in activities, choice is central to the Forest School ethos and children have choice over the activities they engage in.

Children will always have access to their water bottles during sessions, and will be offered a warm drink and campfire snacks if cooking on the fire. The children 'check out' at the end of the session. This is usually a reflection and comparison to how they felt at the start of the session. It is hoped that the children have felt a positive impact from their time outdoors in the natural environment.

Etchells Forest School Communication Strategy

Stakeholder	Communication Strategy
FSL Mrs Plumb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forwards overviews / planning documents to all teachers at start of block and support TA's. ● Send's out consent letters to all parents prior to their child's Forest School block and communicates through individual class dojo accounts. ● Feeds back reflection and feedback notes, including additional planning documents, to the teaching staff of all classes after every session. ● Posts photos and updates of sessions on all social media platforms. ● Updates and reviews Site & Activity Risk Assessments yearly, as well as Site Development Plan & Environmental Impact Strategy.
Teaching Assistants / Forest School Support Assistants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mondays – Class TA. ● Tuesdays – Mrs Hayward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supports the FSL in line with planning. ● Works alongside the FSL during sessions and contributes to observations and feedback notes for class teachers. ● Communicate with parents and carers at the end of sessions.
Parents/Carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All parents / carers will receive a consent letter prior to the start of their child's block, this must be returned to school signed and dated to enable their child to access sessions with tools and fire. This is a requirement of our insurance policy. ● Consent letters outline essential FS kit for parents and that given the nature of the activities at FS this kit may come home muddy. ● Open dialogue with all parents / carers is encouraged at the end of the day as children go home, or via email and dojo.



Etchells Forest School Policies and Procedures

Forest School Health & Safety Policy

- Full classes attend each Forest School session. Ratio's will be maintained at 1:15 where tools and fire are included in sessions, in line with Risk Assessments and Insurance Policy.
- Higher risk tools will be overseen on a 1:1 basis.
- Each session will be run by a qualified Forest School Leader and a qualified Teaching Assistant to maintain ratios of 1:15, (This does not include SEND or 1:1 TA's).
- The Forest School Leader will always hold an up to date Outdoor First Aid qualification which includes a paediatric element. Where possible the accompanying TA will also hold an update first aid qualification.
- The Forest School Leader will review the risk assessments, environmental impact plan and site development plan every twelve months, and dynamically risk assess the site before every session.
- The FSL will ensure tools are cleaned regularly and fit for purpose before use during sessions.
- Consent Declaration forms must be signed & returned by the main parent / carer before each child accesses the higher risk activities involving tools and fire.
- Emergency procedures will be followed in the event of an emergency on site.
- School behaviour policy will be followed throughout sessions.

Weather

- Forest School sessions will not run if the conditions are deemed dangerous such as high winds. Sessions will be cancelled if any part of the session exceeds wind gusts of Beaufort 7; (wind gusts of 38/40+ mph or above). Sessions will also be cancelled in the event of lightening/thunder storms or during periods of extreme heat/cold.
- Fully covered log circles are in place so that there is a safe, sheltered space that is available on site during wet weather.
- The site will be checked after high winds, storms, ice and snow to ensure it is safe to use.

Clothing

- The consent letter which goes home prior to the beginning of each block informs parents/carers of the need to wear appropriate clothing that will protect them from the elements, this should keep them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes and damage limitation from mud in winter. Clothing should fit appropriately for comfort, and meet any religious requirements.
- Children and parents are encouraged to think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities, and to be aware that they are likely to take some of our mud home with them after a session.

Clothing list:

- Children come to school in black leggings/joggers, school polo shirt & sweatshirt.
- Waterproof trousers
- Waterproof coat, with a hood.
- Warm boots (wellies can be very cold during the winter)
- Warm Socks, and a spare pair
- Gloves, scarves and Woolly hat – Cold weather
- Sun hat and suncream during hot weather.

We work on the principle that “there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing”.

Waste Disposal

- PPE will be used to dispose of any waste which involves bodily fluids. All staff are aware of school regulations for disposing of waste.
- All children are encouraged to tidy a site and remove any waste from the session in line with the sustainability policy. As much waste as possible generated as a result of the session will be distributed in recycle bins.
- Site checks will be conducted at the end of each session to ensure all waste has been disposed of appropriately.
- We build in an ethos of LEAVE NO TRACE as much as we possibly can to site.

Tools Policy

Whilst using hand tools the staff to child ratio is increased and safety rules are followed:

- Health and Safety Policy followed and risk assessment adhered to before tools are used.
- Staff to child ratio of 1:1 for bow saws, bill hooks and knives.
- Tools will only be used in the log circle.
- Tools to be kept in the designated area in the log circle when not in use.
- Children will be given a Tool Talk before using any tools. They will be informed of potential risks, hazards and working methods to minimise risks. Correct behaviour is always modelled from adults.
- Appropriate instruction will be given to everyone using the tools (including supporting adults).
- Inappropriate/unsafe use of the tools will result in the tool being removed and repeated instructions given. Beyond that the tool will be removed from use
- Any accident or near miss will be recorded and evaluated.
- Before each tool is used it will be checked for damage and working order.
- Tools will be counted in and out of the designated store during each session.
- Tools will be cleaned, maintained and checked every half term to ensure they are fit for purpose.

Fire Policy

There is an established fire pit at the centre of each log circle, fire sessions are delivered at the end of each block to share time and campfire snacks together and reflect on the block.

Site:

- A fire resistant canopy, away from nesting birds and known animal habitats.
- Ensure ground is level.
- Free from peat, leaf litter, dry shrubs and flammable substances.
- Ensure no obvious trip hazards – sticks, rocks, holes.
- Four large logs are used to contain the portable, raised fire pit.

Management:

- The fire pit will be located within the centre of the log circle. There should be 1.5m radius between the fire pit and the surrounding log circle. (This is an exclusion zone and should only be entered by designated adult unless children are invited in by the FSL/TA and supervised to support fire prep & fire lighting).
- The fire should not exceed the 1m fire square in the centre.
- Log seats will surround the fire circle at a distance of 1.5m, providing adequate space around the fire.
- Movement around the fire will be controlled and should always take place **outside** the log circle.
- The designated adult/Forest School Leader will manage the fire.
- Only wood will be burnt on the fire, no flammables or plastics.



Personal Protective Equipment

- 10 litres of water in a bucket located in log circle as well as a fire blanket. The water will be deep enough in the bucket to submerge a body part.
- Heat resistant gloves to be worn when managing the fire.
- Long hair/loose tassels tied back.

Extinguishing and Ash Dispersal.

- All fires will be extinguished at the end of each session.
- Water will be poured onto the fire to extinguish.
- Water should be poured on until smoke and steam has ceased. This will then be stirred to ensure all of the ashes are dampened.
- Ash should be scattered and periodically dug in around the site.
- 'Leave no trace' approach adopted.

Procedures for Off Ground Play/Tree Climbing

Off Ground Play - rope swings, hammocks and slack lines.

- The ground around the apparatus will be clear of hazards and checked prior to each session.
- The apparatus will be erected securely by the FSL and checked at the beginning of each session for security and wear and tear.
- Hammocks and slack lines will be no more than 50cm off the ground.
- Safe use for all equipment will be modelled, and safe spectating distances established.

Tree Climbing

- Children will be supervised by a FSL or accompanying adult whenever they are climbing
- FSL will assess the suitability of the tree to be climbed with child – height, size of branches – no branches thinner than their forearm to be climbed, tree health/rotting branches, weather and ground conditions.
- Children are encouraged to have three points of contact with the tree and not to climb higher than their head height.
- FSL to dynamically risk assess the climb with the child as it is happening.

Food Hygiene & Campfire Cooking Policy

During the final session of each block we provide opportunities to prepare and cook snacks around the campfire. High standards of food hygiene and maintained in relation to the purchase, storage, preparation and serving of food on site. At least one FSL will be present on site who holds a Level 2 Certificate in Food Hygiene & Safety, the children will be under the guidance of the FSL. Food allergies will be taken into account when providing campfire snacks.

Hand Hygiene:

- Water, soap and hand sanitiser will be provided for washing hands prior to food preparation.

Food Purchase & Storage:

- All food purchased to be within Best Before Date and stored in the refrigerator if necessary or cupboard to prevent contamination from pests/bacteria.
- All food will be stored in a dry place, cool bag, covered box – it will not be left uncovered.

Food Preparation

- Utensils will be clean and fit for purpose.
- Surfaces will be cleaned with antibacterial wipes.
- All water used for cooking and drinking will be fresh.

Cooking

- FSL with Food Hygiene certificate to oversee cookery of snacks with children.
- Food to be consumed once prepared, no reheating beyond 2 hours.

Waste

- All food waste will be collected and removed at the end of the session.
- A 'Leave No Trace' policy will be applied to fire/campfire snacks sessions.

First Aid Procedures

- FSL to hold an up to date, 2 day, outdoor first aid qualification which includes a paediatric element. First aid qualifications are renewed every three years.
- A school first aid kit is present during every session as well as PPE equipment which includes a full bottle of fresh water, hand sanitiser, antibacterial spray and wipes and paper towels.
- Accidents will be recorded in line with school policy.
- Children with severe allergies will carry their own bags containing epi pens.
- The FSL will carry the school mobile phone during the sessions which is fully charged so that immediate contact is possible with the main office in the event of an emergency.
- In the event of an emergency, the Forest School Leaders will ensure that emergency policy & procedures are followed.

Emergency Procedures

In the event of serious injury, emergency procedures will be followed:

- FSL to stay with casualty, ensure area is safe and begin to administer first aid, phone office/emergency services using school phone.
- TA to gather the rest of the class and relocate them to safe area.
- FSL to stay on site with casualty if needed and ensure they are breathing and safe. Keep talking to them and reassure them.
- TA or additional staff members to attend site to support FSL.
- School emergency procedures to be followed if emergency services need to be called. Monitor casualty until they arrive.

Death or Serious Incident:

- Follow First Aid procedures.
- FSL to Remain with causality. TA to remove others in the group from the setting.
- Inform emergency services and follow school policy.

**All other procedures not present in this FS Handbook will be followed in line with current school policies.*

Sustainability Policy

Forest School aims to educate and inspire the next generation to become custodians of the natural world by fostering a love and respect for nature. We understand that this goes beyond the boundaries of our school and look to run our Forest School in the most sustainable way possible.

Materials and resources

- Wherever possible we use natural resources found on site to make and create with. We do this in a sustainable way to minimise our impact on the site as detailed in our Environmental Impact Plan.
- Additional resources taken onto site are made from natural materials wherever possible.
- We avoid using plastics as much as possible. Where their use cannot be avoided we repurpose existing resources, such as containers, or purchase items made from recycled plastic.
- We make sure all resources not naturally found on site are removed at the end of the session - leave no trace approach.
- We use local suppliers where we can.
- When cooking or providing snacks we try to use seasonal ingredients.

Managing waste

- We produce as little waste as possible from our sessions.
- All rubbish is removed from site at the end of every session
- Litter picking is encouraged and available to access every session to support our 'Look after the natural world' rule. Waste is removed from site at the end of each day.
- Plastic, glass, paper and cardboard waste is recycled.





Information and Consent Letter for Parents/Carers

During the Spring term Mrs Plumb will be delivering Forest School sessions every Monday and Tuesday. We have developed our school field extensively, which provides an ideal environment for us to explore and learn. Forest School Sessions are inclusive and planned to allow all pupils, including SEN, to participate fully.

Forest School is an inspirational concept providing learning opportunities through practical activities in an outdoor environment. Children enjoy the freedom to explore and experience the natural world in all seasons and in all weathers. Forest School embraces an approach of nurturing, focusing on supporting and developing the self-esteem of children. It is an ideal environment for the children to develop innovation, problem solving, risk taking, creativity and teamwork.

Mrs Plumb is a qualified Level 3 Forest School Leader and has an up to date qualification in outdoor first aid. She will be supported on Forest School Sessions with support staff from the school.

Clothing

To allow the pupils to participate fully, the correct clothing is essential for Forest School. All children can come to school dressed in:

- Black leggings or track suit trousers.
- White T Shirt & school sweatshirt.

Please bring:

- Wellingtons/sturdy walking boots
- Waterproof coat and trousers (Waterproof trousers to be worn over the child's own clothes)
- Hat, gloves and thick socks in Autumn/Winter months
- Sun hat and sun cream in Summer

Old clothes are advised as we do not intend to stay clean! Decathlon stock waterproof over trousers and coats at very reasonable prices.

3VC will be the next class to have Forest School, starting on Monday 9th January 2023 and every Monday afternoon until the February half term.

If you have any questions about Forest School, please speak to Mrs Plumb.

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Please return this to school as soon as possible.

Name of Child: _____

I give consent for my son/daughter to participate in Forest School sessions.

Signed: _____

Dated: _____