



# Disley Primary School Forest School Handbook

## **What is Forest School?**

Forest School is a child-centred inspirational learning process, that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. It is a long-term program that supports play, exploration and supported risk taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting.

Forest School has a developmental ethos shared by thousands of trained practitioners around the world, who are constantly developing their learning styles and skills to support new and imaginative learners. Its roots reach back to the open-air culture, friluftsliv, or free air life, seen as a way of life in Scandinavia where Forest School began. It arrived in the UK in 1993 and has grown from strength to strength since then.

The process helps and facilitates more than knowledge-gathering, it helps learners develop socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually. It creates a safe, non-judgemental nurturing environment for learners to try stuff out and take risks. Forest School inspires a deep and meaningful connection to the world and an understanding of how a learner fits within it. Our approach to risk means that learners constantly expand on their abilities by solving real-world issues, building self-belief and resilience. We believe that risk is more than just potential for physical harm, but a more holistic thing, there are risks in everything we do, and we grow by overcoming them. Forest School therefore, helps participants to become, healthy, resilient, creative and independent learners.

There is lots of research out there to support the outcomes of Forest School, but we know that it isn't just the educational outcomes and research that matter, our children love it too!

## **Forest School Activities**

At Disley Primary School we have our own Forest School area, which allows the children to take part in a range of outdoor activities. In the area we have a range of trees, bushes and wild flowers. In addition to this, the children can choose to use our mud kitchen and music area. During each session the children will learn about the trees, wild flowers, animals and seasonal changes. As well as this, they are shown how to use tools safely, such as: hammers, whittling blades and fire lighting flints. We play a range of team games to allow the children to exercise and have fun in the outdoors. The children learn how to make outdoor shelters and then make their own out of natural materials. Natural art and craft are a regular part of Forest School e.g. using clay to make leaf prints.

## **Where is our Forest School area?**

Our area is on the school grounds and we reach it by walking through the staff car park. The gate is closed and we walk around the carpark on the grass verge then enter through a gate. The area is enclosed by a secure fence and doesn't allow access to the public.

### **Our Forest School Guidelines**

Walk within the Forest School Area

Do not put anything in your mouth

Stay within the boundary

Use the respect position when using tools or working near a fire

Do not throw anything

Drag sticks behind you

Care for nature

Ask an adult before you use a tool and follow the tool rules

Always wash hands following a session.

Have FUN!

### **Health and Safety**

The forest school leader is responsible for the safe running of Forest Schools therefore, has a duty of care for the children. However, all adults are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure children are safe. Before a session commences, all staff involved in the sessions have access to activity plans and risk assessments associated with the activities.

#### **Risk assessments**

A site risk assessment (safety sweep) will be carried out before the site is used to ensure that there are no changes to the site which could cause harm. This should be taken with extra caution following high winds and other bad weather. It should be carried out by the forest school leader who will make the decision whether PPE should be worn when carrying out checks. Following the daily site risk assessment, the FS leader will carry out anything that is needed to make the site safe (e.g. remove any hazards, mark off any unsafe areas). At the same time will consider specific circumstances which make it appropriate to cancel a Forest School Session. We will not visit the site if there is a danger of thunder and lightning.

#### **Activity risk assessment**

When planning activities for Forest Schools, any hazards associated with that activity, that are at risk of causing harm, should be considered. These should be recorded on an activity risk assessment with suitable control measures taken to control and minimise the risk. Due to the nature of Forest Schools, the children may come up with a new activity during a session and therefore reasonable steps will be taken to ensure the activity is safe. An activity risk assessment form will be completed ASAP following that session.

## **Clothing requirements**

The children will take part in the session in all weather so they should wear suitable warm clothing on the day they do Forest School. In addition to this they should bring a waterproof jacket, waterproof trousers and wellies. When the weather gets colder a pair of gloves and hat would be great. As well as wellies, children need to have indoor footwear to stop mud coming into the school.

## **Toilet Policy**

Children will be encouraged to use the toilet before beginning a session, firstly to avoid too many trips during the session and to avoid having to take off all the waterproofs again! Adults and children are advised that tool use will be stopped during toilet visits due to the ratio of staff remaining. Should a child need to go to the toilet during a session, they will enter the building next to the reception classroom. If children are able, they will escort themselves to the toilet with an adult watching from the forest school gate. If an adult needs to escort a child, the forest school leader will be informed. If in the rare occasion a child should have a toileting accident on site, then the adult and child will inform the Forest School Leader who will advise adults and children that tool use will be stopped, whilst an adult leaves the site due to the ratio of staff remaining. The adult and child can return to the session when they are ready and advise the FS leader so that a usual session resumes.

## **Headcounts**

At the beginning, during a session and at the end headcounts take place. The number of children and adults participating, can be found at the top of the daily risk assessment where the ratio of adults to children has been calculated for the session. It is the responsibility of all adults to ensure they are aware of the headcount for the session and to be involved in the monitoring of this.

## **Extreme Weather**

Following the Forest Schools ethos of.....‘there is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing!’ Children are advised to dress warmly and provided with waterproofs.

However, there are some occasions where it may not be safe or practical to go ahead with a planned session due to extreme weather;

- In the case of high winds Beaufort Scale 5 or above or a warning issued by the met office online.
- In the case of extreme temperature determined by a met office amber weather warning.
- In the case of extreme cold of below ‘0’ a session will be cancelled if it is near to this, we will ensure children are appropriately dressed, sessions will be made shorter and activities will be planned to ensure children are kept moving.

## **Tool Usage**

Children will not be using tools until the children are ready in every way; emotionally and physically. Specific tool policies are in place for each tool that may be used within Forest Schools. The policies cover specific ratios for tool usage and any PPE required for adults or children whilst using the tools. All tools are initially modelled by the Forest School Leader to children and adults as set in the ratios determined by the tool policy. All Adults participating must receive basic training on the safe use of

## **The Forest School Tool rules:**

- Children are taught these and they are reinforced at the beginning of each session.

- Ask an adult before you take a tool from the tool area.
- You must have a purpose for your tool.
- You must make sure you choose a safe working area with nobody within two arms and a tool distance from you.
- You must wear the correct PPE and sit in a safe tool working position.
- Tools must be returned to the designated tool place after use.

### **Fire Safety Policy**

Fires will only be lit by a Forest School Leader following this safety policy when the children are ready in every way; emotionally and physically.

### **Considerations before deciding to have a fire:**

Wind direction.

No combustible materials nearby/overhanging branches.

Soil type – ensure not too peaty.

### **Safety - clothing and hair:**

No hair/Jewellery dangling – hair tied back.

Heat resistant gloves when fuelling the fire.

### **Safe Sitting:**

Seating should be positioned 1.5m away from fire.

Allow gaps for between seating arrangements for escape routes.

Invite children into the inner circle.

Ensure the area between the seating area and fire pit is free from debris and trip hazards.

Children will be taught they must never cross the inside.

Seating in line of smoke will be avoided.

Children will be taught to turn their heads if smoke is coming in their direction.

### **Safe Management:**

Fires will be lit by the forest school leader and only when the leader is confident the group is able to carry out instructions safely.

Fires will be lit using a fire steel, matches and firelighters can be used but will be stored safely away in a fire proof box.

No flammable liquids will be used to light or accelerate fires.

Never leave the fire unattended.

Have 10L of water available in case of an emergency burn/scald, a fire blanket and a 20 watering can/bowl for extinguishing available.

The fire will be lit in a designated area used only for this purpose. The area will be cleared of dried leaves, wood and porous rocks which might explode if heated.

A fire bowl/pit will be used to prevent the spread of fire on the school site.

#### **Safe Extinguishing:**

Spread out the embers of the fire.

Pour on water gently using a watering can.

Using the back of the hand, check for heat, and then apply further water if necessary.

#### **Emergency:**

In the event of a fire emergency the school's fire policy will take place.

#### **Hygienic Handling of Food Policy**

Children at Forest Schools are taught a strict NO eating rule, unless it is a specific activity led by an adult to prepare and cook food. Initially, when children are ready, they will participate in simple cooking on the fire activities which include; toasting marshmallows or making popcorn. As skills develop, this may include other cooking methods. There is always a staff member present with food hygiene training, when food is being handled and prepared. Allergies and intolerances must also be fully complied with.

Food Preparation, transport and storage;

- Hands will be washed thoroughly and any cuts/grazes covered in the correct manner (blue plaster or ideally gloves) before handling and preparing food.
- Any food needing preparation will be prepared in the school kitchen e.g. bread dough.
- Food will be stored in clean containers and transported in a cool bag to and from the site, with any clean utensils and cooking pans required. The box will remain closed in between use with food covered in bags or boxes; to avoid attracting flies and other insects.
- Raw meats will be stored separately to any other foods.
- All 'use by' dates will be checked on foods before eating.
- Water for cooking will be provided in cleaned sealed storage

#### **Handling, cooking and eating Food;**

- A fresh, clean, bucket of warm soapy water will be available for children to wash their hands before handling food or utensils.
- Children are taught how to cook food safely following the activity risk assessment and fire policy. All food will be checked by an adult to ensure it is fully cooked before eating.
- Children will be asked to sit still around the fire circle or to move to a designated eating area from the fire to keep numbers to a minimum near the fire circle.

Clearing away and cleaning up;

- ALL food not eaten or cooked will be placed in black bin bags and disposed of in the school bin at the end of the session by one of the adults. The 22 area is checked to ensure there no food traces to avoid vermin being attracted to the area.
- ALL utensils and pans will be placed in the cool box and carried away after the session and cleaned in hot soapy water by one of the adults and stored away correctly.

### **Behaviour at Forest School**

Good behaviour is essential for the smooth running of Forest School sessions and for the safety of all. The Forest School behaviour policy works in line with the school's behaviour policy but given the setting, surrounding and difference expectancies from the children during Forest School this is more relaxed and is determined by the Forest School Leader and the dynamic of the group that is participating. Usually a "time out" and discussion is used to address behaviour at Forest School.

Unacceptable behaviour will be dealt with by the class teacher in the first instance. All incidents will be logged. Incidents will be regularly monitored by the Senior Leadership Team.

Sam Emsley KS1 Teacher and Forest School Leader

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