



**Forest school**  
**Long Marston VA Church of**  
**England Primary School**



Forest School Provided by Woodland Walkers, Forest School and Bushcraft

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## What is Forest School?

Forest School takes a holistic approach to the development of participants, fostering a deeper relationship and understanding between the learner and the natural world, encouraging respect and a sense of responsibility for the planet we all live on.

It provides a nurturing environment, forming a community of trust and belonging where each individual is important. The young people decide how to participate, setting their own goals and challenging themselves while working towards achievable tasks. In this way it encourages the ability to recognise and manage risk as well as helping to create positive attitudes towards learning while allowing the participants the chance to discover their own strengths.

The ethos of Forest School is based on a fundamental respect for young people, recognising that everyone has the capacity to learn, while nurturing their curiosity for the world around them. Using the natural environment is the perfect classroom for this. The dynamic environment and changeable seasons provide a countless number of resources allowing for individual expression and use, limited only by the young person's imagination. Being outside is also very calming, allowing us to approach difficult situations and heightened levels of anxiety in a different way.

All children have a right and natural need to play, this is how they learn to deal with the world, understand emotions, build resilience to cope with challenging situations, understand risk and bond with peers. Forest School uses this to help build self-confidence and promote wellbeing, helping each young person to realise, we all have strengths that enable us to overcome difficulties as both individuals and as a group. This approach is extremely important to the Forest School ethos, it allows participants to relax, talk and interact in often a very different way to how they might in a classroom; strengthening bonds with both their peers and teachers.



## Forest School Principles

**Principle 1: 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, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.**

- Forest School takes place regularly, ideally at least every other week, with the same group of learners, over an extended period of time, if practicable encompassing the seasons.
- A Forest School programme has a structure which is based on the observations and collaborative work between learners and practitioners. This structure should clearly demonstrate progression of learning.
- The initial sessions of any programme establish physical and behavioural boundaries as well as making initial observations on which to base future programme development.

**Principle 2: Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.**

- Whilst woodland is the ideal environment for Forest School, many other sites, some with only a few trees, are able to support good Forest School practice.
- The woodland is ideally suited to match the needs of the programme and the learners, providing them with the space and environment in which to explore and discover.
- A Forest School programme constantly monitors its ecological impact and works within a sustainable site management plan agreed between the landowner/ manager, the forest school practitioner and the learners.
- Forest School aims to foster a relationship with nature through regular personal experiences in order to develop long-term, environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices in staff, learners and the wider community.
- Forest School uses natural resources for inspiration, to enable ideas and to encourage intrinsic motivation.

**Principle 3: Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.**

- Where appropriate, the Forest School leader will aim to link experiences at Forest School to home, work and /or school education
- Forest School programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and spiritual aspects of the learner.

**Principle 4: Forest School offers children the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and themselves.**

- Forest School opportunities are designed to build on an individual's innate motivation, positive attitudes and/or interests.
- Forest School uses tools and fires only where deemed appropriate to the learners, and dependent on completion of a baseline risk assessment.
- Any Forest School experience follows a Risk–Benefit process managed jointly by the practitioner and learner that is tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.

**Principle 5: Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.**

- Forest School is led by qualified Forest School practitioners, who are required to hold a minimum of an accredited Level 3 Forest School qualification.
- There is a high ratio of practitioner/adults to learners.
- Practitioners and adults regularly helping at Forest School are subject to relevant checks into their suitability to have prolonged contact with children, young people and vulnerable people.
- Practitioners need to hold an up-to-date first aid qualification, which includes paediatric (if appropriate) and outdoor elements.
- Forest School is backed by relevant working documents, which contain all the policies and procedures required for running Forest School and which establish the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers.
- The Forest School leader is a reflective practitioner and sees themselves, therefore, as a learner too.

### **Principle 6: Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community of development and learning.**

- A learner-centred pedagogical approach is employed by Forest School that is responsive to the needs and interests of learners.
  - The Practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote during their programmes through careful learning and development at Forest School.
  - Forest School provides a stimulus for all learning preferences and dispositions.
  - Reflective practice is a feature of each session to ensure learners and practitioners can understand their achievements, develop emotional intelligence and plan for the future.
  - Practitioner observation is an important element of Forest School pedagogy. Observations feed into 'scaffolding' and tailoring experiences to learning and development at Forest School





# Forest School at Long Marston VA Church of England Primary School

Forest School works very well alongside a school environment, giving young people a chance to take a break from the classroom and enjoy the benefits of being outdoors, while still enabling good learning.

Leaders bring to sessions a range of items termed “loose parts”, these items are open ended in nature and have a variety of uses. This enables Forest School to provide a huge variety of potential tasks, with freedom of choice being key to allowing young people to follow their own interests and develop a love of learning, while coming up with creative ideas and solutions.

Forest School approaches young people from a Holistic point of view, looking at things such as resilience, participation and confidence, it aims to boost young people, enabling them to perform better in class, understand friendships and that failure is an opportunity to learn and improve. Many activities will also have a relevance to the national curriculum covering Maths, English and Science, enabling things that happen out in the woods to become a lightbulb moment for a young person struggling in class.

## Challenging

### Building Structures

- Gross motor skills
- Physical activity
- Teamwork
- Working with weights
- Supported risk awareness
- Estimating size
- Completing challenges
- Working with Ropes
- Resilience



## Teamwork



# Discovery



## Identification and Exploration

- Curiosity
- Language
- Discovery
- Getting dirty
- Inspiration
- Awe and wonder in nature and the outdoors
- Learn about woodlands habitats



# Story time

## Fun and Games

- Stories and re-enactments
- Forest school games
- Imagination
- Creativity
- Resilience
- Listening
- Observation
- Language
- Physical activity





# Perseverance



## Crafts and tool skills

- Imagination
- Creativity
- Patience
- Perseverance
- Resilience
- Using natural materials
- Fine motor skills
- Responsibility
- Learn Safe tool use
- Learn about and use fires
- Cooking

# Resilience



# Creativity



# Imagination



## Freedom to choose

- Play
- Explore
- Freedom of choice
- Interact with nature
- Find an interest

# Time to Just be...

As you can see above, Forest school has many different parts to it and sessions can go many ways; this is due to the fact that young people want to play. Forest school uses that natural urge all young people have to play and directs it into learning skills that are fun because it's something they have chosen to do. The woodland itself inspires some kind of emotion in most people, this almost on its own triggers an imaginative response, allowing some young people to create and do things that are often amazing. This could be building a den, a swing, creating a piece of art or finding an insect, young people love to explore, find new things, and to create. Given the freedom and time to just be, young people will teach themselves.



## Assessment for/of learning, recording and reporting

For Forest School to provide a successful learning environment and ensure good practice is maintained, it is important to make observations and continually evaluate the many different activities the children undertake.

During all sessions, evidence will be gathered looking at the following criteria:

- Self-esteem/ confidence
- Overall behaviour
- Relationships
- Independence
- Risk awareness
- Communication skills and language
- Curiosity
- Creativity and imagination
- Physical ability
- Practical skills
- Participation
- Other general observations

Observations will be recorded using notes and photographs during the session.

At the end of each session the Forest School leader will make notes, reflecting on the previous session, using the observations made in order to plan the next, taking into consideration the learners' interests in order to develop their skills and learning further.





## Rules of Forest School

Forest School aims to enable children to create the rules that they will work within during a session, we call these group agreements and they may change or have new rules added over a period of time. However, some rules are needed in order to ensure safety therefore we do have some rules that will always be in place. These basic rules as well as any group agreements will be discussed with the children during their first session, with a recap at the beginning of a session when needed, to ensure their safety at Forest School.

- Stay within the set boundaries
- Must respond to the “1-2-3 where are you” game (used mainly with younger groups)
- If “sticky feet” is called, everyone should form up at the Forest School leader.
- If “Fire Circle” is called, everyone must return to the fire circle immediately
- If whistle is blown 3 times, all Activities must stop immediately and form up at the evacuation point
- No pick, no lick – nothing goes in your mouth
- Do not enter the fire circle without permission.
- An adult must give permission and be present to climb a tree (this is considered a 1:1 activity)
- Permission is needed from an adult before any tools may be used (Sharp tools are stored in a locked box)
- Rules for tool use and specific activities must be followed, see Practical skills handbook
- Do not intentionally damage trees, plants, habitats, animals or insects, (logs covered in moss are not to be used, other than to explore)
- No throwing items randomly around the site
- Do not tie ropes or cord around yourself or others, unless given permission to do a task by the forest school leader and the Knots have been checked
- Long sticks should be dragged, or used like a walking stick. They should not be pointing in front of someone
- Always wash hands prior to eating snacks and at the end of the session
- Have FUN!

The rules above are set to ensure safety for all participants at Forest school. It is important that all attending adults help and support the children to understand and stick to the rules. Not doing so can make Forest School a dangerous place, possibly meaning a session will need to be stopped or ended.



## Clothing and personal equipment

Children are encouraged to be active and explore their surroundings during Forest School, no matter the season or weather. To ensure they can do this and enjoy the full potential of Forest School, the correct type of clothing is important. This protects them against the elements, minor injuries such as scrapes and insects or plants that bite and sting. There will also be plenty of opportunity to get dirty, so please do not wear your best cloths.

All year-round general clothing:

- **A sturdy, waterproof pair of walking boots or wellies.** Footwear will get wet; therefore, trainers are not a good option. Wellies are good but not for tree climbing and will need to have an extra layer of socks during cold weather
- **Full length trousers,** Shorts are not suitable for Forest School as they offer no protection to the lower legs.
- **Long sleeved T-shirt, jumper, shirt or blouse.** Long sleeves are a must for Forest School, in order to prevent scrapes, bites and stings.
- **A hat** is not required, but is a good idea all year round to help protect against sun, rain and midges (which can be annoying).
- **Waterproof trousers,** the woods tend to hold moisture for a good while after rain fall or a heavy mist. This means it is highly likely children will get dirty and wet through activities, or the need to sit on wet logs.
- **Waterproof Coat,** this is required throughout the year, but will only be used when needed.
- **Spare pair of socks,** this is in case your child should get wet feet and allows them to change at the end of a session.

During cold and wet weather additional clothing is required. Being cold in anyway is not comfortable and will reduce the enjoyment and learning a child may experience during a session. Cold hands and feet especially, can also become painful.

Cold weather Clothing:

- **A warm, waterproof coat,** preferably with hood
- **Gloves,** preferably waterproof, if your child's hands get cold quickly, please supply these even during other times of the year.
- **Socks,** either a thick warm/thermal pair of socks or wear two pairs.
- **Warm hat.**

## **Donation of old equipment**

If you have any old clothing items, especially waterproof trousers, coats and boots you no longer have a need for, donations of equipment are always greatly appreciated.

Please hand any old unwanted items in to the school Office, thank you.