

Forest School at Palace Wood



Handbook

Contents

What is Forest School?	4
History of Forest School	4
Our Vision and Aims	5
Ethos and Principles	6
Our Rule and Routines	7
Session Structure	7-8
Forest School Leader's Roles and Responsibilities	9
Forest School Assistant's Roles and Responsibilities	10
Children's' Roles and Responsibilities	11
Benefits of Forest School	12
Clothing	13
Weather	13
Conservation	14
Welfare Requirements	15
Toilets	
Hygiene	
Food and Drink	
Equipment	16-17
Leader's emergency bag	
Items kept o the Forest School site	
First Aid kit	
Session Equipment	
Use of Personal Protective Equipment	17
Risk Protocol and Risk Management and Assessment Policy	18
Policies	19-22
Anti-Bullying Policy	
Behaviour Policy	
Complaints Policy	
Confidentiality Policy	
Data Protection and GDPR Policy	

Early Year Foundation Stage Policy
Emergency and Incident Management Policy
Equal Opportunities and Inclusion Policy
Fire Safety Policy
First Aid Policy
Forest School Staffing Policy
Health and Safety Policy
Insurance Policy
Safeguarding and Child Protection
SEND Policy
Tool Use Policy

What is Forest School?

Forest School is an ethos – a way of working with children, young people and adults in an outdoor natural space for an extended period of time. It allows the social and emotional development of learners. It is an inspirational process that offers learners regular opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences. These learning experiences also help to develop communication and practical skills as well as a greater understanding of our environment. It allows children to follow their own interests and develop new skills.

History of Forest School

Although Forest School in the UK may seem a relatively new movement, it is based on a rich heritage of outdoor learning going back at least to the 19th century. Philosophers, naturalists and educators in Europe and the UK such as Wordsworth, Ruskin, Baden Powell, Leslie Paul, Kurt Hahn, Susan Isaacs and the Macmillan sisters all laid the foundations for what is known as Forest School today.

The inspiration for bringing Forest School in it's current form began when nursery practitioners visited Denmark and observed the largely outdoor, child-centred/play-based childcare. They were excited by what they saw and started their own Forest School.

Our Vision and Aims

'Forest School is an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees'. (Forest School Association)

At Palace Wood, through our Forest School sessions, we hope to encourage independent, enthusiastic, creative and resilient learners who develop holistically through a well-planned and interesting child-centred approach. We believe that there is no limit to what our children can achieve and we want to provide them with every opportunity to attempt new challenges and takes risks with confidence. We want our children to be courageous, compassionate, curious and willing to challenge themselves. Forest School will give all children the opportunities to show and develop these values to take into wider society.

The effects of Covid has had an immeasurable impact on our children. With the increasingly tech dependent world we are living in, it is important, now more than ever to get back into nature to achieve balance. As John Burroughs, an America naturalist said, 'I go to nature to be soothed and healed and to have my senses put in tune once more.'

At Palace Wood we are committed to the ethos of Forest School and embedding these alongside the values of our school.

We aim to:

- Fulfil every child's potential by offering high expectations and equal opportunities for all.
- Develop a love of learning that creates independent and confident learners.
- Promote a secure, exciting and fascinating learning environment.
- Promote children's self-esteem.
- Encourage independence.
- Promote positive behaviour to ensure the safe running of Forest School.
- Build resilient and curious learners.
- Give children the opportunity to show courage and challenge themselves.
- Promote and encourage aspiration for all children and equip them with skills for life.

Ethos and Principles

What makes Forest School different to other forms of outdoor education is that we follow the six guiding principles agreed by the UK Forest School community.

1. *Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions.*
At Palace Wood, children will experience Forest School three times a year for a block of 6 weeks each time. This will allow children to experience the programme through all seasons.
2. *Forest School takes part in a natural wooded environment where possible.*
At Palace Wood we are fortunate to have a designated area and small woodland where the children will come. The children will work together to take ownership of the site and will undertake activities to ensure that our site is sustainable for the future.
3. *Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved.*
At Palace Wood, Forest School will be one part of ensuring the development of a 'whole' child. This will encourage their social, emotional and intellectual development and well-being, including: self-esteem, confidence, emotional intelligence, resilience, spiritual development, creativity and independent learning.
4. *Forest School offers learners the opportunities to take supported risks, appropriate to the environment and themselves.*
At Palace Wood we will ensure there is an emphasis on learning through play, giving children the freedom to try things out. The leaders will suggest meaningful activities which nurture the ability to learn through overcoming a risk, challenge or problem. Children may be taught how to safely use a range of tools when they are ready but will also take social and emotional risks such as embracing something new or confronting the fear of looking silly.
5. *Forest School is run by qualified practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practise.*
At Palace Wood our Forest School will be led by Mrs Emmerson and Mrs Cooper who both hold the Level 3 Forest School qualification. They will be supported by Mrs Lembo who holds the Level 2 Forest School qualification.
6. *Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.*
At Palace Wood we will follow a process-based progress rather than a goal-based measure of progress. Both the leader and children will observe, reflect and communicate on their learning to create unique outcomes specific to each learner.

Our rules and routines at Forest School

Expectations of behaviour will be set by the Forest School Leader and discussed with the children in the classroom beforehand, in conjunction with the School's Behaviour Policy.

Children will also help set rules, which will be revisited at every session.

These include:

- 'No pick, no lick, be careful how you carry a stick.'
- Respect for plants, trees and animals
- Staying in view of the base camp at all times
- Staying within the designated areas at all times

When the adult says '1, 2, 3 base camp', the children will respond with 'I'm coming' and make their way back to the base camp area.

Session Structure

Before session

- Check the weather
- Carry out a site risk assessment and act or advise accordingly
- Collect necessary equipment and restock first aid as necessary
- Register the children and assess any needs
- Gather asthma pumps and inhalers

Start of session

- Welcome and reminder of names
- Check the children are wearing the correct clothing and footwear
- Children and adults to carry out a safety check of the site and deal with anything that arises
- Discuss boundaries, rules and guidelines
- Explain the session and the activities on offer

During the session

- Continually assess tools and equipment within the session- correct use, where is it in the area, breakages
- Check if the needs of the children are being met
- Carry out dynamic risk assessments as activities progress and act accordingly
- Monitor the weather and the children to ensure they are wearing the correct clothing
- Monitor activities with tools to ensure correct PPE is being worn and safety procedures are being followed

End of the session

- Take down any structures that have been built
- Collect and count back all equipment
- Extinguish all fires
- Review the session at base camp and provide a reflective activity
- Check for litter and leave the site as we found it
- Dry and clean all equipment and carry out a safety check on it
- Review and evaluate the session
- Make adaptations to risk assessments as necessary

Forest School Leader's Roles and Responsibilities

All adults at Forest School model appropriate behaviour and safe practices, whilst interacting with the children and each other; boundaries are shared, promoting positive reinforcement and choices and consequences discussed.

Prior to the session

- Check the equipment that is being used in a session
- Ensure first aid kit is stocked and available
- Carry out necessary risk assessments
- Carry out a site risk assessment
- Register the children and assess any needs for that session

During the session

- Making clear the aims and activities available in the session
- Ensure there is a good level of challenge for all children
- Ensure that the children are learning about themselves, each other and the environment around them
- Carry out dynamic risk assessments and act accordingly
- Adapt the session and develop activities based on the needs and interests of the children
- Promote the safety and well-being of the children at all times
- Carry a first aid kit and administer first aid as required
- Create a positive learning environment, based on each child's needs
- Encourage good relationships, based on respect of each other
- Promote, honesty, politeness and kindness through example
- Use encouraging language and show appreciation of each child's contributions and effort
- Ensure fair treatment and equality for all attending, regardless of age, gender, ability or race, in line with the school's Equality Policy

At the end of the session

- Review and reflection of the session with the children
- Check, clean and store equipment
- Report any accidents
- Review and evaluate sessions
- Adapt planning for previous sessions
- Leave the site as we found it

Forest School Assistant Roles and Responsibilities

Prior to the session

- Carry out the daily checklist of the site
- Prepare examples of any craft to be made
- Help to gather tools, equipment and resources needed for the session
- Read the session plan

During the session

- Reinforce the aims and activities available in the session
- Help to ensure there is a good level of challenge for all children
- Help to ensure that the children are learning about themselves, each other and the environment around them
- Carry out dynamic risk assessments, act accordingly and pass on to the Forest School leaders to enable risk assessments to be adapted
- Help to promote the safety and well-being of the children at all times
- Help to create a positive learning environment, based on each child's needs
- Encourage good relationships, based on respect of each other
- Promote, honesty, politeness and kindness through example
- Use encouraging language and show appreciation of each child's contributions and effort
- Help to ensure fair treatment and equality for all attending, regardless of age, gender, ability or race, in line with the school's Equality Policy

At the end of the session

- Review and reflection of the session with the children
- Help to check, clean and store equipment
- Feedback to the Forest School leader for successes and next steps
- Leave the site as we found it

Children's roles and responsibilities

Prior to the session

- Ensure I have, with the support of my parents/ carers, the appropriate clothing to suit the time of year

During the session

- Carry out a safety check
- Remind myself of the rules and boundaries of the Forest School
- Listen to the range of activities on offer
- Choose to engage in a range of different activities
- Work as a team
- Listen to advice given and act on it
- Challenge myself to try something new and take risks
- Follow the instructions of the leader
- Return to base camp when asked to
- Take responsibility for the management of an area in the Forest School site
- Take a part in clearing the site at the end of each session
- Learn the range of plants and animals on the site and how we can take care of them
- Reflect on what I have learnt in a session

After the session

- Share my success and learning with other adults

Benefits of Forest School

The benefits of Forest School encourage the holistic development of the child. Research has shown that children can benefit in a multitude of ways ranging from confidence to social, emotional, intellectual, physical and language development (Murray & O'Brien, 2005).

These include:

- Physical development: improve gross and fine motor skills, build stamina, develop coordination and balance.
- Creativity using the natural world around them.
- Independence: children will make choices, negotiate, problem solve, use initiative, take risks, develop resilience and self-regulation
- Work collaboratively to problem solve and discover for themselves. They will build positive relationships with adults and peers.
- Confidence and self-esteem through mastering new skills and being part of the decision-making process.
- Emotional intelligence and resilience: develop communication and language skills, increase empathy, social skills, self-awareness and regulation, tolerance, adaptability and being able to overcome obstacles.
- Spiritual: having a sense of responsibility, understanding the connectivity of our world, understand the importance of leaving no trace, a sense of achievement, feel empowered

Clothing

Part of being outdoors is to experience all seasons and inevitably the changeable British weather! To ensure the children get the most out of each session, appropriate clothing for the weather is provided. This needs to be provided for each session to allow for unexpected weather changes.

- Waterproof trousers and jacket or puddle suit
- Wellies or walking boots
- Long sleeved tops (fleece/ sweatshirt on colder days) and full length trousers in all weathers. This help prevents ticks, stings and bites.
- Sun hat and sun cream for warm days
- Warm hat, gloves (not mittens) and warm under layers (vests, socks, long johns etc.) on colder days.
- Spare pair of clothes (top, trousers, pants, socks, shoes- to be worn into school)

All clothes need to be comfortable, practical and warm. The children will get dirty, old clothes would be a good idea. Children are to come into school in their Forest School clothes but bring their wellies/ walking boots in a separate bag to be changed into just before the session. The change of clothes will only be used if needed after a session.

Weather

It is important for children to experience being outside in different weathers. Forest School sessions will continue to take place during rainy, cold and hot weather so the children need to be appropriately dressed. Forest sessions would only be cancelled during extreme weather, such as high winds, blizzards or thunderstorms, when safety is an issue. We will always monitor the weather. If we know in advance that the weather will be unsafe for Forest School we will plan an alternative outdoor activity at a different part of the school grounds. This may be at another outdoor location on the school site, away from trees and overhead items. It may be necessary to continue Forest School in the classroom where similar activities will be carried out.

Adverse weather conditions

If the wind is stronger than 7 then the area will not be entered.

Clothing will be checked before going out on cold days.

Spare clothing will be carried out and a shelter sheet, such as a parachute will be available.

If the children are getting too cold either warm them up through exercise, shared shelter, or sitting by the fire.

In the case of extreme heat, children will be encouraged to drink plenty of water, wear suitable clothing, seek shelter from the sun when necessary and staff will monitor the situation and end session if necessary.

Conservation

Regular use of the woodland area is bound to cause some damage, however during our forest school sessions the children will be taught and encouraged to think about their responsibility and respect for our woodland area and environment. Activities such as snapping off living branches or pulling up plants shall be prevented with explanations about the consequences to the woodland area. At forest school, we will focus on developing children's empathy and care for the wildlife around them and help them to become aware of the bigger environmental issues that may impact our woodland area directly and the world in which they live in.

- Where possible, and if appropriate, reclaimed, recycled and sustainable resources will be used to maintain and develop our Forest School site.
- Different year groups will be responsible for taking care of different areas of the Forest School area and will take part in coppicing, cutting back, weeding, planting at different times throughout the year.
- The aim of Forest School is to always leave no trace so we will encourage this of the children as they undertake their activities.
- Forest School should be a sustainable programme, replacing anything we use and take from the woodland. The children will be a part of ensuring that our programme is a sustainable one for the future.

Welfare Requirements

Toilets

Children will be encouraged to use their closest classroom toilets before moving to the Forest School area.

Throughout the session the children will be able to use toilets in the Acorns building.

Hygiene

Children will be taught no pick, no lick and reminded not to eat anything that we find in the area, unless it is specifically planned to do so.

Before the children prepare, cook and eat food cooked on the fire, hand washing will happen.

On leaving the session, children will wash their hands.

Food and drink

Children will bring their water bottles with them to the Forest School session and they will be stored in a trolley.

During a morning session, children will bring a snack with them. If working with Key Stage 1, we will make available the free fruit.

At times, children may help prepare and cook food on the fire. Allergies will have been checked in advance and food prepared will accommodate these.

Equipment

We are very fortunate to have a storage space very close to the Forest School site where all our equipment will be kept. At the start of each session, the equipment needed for that session will be transported to the site itself so it is ready and available to use. If needed, throughout a session, led by the interests of the children, other equipment can be accessed. For the safety of all taking part in forest school, the EYFS outdoor area runs alongside the Forest School area so we will have these adults available if needed.

Leader' emergency bag.

- First aid kit
- Emergency medication
- Children's medication e.g. asthma pumps
- Mobile phone
- Emergency life blanket
- Antiseptic hand gel

Items kept on the Forest School site.

- Extra waterproofs
- Spare wellies
- Accident and emergency procedures
- Relevant site and risk assessments

First aid kit.

- Gloves
- Bandages
- Plasters
- Dressings
- Scissors
- Antiseptic wipes
- Burns kit (burns gel/ burns dressing)
- Tick remover

Session equipment.

Each session will require different equipment depending on the activities planned. All equipment will be easily accessible if the session takes another direction. The equipment will be monitored by adults and will be locked away at the end of each session. Equipment will be checked and cleaned after each session to ensure it is safe to use.

Fire kit.

- Fire blanket
- Fire gloves
- Fire lighting strikers
- Cotton wool

- Vaseline

Other equipment.

- Water
- Bucket
- Protective gloves
- Scissors
- Wool
- String
- Canvas/ fabric
- Tarpaulin
- Kelly kettle
- Tools: hand drills, bow saws, hammers, tent pegs, potato peelers, secateurs, loppers, hatchets, pam drills, sheath knives, bill hook knives
- Rope
- Cooking equipment
- Steel saucepans
- Cooking pot
- Sieve
- Grill
- Cutlery
- Chopping boards
- Knives
- Wooden spoons
- Ladles
- Mugs

Use of Personal Protective Equipment

When using tools and lighting fires it is important to keep safe and for children to learn how to keep themselves safe. The Forest School leader will ensure the appropriate safety equipment is available for specific activities and will model how to use it.

Safety equipment will include:

Gloves

Fire safety equipment: fire gloves, fire blanket, bucket of water

First aid kit

Children will also attend Forest School wearing appropriate clothing, which will be checked prior to the session.

Risk Protocol

Through Forest School we will encourage our children, in a safe and structured way, to take risks. Children learn by their mistakes and need to have the freedom to make mistakes in comfortable and safe environment. Children should be encouraged to have a go at activities when appropriate, to be able to take a risk and learn from their experiences.

We have a legal duty to carry out risk assessments. These will allow risks and harms to be identified and actions taken to minimise so that the children do not miss out on adventurous activities. We do not risk to be eliminated from children's lives or life will become less interesting and they may go and find fun elsewhere. Risk benefits will also be considered. The Forest School leaders will think about what the children can gain from an activity and this may include things like increased confidence, sense of achievement, freedom, physical development, contact with nature, trying out an activity that is usually seen as adult, social skills, fine motor skills/sharing skills.

As well as the Forest School leaders carrying out risk assessments, children also need to learn how to assess risks and be responsible for their own safety. Children will be involved in discussing activities and help to highlight what the risks are and how these can be reduced. They will also help to identify what fun elements there are to the activity and other benefits to completing an activity, that will outweigh the risks.

Risk Management and Assessment Policy

At Forest School we aim to encourage independent, enthusiastic, creative and resilient learners who develop holistically through a well-planned and interesting child-centred approach. The children will be exposed to and experience many different activities using the Forest School area, and at times the wider school site. They will also be taught how to use different tools and take risks.

Each tool used and activity undertaken will be risk assessed before it is carried out. These will be of written form and included in the Forest School handbook. As the activity is taking place, dynamic risk assessments will be happening to ensure the safety and progress of the children and changes will be made as needed in the moment. Following a session, risk assessments will be reviewed and adapted in light of things that may have arisen in the session. Both Forest School leaders will be responsible for ensuring the correct assessments are carried out and reviewed following each activity or tool use.

Before each session a site and daily risk assessment will take place to ensure the site is safe to use. Adaptations to the site will be made where needed and if it is not possible to make an area of the site safe to use before the children arrive then children will be unable to use that area.

Alongside each risk assessment, the Forest School leaders will consider the risk benefit. This allows the ethos and vision of Forest School to be carried out so that children experience risk in a timely and appropriate manner.

Policies and protocols

As part of Palace Wood, the Forest School is subject to the policies of the school particularly:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Health and safety policy
- Confidentiality policy.
- Equality and diversity policy
- Behaviour policy

Anti-Bullying Policy

The Forest School will follow the school's policy for anti-bullying and will ensure that the Forest School follows the ethos of Palace Wood surrounding anti bullying.

Behaviour

The Forest School will follow the school's policy for behaviour with a strong focus on positive behaviour. The vision of Palace Wood (**G**ive it our best, **R**espect one another, **O**vercome obstacles, **W**ork together) aligns well with the ethos of 'Forest School' and so the two can work well together. Some aspects of the behaviour policy will not be followed in the Forest School as it is not practically possible. We will not use marble jars or recognition boards but will give out house points and mention children who are displaying the school rules and choosing the right behaviour. Rather than using hands up to gain the children's attention we will call 1, 2, 3 where are you? This signal will indicate to the children that they must stop what they are doing and return to base camp. Children will be celebrated on social media and in the weekly newsletter. The tiered system will be followed for behaviour that does not meet the school rules and communication will take place between the Forest School leader and the class teacher to ensure sanctions are followed up. Assessment of behaviour will feed into decisions about the readiness of children for completing different activities and use of tools.

Complaints Policy

Palace Wood Forest School will follow the school's complaints policy.

Confidentiality Policy

Palace Wood Forest School will follow the school's confidentiality policy.

Data Protection and GDPR Policy

Palace Wood Forest School will follow the school's data protection and GDPR policy.

Early Years Foundation Stage Policy

The Forest School will follow the school's policy for the Early Years Foundation Stage and will ensure that where possible we incorporate relevant aspects of the Early Years curriculum when the children take part in Forest School.

Emergency and Incident Management Policy

When dealing with an emergency situation the Forest School will follow usual school procedure.

During the accident/ emergency

- Keep calm and ensure the safety of the rest of the group
- Attend to the casualty
- Contact the emergency services and inform the school office
- Ensure an adult from the group accompanies any hospital/ doctor visit
- Make arrangement for the casualty to continue the session or return home

Information to give to Emergency Services

- Your name
- Nature and time of accident
- Location
- Details of individuals involved
- Action taken so far

After the Accident/ Emergency

- Tell parents of the incident
- Do not touch the scene, especially if protective equipment is involved
- Do not discuss legal liability
- All leaders to write down all the relevant details and keep a record of witnesses
- Record the accident/ incident following school procedure

Equal Opportunities and Inclusion

The Forest School will follow the school's policies for both Equality and Inclusion. Forest School staff will ensure the Forest School allows equal opportunities and inclusion for all through well planned, structured and supported activities based on the needs and interests of a group and individuals within a group.

Fire Safety Policy

See the attached fire safety policy.

First Aid Policy

The Forest School will follow the school's policy for First Aid. The Forest School leaders will have an outdoor first aid qualification and will always have a first aid kit in the Forest School area.

Forest School Staffing Policy

Palace Wood Forest School will be led by 2 level 3 trained Forest School leaders.

They will undertake relevant training and keep up to date with policy changes and good practise changes.

They will hold an up to date Outdoor First Aid qualification.

The Forest School leaders will ensure the Forest School is planned and resourced well, to achieve it's aims. They will ensure the appropriate risk assessments and benefits are completed so that the children can grow and learn in a safe environment. They will take responsibility for the management of the Forest School site, alongside the children, and the safe storing of all tools.

The Forest School leaders will be assisted by a Forest School teaching assistant who is Level 2 trained.

This will be reviewed yearly to check the responsibilities and training of the leaders.

Health and Safety Policy

Palace Wood Forest School will follow the school's Health and Safety policy but these measures are additional, relating directly to Forest School sessions.

- The person in charge is always the Forest School leader.
- The Forest School leader has overall duty of care of the children but all adults take reasonable steps to ensure children are safe.
- All adults must read the handbook and appropriate risk assessments.
- The Forest School staff must carry a first aid kit and appropriate medicines for specific children.
- The Forest School leader will always carry a mobile phone in case of emergency.
- The Forest School leader will review the risk assessments before every Forest School session.

Insurance Policy

The Forest School is covered by the Kent County Council School's insurance policy.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

The Forest School will follow the school's policy for safeguarding and child protection. All Forest School staff will have a yearly update for safeguarding and will ensure the current safeguarding policy is readily available for anyone who wishes to see it.

SEND Policy

The Forest School will follow the school's policy for SEND and will ensure that FS leaders know of any children with SEN. Planning will ensure that the needs of these children are met so that these children can have equal access to all Forest School activities.

Tool Use Policy

See the attached tool use policy.