



Forest-Schools Curriculum Overview

Forest-Schools sits in a unique place within the school timetable. Being a child led, responsive programme, it does not follow a structured, progressive system in the same way that a traditional curriculum subject would. Indeed, it would be counterproductive to impose such a traditional structure on it; it is an experience more akin to a therapeutic intervention than a traditional subject. The progress of a session, or series of sessions, will depend on the moods and enthusiasms of the children involved, chance events and encounters during the session, and the maturity and age of the children. In addition, children should not be expected or forced to participate in a given activity, or given a level of expectation of what they will achieve.

In practical terms, this would mean that a child would not be told that they will be learning to climb trees, or told they have to climb to a given height. This imposes a definition of success, and subsequently the chance of failure. A child presented with the opportunity of tree climbing may choose to join in, or to pursue another interest. Anything they achieve will be their choice and their own achievement, and the more powerful and valuable experience for that.

That said, the types of experiences made available for the children, the broad expectations of how they may engage and behave on sessions and the amount of independence and responsibility given to the children by staff will alter and develop as they progress through the school; a year one pupil will experience Forest-Schools sessions in a different way to a year six pupil, albeit sharing a similar fundamental experience. This overview seeks to establish a broad framework for the delivery of Forest Schools, and ensure that the children gain full benefit from the sessions.

The following is taken from the Forest-Schools Association website and gives an overview of the aims of Forest School, and how it should be implemented.

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 is a specialised learning approach that sits within and compliments the wider context of outdoor and woodland education.

The ethos is shared by thousands of trained practitioners across the UK and beyond. Its roots reach back to early years pioneers in outdoor learning and across the sea to Scandinavia.

Principles of Forest School

These principles were first articulated by the Forest School Community in 2002. They were reviewed in 2011 and sent out for a 5-month consultation to Forest School networks and practitioners in all UK nations. They were published on the Institute for Outdoor Learning Forest School SIG page in Feb 2012, and in the minutes of the GB trainers' network.

- *FS is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than a one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.*
- *FS takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.*
- *FS uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.*
- *FS aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.*
- *FS offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.*
- *FS is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.*

For a more detailed overview of the ethos and implementation of Forest-Schools, see the Forest-Schools Handbook, which is saved in the School Shared Drive.

Implementing Forest-Schools within Littledown

As a specialist provision for children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, Littledown has a number of challenges and considerations in delivering Forest Schools, especially when considering more inherently risky activities such as fire-lighting or the use of tools. Thus, sessions are split between the school site, and offsite locations, primarily Black Park in Slough. The school site is used predominantly for more risky activities and 'woodcraft' style activities, which are more safely delivered in a more controlled

environment. The balance between these sessions will alter as the age of the children increases, with older children more able to access such sessions. There may also be one off sessions at other sites, for example Paccar Scout Camp in Chalfont.

Provision for pupils whose behaviour makes it unsafe for them to be offsite is made to ensure all pupils have some experience of the natural world. This may include project work around wildlife, creative/art activities, looking for wildlife on the school site or growing plants.

Each class will experience one afternoon of Forest-Schools sessions each week, with this taking place in all seasons, regardless of weather, which will have a natural impact on the type of experiences and activities they will experience, whilst also allowing them to experience the natural world in different seasons and weathers.

The following tables break the sessions down into either two or three groupings, years 1 and 2, years 3 and 4 and years 5 and 6 being grouped together. Expectations, tools and skills are cumulative; i.e. a child in year six would be fulfilling the expectations of younger year groups.

Age Group	Independence and boundaries	Interaction with Nature	Group Work and interaction	Adult Support
Year 1+2	Children in these year groups would be expected to work within shortened boundaries, typically staying within adult sight, or even closer, perhaps holding hands if less confident.	Children would typically be curious about the world around them, but require adult mediation to explore and understand, or adult questioning or planning to ensure they get the best outcomes.	Children would be expected to work together, but groups may be smaller (pairs or threes) and often include adults, or very close adult support.	Adults would be expected to lead sessions (albeit responding to suggestions from the children) and provide very direct support and reassurance.
Year 3+4	Children should be becoming more independent, choosing the appropriate distances to be from adults, although adults should still monitor and discuss to ensure boundaries are appropriate.	Children should be developing some knowledge of the animals and plants around them, identifying the more common ones by sight and making comments and predictions about where they may be and why.	Children should be able to work together and discuss and negotiate together to achieve tasks; they may be more independent in doing so, but require adult support and intervention to achieve positive outcomes.	Adult support should be more low key, with activities being more child led, and adults using questioning, or advice to support the children and guide their ideas
Year 5+6	Children should be confident and able to make choices and plan activities for	Children should be confidently able to identify common woodland species	Children should be able to collaborate and work together,	Activities should, ideally, be entirely child led, with adults providing low key,

	<p>themselves – they should effectively choose their own boundaries, choosing the appropriate distances to be from the adults dependent on terrain and activities. Children would also be expected to have more control and choice over clothing – e.g. choosing trainers over wellies if wanting to climb*</p>	<p>and talk about the relationships between them and their habitats.</p>	<p>negotiating with each other and responding positively to others ideas. Groups should be more fluid and alter according to the activities undertaken.</p>	<p>minimal support as needed. Children should be confident in seeking advice and support when needed.</p>
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**Not at the expense of safety – e.g. no child would be allowed on a winter session without coats*

Age Group	Possible Activities Onsite	Possible Activities Offsite
Year 1+2+3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult led and supported campfire • Use of simple tools, such as potato peelers to create toasting sticks • Cooking of simple foods • Making of “Tree Cookie” medals • Assisting adults with splitting and cutting of firewood • Lighting small fires, using flint and steel, to help start a communal fire • Basic knot tying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of woodlands • Viewing and feeding of animals • Tracking and searching for wildlife • Scavenger hunts • Assisting adults in building rope swings • Building simple dens • Tree climbing • Paddling (both in lake and in mud!) • Assisting leader to make hot chocolate with Kelly Kettle • Gathering natural materials (e.g. firewood, resources for art) • Map reading/orienteering type activities (including treasure hunts) • Pond dipping
Year 4+5+6	<p><i>Older pupils would typically do all of the above activities, but with changes in the level of independence and responsibility – e.g. lighting the Kelly Kettle for hot chocolate without help, rather than assisting or making a rope swing with the adult supervising to ensure it is safe, rather than leading the building. In addition, some more technical activities, listed below, will be reserved for older children.</i></p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building more complex objects – e.g. making wooden mallets or animals • Shelter building with tarpaulins on site • Building different forms or fire, or building and controlling individual fires • Cooking more complex items, or using a cooking stove • Use of more complex tools, independent/ chosen tool use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More specialised work with wildlife – e.g. twig traps to track animals, or photography • Creation of more complex and advanced shelters, or group shelters • Creation of activities for younger children – eg making a treasure hunt trail • Fishing trip • Visiting more remote locations – eg Paccar Camp – for longer periods of time • Using tools on offsite sessions
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The above activities represent a sample of the typical activities that could be used or experienced and is by no means definitive

Trust

At the heart of Forest-Schools sessions is the development and maintenance of trust. It is down to the individual to leader to decide how they interpret and apply the above; all new series of sessions should begin with low risk, simple activities and build up to more risky or advanced sessions as the trust between the staff and children is established. This may mean that some groups will not experience the same activities as other groups of the same age, dependent on their maturity, engagement and interests, which is in line with the personalised nature of Forest-Schools.

Trust should be explicitly and regularly discussed with the children as part of all sessions.