



Overstone Combined School

Forest School Policy

Reviewed – September 2024

To be reviewed – September 2026

An introduction to Forest School

Forest school has been developed from the outdoor based education system in Scandinavia. It is all about children building self-esteem, independence, and skills through exploring the natural world, thus countering the modern trend for children to have little contact with the natural world during their education and free play. Essentially, forest school is an outdoor classroom. The ethos of forest school allows learners the time and space to develop skills, interests and understanding through practical, 'real life' experiences.

At Overstone, we aim to fulfil the six principles of forest school, as agreed by the forest school community in 2011. Quality forest school is delivery which holds to all six key principles that shape and govern the forest school ethos. There are many forms of outdoor education, and all have enormous value, however, forest school is unique in its reach, delivery, and effect. These six principles are:

- Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than one-off or infrequent visits, the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.
- Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a lifelong relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being development and learning.
- Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all 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.

Session Organisation

Forest School sessions take place throughout the week. Each session lasts 2 hours and 30 minutes. The AM sessions run from 9:30am – 11.45am whilst the afternoon sessions run from 1.00pm – 3:15pm.

The sessions are run from Pre-School to Year 4 and every child is welcome at forest school. Children with additional needs will be given the additional support they need to access Forest School in a personalise way, if necessary.

Play

Within forest school, play is a significant part of participants experience. Play is a process which is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. Through thorough planning and preparation, children are provided with experiences which support, encourage, and nurture a variety of play types. When establishing the forest school site and preparing it for sessions, leaders must ensure there are ample opportunity for children to play and explore the space at their own pace. When carrying out observations, facilitators will identify the different types of play happening so that adaptations can be made to the Forest School offering to extend play and ignite new play. The play types are inclusive of and not limited to the following: symbolic, socio-dramatic, social, creative, dramatic, explorative, imaginative, locomotor and skilful play.

Planning and Observation

Planning is an integral part of the forest school facilitation. Although sessions are primarily participant-led, it is important to have an overview of the experience's facilitators will provide and how they will execute the provision. Each session will follow the long-term plan and the following aspects will have been considered:

- Cohort information
- Staffing information
- Numbers and ratio
- Site check
- Weather check
- Activity plans for the session

Experience Procedures

Entering forest school	We will enter forest school respectfully and know that when at forest school specific expectations are in place. We will explore, investigate, learn, and play in a manner that will not damage our forest school environment. We understand that we share our forest school with plants and animals and that when we are in our forest school we are sharing the environment with them.
Boundaries	During each session, it is made clear to children that they must stay inside the specific area during forest school sessions. Boundaries are in place from the planters to the Christmas trees, which the children are introduced to and are regularly reminded of. Children are given the freedom to explore independently and move around forest school freely, although facilitators must be aware of where children are throughout the session. The forest school leader will agree a call and response tactic with the group when they need to children altogether.
Eating and drinking	Nil by mouth policy for anything found in forest school, unless this activity has been specifically planned for during the session (e.g. blackberry picking, foraging to cook). Children must be reminded not to put their fingers or hands in their mouths or noses. When having drinks and snacks children will learn to eat snacks safely. Children will always have access to drinking water through the sessions.
Toileting	Children will be reminded to use the toilets before we begin the session. If a child needs to use the toilet during a session, they will leave forest school and use the toilets in the school building. If in EYFS, they will be accompanied by an adult. If in Years 1 - 4, they will go with a buddy.
Tree climbing	A visual check must be made for loose and rotten branches by the child and an adult prior to climbing the tree. Children are permitted to explore to their own limits or to a maximum height of 2m. Children must ensure three body parts are touching the tree at all times. Adults should be made aware by the child that they are climbing trees so that they can keep a vigilant eye, but also letting the child feel that they are independent. Initially, tree climbing will be a guided activity, for adults to assess that children are adhering to the tree climbing expectation.

Tool use	All tools have their own clear code of conduct for correct use which will include consideration of specific personal protective equipment, correct use of a specific body posture, and consideration of the appropriate types of activity that each tool may be used for. Before using any tool, children will be given a clear safety demonstration and clear guidelines on how to use the tool. These safety steps must always be adhered to, by both adults and children.
Fire	When lighting a fire, the forest school leader will take control of the operation and all accompanying adults will be briefed before the start. A lit fire will not be left unattended at any point. A fire may not be lit until it has been confirmed to all that our fire safety equipment is in place. Open fires will be built within the designated fire area. A fire circle using log stools will be established around the perimeter, 1.5m from the fire area. No one may enter the fire circle perimeter unless invited to do so by an adult. There may be no running past the fire circle. No items must be carried and placed within the fire circle unless by an adult. If you wish to move around the fire to a new stool you must step out of the circle and walk around the outside of the log circle. Even when the fire is unlit we will treat it as if it is lit.
Cancellation	Forest school sessions take part in all weather, hence why children need to be dressed appropriately. The only time that forest school will be cancelled is if the appropriate adults are not available to take the sessions or if there are high winds or lightning.

Accident Procedures, incidents and near misses

Accidents, Emergencies and Near Misses will be recorded in the first aid book, which must be completed, signed and dated. Any incident or near miss must be subsequently investigated by forest school leader to review existing controls and procedures.

In the case of any potential threat the children need to be moved to a safe place, (school field, back inside, out of the woodlands) and remain there until the situation is resolved.

In the event of a serious incident, arising from either an injury, illness or threat, school office will be contacted, who will then contact emergency. Secure safety of group from further danger. If necessary, the children will return to their class while the forest school leader deals with the incident.

In the case of minor to medium accidents, first aid will be administered and logged in an accident book. Parents will be informed of any incident requiring any attention.

If the accident is severe, 999 will be called. First aid will be administered as appropriate, followed by a phone call to the parents. If the call requires explanation from the forest school leader, the children will need to come to base camp with the assistant and remain there until the leader has finished. A record of changes in casualties' state and anything administered to them must be made. The incident will be recorded as soon as possible. If a victim has to be taken to the hospital, a member of school staff will go with the child if parents haven't been able to arrive in time.

Health and Safety / First Aid

Forest school sessions offer learning opportunities for children and young people. Part of their purpose is to encourage participants to face new challenges and to learn to take reasonable risks. In order to do that safely, the adults involved must know their role and ensure that the necessary risk assessments are carried out regularly and thoroughly. Risks can rarely be eliminated entirely, but they can be reduced to a minimum without unduly limiting opportunities for children to explore and learn.

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. A visual risk assessment will be carried out by the forest school leader before the start of any session.

Visual risk assessment – A daily visual 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 forest school 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.

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 school 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 following that session.

A first aid kit is accessible to the adults. In addition to this a full emergency bag is on site and can be found in the base camp area. Access to the emergency bag is permitted only to the forest school leader and other teaching assistants.

The Emergency Bag contains the following;

- First Aid Kit
- Burns Kit (cling film/scissors/latex gloves)
- Blanket and Roll mat
- Fire blanket
- Small tarp.
- Tissues and paper towels in plastic bag
- Fresh water in container
- Emergency action plan and incident book.

The full first aid kit will contain instant ice packs, antiseptic wipes, eye irrigation solution sachets, jumbo plasters, medium plasters, small plasters, triangular bandages, large self-adhesive wound dressings, small self-adhesive, wound dressings, crepe bandages, pairs of protective gloves, eye pads, roll micro pore tape, CPR face shield , Foil Blanket.

The forest school leader will ensure this is adequately stocked and replenished. In addition to this a summary of medical information relating to each child and/or specific care plans are carried by the forest school leader. Doors to the school are unlocked to ensure that full access is available to any medication required (e.g. inhalers, epi-pens). Staff will be advised of any specific medical information they should be aware of. The leader will also ensure walkie-talkie are available in the area during each session.

Behaviour

Forest School aims to build self-esteem, independence, motivation to learn whilst always maintaining a safe environment. We promote awareness, respect and care for other individuals and for the natural environment. We reinforce collaborative behaviour and develop awareness of acceptable behaviour and responsible behaviour in an outdoor environment.

In order that these aims are achieved, certain standards of behaviour must be sustained. The role of the forest school leader is to create a positive environment which encourages and reinforces caring, nurturing and acceptable behaviour towards one another, the environment and equipment, to promote effective relationships in which all are accepted, valued and treated equally, to be mindful of the need to maintain safety at all times. The leader will establish clearly defined standards of behaviour, provide a positive role model for all children and volunteers and place the needs of the children, including needs linked to their preferred learning styles, social and behavioural needs at the centre of the forest school curriculum to maximise individual success and raise self-esteem. The leader will give verbal praise to children demonstrating good work, good behaviour, co-operation and good group work.

The children will listen carefully and respond to instructions and requests, especially those concerning safety. They will develop and maintain an acceptable attitude towards one another, the environment and all equipment.

The leader will clearly remind children of the rules and the reason for them. When a child breaks a rule, the leader or any other supporting adult will give the child a first reminder. If the behaviour continues, the adult will give a second reminder and explain what the consequence will be of the behaviour doesn't stop. The consequence will always be linked to the rule that has been broken, clearly explaining the link between cause and consequence.

If the behaviour is judged severe (violence towards children or adults, putting others voluntarily at risk), parents will be informed. If the behaviour continues, child will be removed from forest school.

Child Protection

Child protection is the response to the different ways in which a young person's or child's physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual health are damaged by the actions of another person.

The purpose of Forest School is to offer the children a safe and welcoming environment with fun activities where the children can grow and learn.

An attendance register will be kept for each session.

Personal Safety

- A group of children should not be left unattended at any time.

- Staff should avoid being alone with an individual child or young person for a long time. If there is a need to be alone with a child or young person (e.g. first aid or he/she is distressed) make sure that another worker knows where you are and why.
- At no time should a volunteer or worker from any external organisation arrange to meet a young person away from the activity without someone else being there.

Child Safety

- The forest school lead will carry out a visual risk assessment of the site prior to each session.
- The forest school lead will make sure that all workers and assistants know
 - Where the emergency phone is and how to operate it
 - Where the first aid kit is
 - Who is responsible for First Aid and how to record accidents or injuries in the incident book
 - What to do in the event of a fire or other emergency.
 - Ensure all adults know the location of the assembly point should there be an emergency
- At the end of the day, do not let children go home without an adult unless the parent has specifically said they may do so. Never let a child go with another adult unless the parent has informed school that this will happen.

Should a child disclose sensitive information, forest school staff should:

- Listen to the child.
- Look at them directly and do not promise to keep any secrets, but always let the child know if, and why, you are going to tell anyone.
- Take whatever is said to you seriously and help the child to trust his/her own feelings. Take notes of exactly what is said to you avoiding assumptions and conjecture.
- It is not the role of the forest school staff to investigate any allegations. Any disclosure by a child must be reported to the school DSL.

What you should *not* do

- Forest school staff/volunteers should not begin investigating the matter themselves.
- Do not discuss the matter with anyone except the correct people in authority.
- Do not form your own opinions and decide to do nothing.

Whistle Blowing

If an employee has a concern about any wrong doing:

- Raise the concern with the Line Manager. If the appropriate response isn't received, raise the concern with the contracting school's head teacher.
- If there is a good reason not to do raise the concern with the Line Manager, raise the concern directly with the contracting school's head teacher and local authority.