



Forest School

Handbook



Forest Schools Lead: Mr Ayres

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Background to Forest School

What is Forest School?

The Forest School movement originated in Denmark. It has been an integral part of Early years education since the 1980's when it was introduced as part of an expansion of nursery provision. It is based on the idea that young children can develop enthusiasm for education through the appreciation of nature. In Denmark, Forest schools have found to boost pupils' confidence and improved their behaviour and social skills. Forest school is holistic learning through play and exploration, children learn about the environment, how to handle risks and use their initiative to solve problems and to co-operate with others.

Where?

Our Forest school site is on the school site

The site is owned by Durham County Council and they have given us access to use this location for our weekly forest school sessions.

Who?

The Forest School leader at present is Mr Ayres

Mission statement:

Through termly visits to our Forest school site every child will access learning and development within the natural world around them. Every child will succeed through inspirational, stimulating, hands on experiences, developing their self-esteem, confidence and responsibility.

Forest School Code of Conduct/Rules

Boundary

Children will always be made aware of how far they can explore before a session begins. If we are unable to see all the children, shout '1, 2, 3, where are you?' The child should reply '1, 2, 3, I'm here.' This will have been introduced to through a game and practised many times.

Picking up and playing with sticks

Children will be allowed to carry sticks shorter than their arm's length but made sure they think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks can be dragged or carried with a child at both ends. Sticks must not be thrown, nor should children be allowed to pull them from living trees.

Tree climbing

When risk assessment carried out before session areas below climbing trees must be checked for sharp objects and the tree checked for loose branches. Children are not to climb higher than an adults arm length or chest height. (This will be taught). Unsafe or tempting trees can be marked with a hazard tape.

Rope and string use

Children will be encouraged to connect and transport materials but prevented from tying up other children or themselves! If a child has a good idea and wants, for example, to try and build a rope swing do help them and use the opportunity to model appropriate knot tying.

All string and rope must be collected up at the end of the session.

Carrying and transporting materials

The children should be encouraged to roll, lift, drag and pull materials either by hand or using ropes. The safe way to lift, by bending your knees and keeping your back straight

should be modelled by all adults. Heavier objects will be rolled, dragged or carried by more people.

Digging

There will be a designated area for digging. Children will be shown how to look after the tools. Children will be shown how to look carefully for insects and their habitats and look after them when they have found them.

Toileting

Children will always use the toilet before leaving school and going to the forest school area. However, in the case of an emergency, children can return to school in pairs to use the toilet.

Eating and Drinking

Children will be taught not to eat anything found in the woods through 'stop, no pick, no lick'. We will discuss this together so that children are secure in their knowledge. If we take drinks or snacks outside we will ensure children use wipes to clean their hands before eating their snack or drinking.

Fire circle

At our forest schools site we have a fire circle with a fire wok in the middle (5 metres in diameter). Children will be seated 2 metres from the fire. There must be no running within the fire area and anything being carried must be placed on the ground behind the seating. We then step over the seat to sit down. The fire is never left unattended at any time and an adult is always there until it is extinguished. Only 4 people are allowed in the fire circle at any one time and they have to be invited in by an adult. You must walk around the fire circle in an anti-clockwise direction and there is a designated entrance and exit to the circle. When tending to the fire you must always adopt the 'respect position' with one knee on the ground and then other for firmly on the ground. Children will be taught that before eating anything cooked on the fire they must wait at least 20 seconds before eating and must stay seated until finished.

Collecting Wood

Wood can only be collected from the ground layer of our woodland.

Leaving the site

The site must always be left as it is found. If artefacts are made using 'found materials' these may be taken off the site and back to school. Shelters should normally be demolished and imported materials taken back into school at the end of each session.

Forest School Rules

- Look after your Forest School
- Do not pick anything growing
- Do not put your fingers or anything else in your mouth
- Stay within the boundaries marked, 'we don't go over it and we don't go under it'.
- Stay outside of the fire circle.
- Look above, below and around for hazards.

Travelling / Walking to and from the Forest School Area

Forest schools takes place every Tuesday afternoon (unless otherwise informed) and the children need to have their own correct clothing and footwear. Spare clothing and footwear will be issued to children who forget, it is expected that all children will attend forest school.

Children have forest school partners for the walk to and from the orchard. A minimum of 2 adults will accompany the children to and from the orchard and remain on site throughout the entire afternoon session.

In case of an emergency the adults must contact the office immediately or contact the appropriate emergency services, giving them details of location and grid reference.

The school travel Policy should be adhered to at all times if the children were to be leaving the school.

Forest School Routines

Procedures to be carried out before each session

- A through sweep of the site will be done half termly and then before each session to check for litter, glass, animal faeces, etc. Any such items should be collected using disposable gloves and a plastic bag.
- At the same time boundary ropes, fences, gates and hedges should be checked to ensure that they are secure and safe.
- Trees should be checked for any broken or dead branches which may fall.
- Checks should be made that no dead twigs, etc. protruding at eye-level from bushes etc.
- Check weather conditions, if it is unduly windy or a thunder storm is imminent or has commenced. Then it is not advisable to carry out a Forest school session.

Procedures to be carried out at the end of each session

- Clear away everything.
- Ensure if used that the fire is completely extinguished, wok taken down and packed into the trolley.
- Count all the tools back into the storage bags and boxes.
- Count children and adults and ensure that all are accounted for.
- Collect any assessment sheets or observations from adults. Discuss next steps/ideas with adults back at school site present.

Insurance

The Children Act 2004 and the Health and Safety Work Act 1974 place a number of legal responsibilities on the school. The school has insurance cover appropriate to its duties under this legislation, including Employer's and Public Liability Insurance. Responsibility will in most cases rest with the school but staff will take reasonable care, both for themselves and other people who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work. (Copy of school insurance in appendix)

Health and Safety

Thornhill Primary School sets out a clear statement of intent regarding the schools' approach to the health and safety of the children, staff and visitors to the school. The following list is additional measures relating directly to Forest School sessions.

1. However many adults accompany Forest School sessions the person in charge is always the Forest School Leader.
2. The Forest School Leader has overall duty of care for the children in his/her charge, but all adults are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure children are safe.
3. All adult helpers must read this handbook and appropriate risk assessments and understand and agree to comply with the general operating procedures for Forest School.
4. The Forest School Leader or assistant will carry a first aid kit and Emergency bag. The emergency bag will contain:
 - Essential survival equipment
 - Contact list for each child undertaking activities
5. The Forest School leader will always carry a mobile in the case of an emergency.
6. In the event of an emergency, the Forest School leader will ensure that the school contacts the emergency services.
7. The Forest School leader will review the risk assessments before every trip to the Forest site.

Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Forest School

Thornhill Primary School is committed to the idea that there should be equal opportunity for all. Our policies help to ensure that we promote the individuality of our children, irrespective of ethnicity, attainment, age, disability, gender or background.

We undertake that all children:

- Feel secure and know that their contributions are valued
- Appreciate and value the differences they see in others.
- Are able to participate safely in clothing that is appropriate to their religious beliefs.
- Are taught in groupings that allow them to experience success
- Use materials that reflect a range of social and cultural backgrounds
- Have a common curriculum experience that allows for a range of different learning styles
- Are set challenging targets that allow them to succeed
- Participate fully, regardless of disabilities or medical needs.

Safeguarding Children, Confidentiality and Forest School

Thornhill Primary School recognises its responsibilities for Child Protection and for confidentiality. The school recognises that effective Child Protection work requires sound procedures, good inter-agency cooperation and a workforce that is competent and confident in responding to child protection situations. A full copy of our Safeguarding Policy is held in the school.

Forest School Accident / Emergency Procedures

Emergency Incident Procedures during Forest School

- Children with minor injuries can be treated in the forest school injury by first aid qualified staff
- Major injuries will be dealt with by Forest School Leader. Assistant(s) will support other children bringing them back to school.
- Record full details through school incident procedure back at school.
- **Missing child.** Children will be taught 123 where are you?
 1. **Search vicinity**
 2. **Assemble rest of children**
 3. **Call into school to alert and school calls police(parent/guardian)**
 4. **Follow school critical incident procedure.**

Risk Assessment and Risk Management of Site

Risk assessment guidelines and forms:

A site risk assessment will be carried out half termly and a check made before every Forest school session will take place. In addition an activity risk assessment will be in place for any activity that may require it.

The risk assessment process is as follows.

- We look for hazards
- We decide who might be harmed and how this might happen
- We evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done.
- We record our findings
- We review our assessments and revise them if necessary
- We inform all adults accompanying the group.
- We have a copy with us on an observation board.

Designated Person

Designated person responsibility:

The Forest School Leader is Mr Ayres. He is a member of the teaching staff at Thornhill Primary School. He commenced Forest School Level 3 training in 2018 and also holds an HSE First Aid at Work and Defibrillation award. He will carry out all roles- safety sweeps, risk assessments and will plan for the sessions (so that relevant curriculum subjects can be incorporated into session). The relevant class teaching assistant will check everyone is wearing the correct clothing and footwear.

To ensure that the children gain the confidence, feel safe and gain maximum benefit from Forest School it is important that all Teachers and support staff, act at all times as good role-models. Mr Ayres will give staff any support they need to in turn support the children's experience. He will advise staff who and what we may be observing during Forest School. But as other lessons it is important to record any fabulous 'wow' moments of other

children. All staff will have a camera/ipad. The Teaching Assistant will ensure we have any snacks or drinks and will ensure we have our tool kit with us if needed and spare clothes. The forest school leader and the teaching assistant will each have their own Emergency bag. The forest school leader will be responsible for carrying and issuing the medication of children who require it to and from the forest (Inhalers, EpiPens etc.).

Risk Management of Tools and Equipment

General rules for tool use:

- All tools must have additional risk assessment in the Forest Schools Folder.
- All tools to be stored in school securing, with Forest School leader having overall responsibility and access.
- Forest School Leader has responsibility and safe storage of tools at Forest School site.
- A designated area will be used for activities involving tools.
- Adults and children to sit when using tools.

- Never walk around with tools.
- Children will be taught to ensure they have 'a blood bubble' around them, when using tools.
- Tools are to be clean and sharp before use.
- Children can only use tools with the Forest School Leader.

Forest School Emergency Kit

In addition to tools/resources suited to the planned activity. The Forest School leader will always take an emergency bag.

- First Aid kit
- Emergency procedures
- Medical information and emergency contact details of all in group
- Risk assessments
- Mobile phone
- Clean water
- Accident sheets
- Individual medication
- Blanket
- Wet wipes
- Spare clothing
- Torch

Forest School Communication Strategy

Each child will receive a letter/email/text informing their parents/guardians of their upcoming forest school session. It will state the date and time of their lesson. It will also remind them that forest school sessions take place in all weather, so for their child to be appropriately clothed and with the correct footwear. In the event of poor weather and a late change to the forest school date, parents or carers will be informed of the cancellation via a text message (with the new date and time if applicable).

Forest School dates will also be published in the newsletters.

Parents/Carers can also find information online of what their children will be doing in forest school and how their skills will be improved.

Appendix

- Site risk assessment
- Risk benefit analysis

- 3-year site plan
- Ecological impact assessment
- Tools risk assessment
- Tool safety talks (held at school)
- Fire safety at Thornhill Primary School

SITE RISK ASSESSMENT

NAME: Thornhill Primary School – Mr Ayres

ASSESSMENT DATE: 1.9.24.

REVIEW DATE: 1.9.25

Access and Vehicles: N/A access via the school yard

History: Orchard in the school grounds

Habitats: Orchard

Flora & Fauna: Fruit trees, conifers, grass area,
various wildlife

Additional points to note: Pathway with steps down
to FS area

PROPOSED USE OF SITE: Forest School**Description of site: On school site****Location:** Thornhill Primary School, Shildon, County Durham**Grid reference:** NZ224267**Site Contact Details:** 01388 772906
p2423.admin.durhamlearning.net

	HAZARD	PERSON AT RISK	EXISTING PREVENTATIVE MEASURES	PROBABILITY (P) 1 - 5	SEVERITY (S) 1 - 5	RATING (P) X (S) 1 - 25	WHAT MEASURES NEED TO BE TAKEN	BY WHOM Confirmation of Understanding or completion
1	Slippery surface	All users	Follow pathway Correct footwear	3	2	6	Correct footwear, follow paths, verbal reminders to walk	Staff/FS Leader
2	Overgrown grass area to attract wildlife	All users	All users to keep out unless instructed otherwise	2	2	4	Staff checks, appropriate activities, no entering the bottom corner where the long grass is kept	Staff/FS Leader
3	Extreme weather conditions	All users	Check forecast Cancel/cut short session	2	3	6	Appropriate clothing, consider activities and time spent outside Consider high winds,	Staff/FS Leader

							cold temperatures and extreme heat (follow the main school policy and sun policy)	
4	Low branches and potentially dangerous trees	All users	Verbal reminders Branches removed Trees checked regularly by council	4	3	12	Check trees, verbal reminders, use tape to cordon off and inform office/Head teacher	Staff/FS Leader
5	The slope/hill in forest school area	All users	Children aware Used for certain activities	2	2	4	Children taught how to ascend/descend the slope correctly	Staff/FS Leader
6	Litter thrown into FS area	All users	Litter check	2	2	4	Staff check prior to FS	Staff/FS Leader
7	Poisonous Plants	All users	Staff to check	2	5	10	Staff check prior to session	Staff/FS Leader
8	Tool Use	All users	Follow tool procedures/protocols sheets Tool demonstrations/safety talk	2	3	6	Tool checks Safety use Tool demonstrations First Aid kit	FS leader/staff and children
9	Use of fire for cooking	All users	Use of fire circle and entry/exit door Fire safety talk	2	4	8	First aid/burns kit available alongside water and safety gloves Fire safety talks and demonstrations Staff/child ration considered before cooking on the fire commences	

Risk Benefit Assessment Form

Date: 10.1.24

Review date: 10.1.25

Location: Thornhill Primary School

Activity: Forest School

The overall risk rating is based on the judgement of whether the benefits outweigh the risks for this activity.

Activity	How will young people benefit from these activities?	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	Local site factors	Precautions to reduce the risk of injury?	Overall risk rating judgement L/M/H
1. Nightline	Team work, communication, social skills, navigation skills	Slips, trips, falls	Children and adults	Small trees with low branches	Size/difficulty of trail Objects/equipment safe to use in task	L-M
2. Shelter building	Team work and plan/review/do	Slips, trips and falls Branches, roots, trees Rope and taurpaline	everyone	Small trees, metal railings and hill	Rules for lifting, logs/branches Working in teams/pairs	M

3. Fire	Learn how to cook Fire safety	Being too close to fire Not entering/leaving from the fire door	everyone	Use fire circle	Fire circle rules, use PPE, seating around fire, use ready position when cooking	M
4. Collecting activities	Learn about woodland plants, trees and animals	Slips, trips, falling	everyone	Hill, weather conditions	Rules for collecting, carrying Safety when moving around site	L
5. Using tools	Motor and fine motor skills, communication skills	Cuts, grazes from using tools	everyone	Equipment and PPE	Use PPE and tool talks/safety briefing	M

Assessor:

Mr

Ayres

Date: 10.1.24

3 Year Site Management Plan

Site Name: Thornhill Primary School	Location: (address) 28 Thornhill Gardens, Shildon, County Durham, DL4 1ES	OS Grid Reference: NZ224267
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Site ownership	Contact Details	
Owner: Durham County Council	Address: 28 Thornhill Gardens, Shildon, County Durham, DL4 1ES	Email: p2423.admin@durhamlearning.net Phone: 01388772906

Access arrangements/permissions: Access to forest school area is via the main school reception (side access is available for vehicles)

List any landowner imposed activity restrictions: ie access or restricted activities on Local Nature Reserves
N/A

Is there public access? No

Site Description

Brief Site Description:

Note: site history, difficult topography, poisonous plants, hazards, protected sites

Forest school is situated in an isolated part of the school grounds. The site has a number of fruit trees and has a fire circle for children to sit round. It is at the bottom of a hill accessed via some steps and a footpath.

Habitats and species:

A variety of animals call forest school their home. This includes birds (wood pigeons, robbin, black birds and others) and a variety of insects.

Management Aims:

The site is well maintained and a lovely area for the children to use. The aim is to develop the site further and add some extra features to further engage the children. The site has been used previously in a anti-social way as children/teenagers can access the site via climbing the fences.

Factor	Location (see map)	Current situation	Target situation	Preventative measures	Monitoring	Method of management	Timescale
Wild grass Area	A	The grass is left to grow to attract animals	To let the area continue to grow to attract wildlife	Make staff and children aware not to go in to trample the grass down	On-going monitoring required	To leave it wild and maintenance team informed of the plans	6 months – 1 year
Orchard – Fruit Trees	B	The fruit trees have produced lots of fruit this year. A couple of the tree need fixing as they are starting to lean (council	To continue to monitor the trees and their condition. The council make regular checks on the trees condition	To prune trees if and when required	Regular checks made	Prune trees in autumn	6 months – 1 year

		informed)					
Hedgerow	C	Well maintained and found at the top of the hill, a good natural barrier	To maintain the current state of the hedge	For DCC to maintain	Regular checks	Continue with current plans	6 months – 1 year

Forest School Ecological Impact Matrix
Assessed by: G Ayres **Date: 10.1.24**

Site: Thornhill Primary School

Activity	Ground Layer	Field Layer	Shrub Layer	Canopy Layer	Specific concerns	Specific concerns
Walking on pathways to and from forest school (weekly/rever	Children to stick to pathways, some damage to grass	Some damage due to moving around site at this level	N/A	N/A	In extreme conditions could be Slippy/muddy/ice	Take different routes to and from forest school in muddy conditions to

sible)						protect the grass
Activities involving collecting objects (weekly/permanent)	Slight damage from collecting at this level	Slight damage from collecting at this level	Slight damage from collecting at this level	N/A	Be clear about what is allowed to be used/collected by children	Seasonal variations to consider
Shelter/den building (termly/temporary)	Slight damage due to children/adults walking around this area	Slight damage due to walking and building dens	Fastening of ropes, branches and tarpaulins may damage branches	n/a	Children to use materials provided	Don't snap branches from trees
Fire (Kelly kettle) (termly – reversible)	Slight damage to walkways round the fire circle and door way	Slight damage from walking round	Limited smoke damage	Limited smoke damage	No fires to be used in extreme wind Use fire circle and seats	Follow fire circle rules at all times

Include the following:

- Positive or negative impact (+ or -)
- Frequency of activity (daily, weekly, termly, annually)
- Length of impact- reversible, temporary or permanent (R, T or P)

TOOL RISK ASSESSMENT (THORNHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL)

NAME: Mr Ayres

ASSESSMENT DATE: 10.1.24

REVIEW DATE: 10.1.25

	HAZARD	PERSON AT RISK	EXISTING PREVENTATIVE MEASURES	PROBABILITY (P) 1 - 5	SEVERITY (S) 1 - 5	RATING (P) X (S) 1 - 25	WHAT MEASURES NEED TO BE TAKEN	BY WHOM Confirmation of Understanding or completion
1	Bowsaw	Child and staff	-Tool safety talk -safe tool use demonstration -child to adult supervision ration	2	3	6	-use existing preventative measures -is each child ready to use the tool on the day (considering their individual development)? - space around tool use - handling and safe storage - observe technique and adjust accordingly	All staff that attend FS FS Leader
2	Bill Hook	Child and staff	-Tool safety talk -safe tool use demonstration -child to adult supervision ration	3	4	12	-use existing preventative measures -is each child ready to use the tool on the day (considering their individual development)? - space around tool use - handling and safe storage - observe technique and adjust accordingly	All staff that attend FS FS Leader
3	Hand Drills	Child and staff	-Tool safety talk -safe tool use demonstration -child to adult supervision ration	2	2	4	-use existing preventative measures -is each child ready to use the tool on the day (considering their individual development)? - space around tool use - handling and safe storage - observe technique and adjust accordingly	All staff that attend FS FS Leader
4	Pen knives	Child and staff	-Tool safety talk -safe tool use demonstration -child to adult supervision ration	2	2	4	-use existing preventative measures -is each child ready to use the tool on the day (considering their individual development)? - space around tool use - handling and safe storage - observe technique and adjust accordingly	All staff that attend FS FS Leader
5	Junior Hacksaw	Child and staff	-Tool safety talk -safe tool use demonstration -child to adult supervision ration	2	2	4	-use existing preventative measures -is each child ready to use the tool on the day (considering their individual development)? - space around tool use - handling and safe storage - observe technique and adjust accordingly	All staff that attend FS FS Leader
6	Peelers	Child and staff	-Tool safety talk -safe tool use demonstration -child to adult supervision ration	2	2	4	-use existing preventative measures -is each child ready to use the tool on the day (considering their individual development)? - space around tool use - handling and safe storage - observe technique and adjust accordingly	All staff that attend FS FS Leader
7	Morakin Knife	Child and staff	-Tool safety talk -safe tool use	2	2	4	-use existing preventative measures -is each child ready to use the	All staff that attend FS

			demonstration -child to adult supervision ration				tool on the day (considering their individual development)? - space around tool use - handling and safe storage - observe technique and adjust accordingly	FS Leader
8	Secateurs	Child and staff	-Tool safety talk -safe tool use demonstration -child to adult supervision ration	2	2	4	-use existing preventative measures -is each child ready to use the tool on the day (considering their individual development)? - space around tool use - handling and safe storage - observe technique and adjust accordingly	All staff that attend FS FS Leader

Fire Safety at Thornhill Primary School

The Forest School Leader is responsible for the safe management of the fire and for the safety of all participants. Children will be introduced to the fire circle early in the introduction to forest school programme. They will sit and move round the fire circle from the start of the academic year. Whilst taking part in fire related activities everyone should:

- Loose clothing removed and long hair tied back
- All belongings should be placed outside the fire circle
- Children walk behind the seating area in an anti-clockwise direction
- To leave they step over the chair and make their way to the exit/entry point for cooking
- Children to remain seated unless cooking on the fire
- No running in the fire circle

The Fire Circle

The fire circle and seating area is on a flat area with no low overhanging branches. Any trips or hazards are identified and removed from the circle area. Please see below for an example of the fire circle used at school (since the photograph some of the branches have been cut back)



Fire Based Activities

A maximum of four children will be allowed to interact directly with the fire (but this could be less depending on the group/individuals involved) and the forest school leader will be there to support. The other member of staff present at forest school will supervise the other children sitting down.

The fire will be lit using a magnesium striker, matches or a shop bought fire lighter. No flammable liquids will be used to assist fire lighting.

The fire will be kept small and usable. The forest school leader manages the fire and it is never left unattended. Transport of fuel or food will be via the entry/exit point. When at the fire each person should adopt the respect position. A bucket of water and fire blanket will be available. Fire gloves are used when adding cooking pots or extra fire.

Extinguishing a Fire

The children are shown the safe practice to extinguish a fire. The fire is spread out and allowed to die down, then water is doused on the fire until fully extinguished. The forest school leader doesn't leave the site until the fire is out and the area around the fire checked. The ashes are removed and spread out in the undergrowth.

Monitoring the Fire Site

The site of the fire circle will be monitored for branches and deemed safe before any fire is started. Regular checks on the site will take place, especially if wet and muddy. The site will be moved around the orchard to preserve the grass areas.