

Forest School

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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 Milwards, 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:

- 1. 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.**
- 2. 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.**
- 3. Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being development and learning.**
- 4. Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent, and creative learners.**
- 5. Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.**
- 6. Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners, who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.**

Policy Aims

This policy aims to set out how, at Milwards, we put these six principles into practise and provide the Milwards community with a fulfilling, meaningful experience at Forest School which has direct impact on their personal development.

The site

At Milwards Primary School and Nursery, Forest School sessions take place onsite. The grounds of Milwards offer a wonderful range of spaces used for Fo

- Two broadleaf copse areas
- A fire circle with raised fire pit
- An outdoor workshop
- A Forest School snug and storage area
- Bird watching area
- Nature area with pond
- Allotment beds
- Beehives



Throughout children's Forest School experience, they will have access to all the forementioned areas through both structured activities and free play and exploration. The main Copse area used is dedicated to Forest School learning and is not to be used by children at break time and lunch time. The site used is shown within the red boundaries in the diagram. This is because children at Forest School are introduced to the boundaries of the copse, how to access them sensibly, and the risks they may come across whilst exploring.



Session/Cohort Organisation

Forest School sessions take place every Friday. There are two sessions each Friday, organised as an AM cohort and a PM cohort. Each session lasts 2 hours and 30 minutes. The AM sessions run from 9:15am – 11:45pm whilst the afternoon sessions run from 12:45pm – 3:15pm. During the pilot year of Forest School at Milwards, every child will participate in a course of Forest School sessions. The formula for this is as follows. Children will be in cohorts of 16, with each cohort receiving a half-term worth of Forest School sessions (approximately 6 x 2.30 hours). With 2 sessions per week, this means **12 cohorts x 16 children = 192 children**. After the pilot year, this will be adapted to allow cohorts longer sessions for longer periods of time, once every Milwards child has been introduced to Forest School.

Each cohort will include a mixture of children ranging in abilities and ages from year 1 – year 6. Every child is welcome at Forest School and those with special education needs will be given the additional support they need to access Forest School in a personalised way, if necessary.

EYFS

At Milwards, we have an early year's department with a mixture of children ranging in ages from 3 – 5, this includes two nursery cohorts and a reception class. These children will participate in Forest School sessions separate to the rest of the school, as they will have a personalised experience suitable for their age and abilities, with the additional adult support and ratio coverage needed to work with children of this age.

Behaviour

At Milwards, we believe that behaviour is a form of communication and plays an integral role within a child's development and the support given to children from adults. At Forest School, we spend time getting to know our participants well in hope that they feel comfortable to expose to us their truest self. All children are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the forest school experience at their own pace. At times when children demonstrate nervous or reluctant behaviours, they will not be forced to do anything. They will be supported holistically to assess risk and move forward when they deem ready. At times, children will demonstrate risky behaviours, whilst exploring the woodland. It is an integral part of Forest School for children to evaluate risk for themselves and it is only when a child is in imminent harm that an adult will intervene to ensure all participants safety. The HILT behaviour policy will be used to ensure the highest expectations is held of staff to support children's behaviour and children are encouraged to learn from their experiences and that restorative justice takes precedence.

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 primary 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 have its own planning document, including the following aspects.

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



- Risk assessments for mentioned activities

- Resources needed

Throughout Forest School sessions, facilitators will conduct different observations on participants throughout their time attending Forest school sessions. Depending on the age and ability of the child, we will select the observational technique we feel is best to gather information on that child. The different observational techniques are as follows:

The Sadwell Pupil wellbeing survey (appendix 1)

This survey will be completed on a sample group of children within each cohort. Children will be selected at random or specifically due to their own SEMH needs as determined by the school's special educational needs coordination (SENco). Once this survey is completed, facilitators will make observations alongside within the key areas of the survey to review ongoing. At the end of the child's time at Forest School, the survey will be completed again. This will give us the child's perspective on how their SEMH has changed because of the provision they have received that term.

Milwards Forest School blank observation (appendix 2)

We use an observation form designed by us for general observations. These do not score or assess the children; they are used to answer the following questions to inform facilitators understanding of participants as individuals at Forest School.

What does the child spend their time doing?

What does the child not do at Forest School?

Does the child engage in group circle?

What questions does the child ask?

Who does the child play with?

Does the child eat and drink at Forest school?

Does the child react to certain weathers?

Experience procedures

Entering the copse	We will enter the copse 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 copse 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 the first session, it is made clear to children that they must stay inside the copse area during Forest School sessions. Boundaries are represented by marked trees, which the children will be introduced to. Children are given the freedom to explore independently and move around the copse 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 the copse, 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 use soap & water to clean their hands before consumption. Children will always have access to drinking water and there will be an open snack throughout the session with the expectations of this being explained to the children in the first session.



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 the copse and use the toilets in the school building, accompanied by an adult.
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.

Health & Safety

A health and safety walk has been conducted by the Forest School lead, site manager and respective governor. An environment risk assessment has been completed to identify potential risks, and how those risks have been alleviated or decreased.

A majority of First Aid incidences will be dealt with in the copse area, if the incident is minor enough for the child to continue participation. The Forest School leader (Jed Smith) has a Forest School first aid and



emergency paediatric first aid qualification. The Forest School assistant (Sam Cooper) has a first aid and emergency paediatric first aid qualification. If a more serious injury occurs, then an ambulance may need to be phoned and the child's parents contacted. If this is the case, an adult will remain with the child and communication will be made with the school office via two-way radio and/or communication through another adult or child.

Risk Assessment

Before every Forest School session, a site walk will be conducted to assess any changes to the woodlands or new risks that may present themselves. This is to ensure the safety of participants and management of risk on the school grounds. Extensive risk assessments have been completed for specific Forest School experiences including the use of tools, fire and tree climbing. These risk assessments can be found in the Forest School risk assessment folder and on the schools shared T:Drive.

Linked policies

These Forest School sessions are running as part of the curriculum offered by the Milwards Primary School and Nursery, which is part of the Harlow Inspirational Learning Trust (HILT). The Milwards Forest School is an experience all children are invited to throughout their time at Milwards and plays a integral role in the development of children during their time at Milwards. Only staff and children working at and attending Milwards will have access to this Forest School. Considering this, Forest School will adopt and follow the policies and procedures already ratified by the school governors and trustees in the following areas:

- **HILT Accessibility policy**
- **HILT Behaviour policy**
- **HILT Child Protection policy**
- **HILT Whistleblowing policy**
- **HILY Health & Safety policy**
- **HILT Complaints policy**

