The Woodland Nursery Handbook

Forest School Ethos

The six guiding principles of Forest School are given below. Criteria for good practice relating to each are listed directly underneath.

Principle 1: Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.

- Forest School takes place regularly, ideally at least every other week, with the same group of learners, over an extended period of time, if practicable encompassing the seasons.
- A Forest School programme has a structure which is based on the observations and collaborative work between learners and practitioners. This structure should clearly demonstrate progression of learning.
- The initial sessions of any programme establish physical and behavioural boundaries as well as making initial observations on which to base future programme development.

Principle 2: Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

- Whilst woodland is the ideal environment for Forest School, many other sites, some with only a few trees, are able to support good Forest School practice.
- The woodland is ideally suited to match the needs of the programme and the learners, providing them with the space and environment in which to explore and discover.
- A Forest School programme constantly monitors its ecological impact and works within a sustainable site management plan agreed between the landowner/manager, the forest school practitioner and the learners.
- Forest School aims to foster a relationship with nature through regular personal experiences in order to develop long-term, environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices in staff, learners and the wider community.
- Forest School uses natural resources for inspiration, to enable ideas and to encourage intrinsic motivation.

Principle 3: Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

- Where appropriate, the Forest School leader will aim to link experiences at Forest School to home or school education.
- Forest School programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of the learner.

Principle 4: Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

- Forest School opportunities are designed to build on an individual's innate motivation, positive attitudes and/or interests.
- Forest School uses tools and fires only where deemed appropriate to the learners, and dependent on completion of a baseline risk assessment.
- Any Forest School experience follows a Risk–Benefit process managed jointly by the practitioner and learner that is tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.

Principle 5: Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

- There is a high ratio of practitioner/adults to learners.
- Practitioners and adults regularly helping at Forest School are subject to relevant checks into their suitability to have prolonged contact with children, young people and vulnerable people.
- Practitioners need to hold an up-to-date first aid qualification, which includes paediatric (if appropriate) and outdoor elements.
- Forest School is backed by relevant working documents, which contain all the policies and procedures required for running Forest School and which establish the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers.
- The Forest School leader is a reflective practitioner and sees themselves, therefore, as a learner too.

Principle 6: Forest School uses a range of learner-centered processes to create a community for development and learning.

- A learner-centered pedagogical approach is employed by Forest School that is responsive to the needs and interests of learners.
- The Practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote during their programmes through careful planning, appropriate dialogue and relationship building.
- Play and choice are an integral part of the Forest School learning process, and play is recognised as vital to learning and development at Forest School.
- Forest School provides a stimulus for all learning preferences and dispositions.
- Reflective practice is a feature of each session to ensure learners and practitioners can understand their achievements, develop emotional intelligence and plan for the future.
- Practitioner observation is an important element of Forest School pedagogy. Observations feed into 'scaffolding' and tailoring experiences to learning and development at Forest School.

Code of Conduct

- All staff hold a Paediatric First Aid qualification.
- All of The Woodland Nursery's Policies will be implemented and adhered to throughout each and every session. These are available on The Woodland Nursery's website www.thewoodlandnursery.co.uk
- This document and all associated policies will be updated when required and reviewed annually.
- In accordance with nursery policy, photographs of children will only be taken if there is written consent from parents.

Forest School Site

Children are dropped off by parents at their chosen forest school site. We then run the sessions either from that site or in local woodland, parks or farms. We provide all transport for children once they have been dropped off by parents or guardians.

As well as using our own sites, we also like to utilise different areas of woodland and open spaces within the local borough. This enables children to experience different environments and extend their learning opportunities.

- Boundaries will be clearly explained to all supporting staff and the children upon arrival at the site. Children wishing to explore the site will be accompanied by an adult who will keep the child/children in their vision. If the children go out of sight the adult will call '1,2,3 where are you?' and the child will reply '1,2,3 I am here'. This will be introduced to them through a series of games.

- Children will be taught to use the woodland with respect. At the end of each day the site should be returned to its original state: -
    - All constructions and creations will be taken down at the end of a Forest School programme.
    - Imported items will be removed after each session.
    - All litter will be removed after each session.
    - Children will not remove materials from living plants unless this is specified in the Forest School Leader plans and supervised by an adult.

Eating and Drinking

- Prevent children eating anything that they find in the woodland by talking with them and warning them of the dangers. (No picking and no licking).
- Remind children to avoid placing their hands in their mouths or anywhere on their face.
- When drinks and snacks are consumed during a Forest School session the children will clean their hands with water and soap that we will have with us in a water container.
- All food that is cooked on a campfire will be cooked on a sterile toasting fork made with willow or hazel.
- On some occasions food will be cooked on the fire with the grill over. In these circumstances the Forest School Leader will be responsible for all cooking and handling of the food. At all times the Fire Procedures will be followed.

Toileting

- Children will be encouraged to use the toilet prior to a Forest School session.
- Toilets are accessible at all of the sites if needed.
- If a child needs the toilet during the session we will have rudimentary facilities on site and staff are available to assist the children.

Moving, Transporting and Playing with Woodland Materials

- Children may carry sticks as long as their arms. If they wish to transport large items they will be taught to drag, carry in pairs, roll or use rope to pull them. Safe lifting techniques should be modelled by all adults by bending the knees and keeping the back straight.
- The children will use natural materials in their activities. If at any point an activity that a child has initiated is deemed unsafe, they will be spoken to by an adult who will encourage them to assess the risk of their activity and find a solution to making an activity safer or moving to a new activity if it is felt necessary.
- Ensure children are considering others in their activities, making sure that they do not endanger others.
- Children benefit from challenging climbing activities and will be allowed to climb trees. They will be supported by an adult during this activity. The adult and child will check the ground for sharp materials and the tree for rotten branches. The child should not climb out of arm's reach of the adult who will be there to assist if the child becomes stuck or is at risk of falling.
- Children enjoy digging activities. Designated areas will be available for digging and the children will be taught to fill in their holes once they have finished their activity.

Equipment and Emergency Bag

The Forest School Leader will be responsible for ensuring that all essential items are kept safely in an Emergency Bag which is taken to every Forest School session. The emergency bag will contain the following items:

- First Aid Kit
- Mobile phone
- Emergency Whistle
- Roll Mat and Blanket
- Emergency contact details and medical information for all children attending*
- Fresh water
- Accident forms
- Emergency Procedures
- Risk assessments
- Any medication for individuals

Other items may include:

- Hand wipes
- Nappy sacks and tissues
- Burns kit
- Sugary foods
- Sun cream
- Spare clothing

***** In accordance with our confidentiality policy all documents containing details of children will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at Farjeon Road, when not in use at forest school.

Daily Operating Procedure

Prior to the Session

- The Forest School Leader will carry out a site risk assessment.
- The Forest School Leader will brief all assisting staff on the lesson plans, children involved and risk assessments.
- The Forest School Leader will check the emergency equipment bag and any other resources to be used within the session.
- The Forest School Leader will take a register of the children prior to the session.

During the Session

- The Forest School Leader and assisting staff will continue to risk assess activities on an ongoing basis throughout the session.
- All staff will headcount the children to ensure that they are all accounted for.

After the Session

- The Forest School Leader will conduct a headcount of staff and children before leaving the site.
- The Forest School Leader and staff will ensure that the children walk back to the transport safely.
- The Forest School Leader will check all tools, following the tool use and maintenance procedures.
- The Forest School Leader will evaluate the session in preparation for the next Forest School session.

Tool Use and Storage Procedure

The decision to introduce tools into a Forest School session will be made by the Forest School Leader. Tool use will be planned into sessions but if the leader deems that it is not a safe time then tools will not be introduced.

- Tools are kept in locked storage containers to which the children will not have access.
- All tools are counted out and in of the storage containers.
- All tools are used for a specific purpose. Their correct use and transportation will be modelled by adults at all times.
- Tools will only be used in designated areas which will be a safe distance from active children.
- Tools may only be transported by walking, never running.
- Gloves must never be worn on the hand that is holding the tool.
- All tools that are damaged will be clearly marked and removed from use for repair or disposal.
- Ensure that tools are dry before storing them.
- All tools should be stored in a locked cupboard.
- All bladed tools must be maintained to ensure they are sharp.

Potato Peelers

Potato peelers are used to sharpen and whittle sticks. They should be used on a 1:1 ratio.

- Check that the blade is held firmly onto the handle.
- Check that the blade is clean and free from rust and debris.
- Kneel on one knee supporting the arm holding the wood on the bent upright knee and holding the tool in the dominant hand.
- Peel away from the body at all times.
- Potato peelers should be carried blade down with the arm held to the side.

Axe

Axes are used to split wood and shape wood to a point for pegs and poles. They should be used on a 1:1 ratio.

- Remove the axe carefully from the bag.
- Check that the axe head is firmly attached to the handle with no movement.
- Carefully remove the axe cover and visually check the blade for damage or debris.
- Use a large wood block to support the wood to be axed.
- Ensure that any observers are to the side and not at the front or behind the tool user. They must be a safe distance away from the tool when it is in use.
- Ensure that the wood to be axed is a suitable length to ensure that the non-dominant hand holding the wood is a safe distance from the axe.
- Holding the wood firmly use the axe in a downward motion to shape the wood.
- To safely store the tool temporarily if you need to pause during use cut the axe head firmly into the log block. To remove the axe, push the handle down first then lift the axe to remove it from the block.
- Axes should be carried with the cover on, axe handle in the hand close to the head and the arm held to the side.
- After use ensure that the axe is clean and free from debris. Place the axe cover over the head and return to its storage container.

Bow Saw

Bow saws are used to cut branches or logs. Bow saws should be used on a 1:1 ratio.

- Remove the saw from the storage container.
- Visually check the saw for damage.
- Check that the blade is firmly attached to the saw with no movement or rattling and that the nuts and bolts are secure.
- Carefully remove the blade cover and visually check the blade for debris or dust.
- Test for sharpness by doing a test cut.
- Use a saw horse to support the wood to be cut with helpers holding the opposite end.
- Place the non-dominant hand on the wood.
- Using the saw in the dominant hand pull the saw along the wood towards the body to create an indent into the wood. Repeat this three times.
- Continue to saw forwards and back.
- Upon completion place the blade cover back onto the blade.
- Carry the bow saw by the frame with the blade pointing downwards and the arm held by the side.

Fixed Blade Knife

Fixed blade knives may be used to whittle and shape wood. Fixed blade knives are to be used on a 1:1 ratio.

- Remove the knife from the locked storage container and visually check it with the sheath on.
- In the designated area kneel on one knee.
- Check the knife blade is securely attached to the handle.
- Remove the blade from the sheath holding the sheath in the non-dominant hand.
- Visually check the blade for damage and debris.
- Hold the knife in the dominant hand and the wood in the non-dominant arm supported by the knee.
- Always cut away from the body.
- Carefully remove any dirt from the knife by wiping carefully with a cloth.
- Place the knife back in the sheath ensuring the blade is sitting in the grooves.

- Transport the knife by holding it downwards with the arm held by the side.

Loppers

Loppers are used to cut wood less than 5cm in diameter. They should be used to cut wood below shoulder level. They should be used on a 1:1 ratio.

- Remove the loppers from the storage bag and carry out a visual check.
- Ensure that the arms of the loppers move freely and do not feel loose.
- Use the loppers below shoulder height ensuring all hands are well away from the blades.
- Carry the loppers with the blade facing downwards.
- Maintain the loppers by removing any debris using a light oil and a cloth.

Secateurs

Secateurs perform the same job as the loppers but should be used on wood approximately 1-2cm in diameter. They should be used on a 1:1 ratio.

- Visually check the secateurs ensuring that there are no signs of damage.
- Unfasten the safety clip and ensure that the arms are secure.
- Use by placing the blades around the wood to be cut and squeezing the hands.
- After use secure the secateurs by the safety clip and place them back into the storage bag.
- Maintain the tool by cleaning the blade with a light oil and cloth.

Fire Lighting and Fire Safety

The decision to introduce fire into a Forest School session will be made by the Forest School Leader. The use of fire will be planned into sessions but if the leader deems that it is not a safe time then fire will not be introduced.

Before lighting a fire the Forest School Leader will consider:

- Are the children behaving appropriately
- Is the fire positioned in a safe place which will not allow the fire to spread or set light to anything overhanging the area
- Is the appropriate safety equipment in place:
    - Water in a bucket
    - Fire blanket and gloves
    - First aid equipment
    - Is there enough fuel for the length of time you wish the fire to burn for and has this been collected already

- A permanent fire surround has been constructed within the site. Seating logs placed no closer than 1.5m around the fire surround. Children move to and from the fire by stepping over from behind the logs and leaving in the same manner. There is strictly no moving within the fire circle. There is no running within five metres of the fire.

- All safety equipment is kept in the designated Fire Safety area within close reach if required.

- Children will collect the materials for the fire collecting three sizes of sticks:
    1. Matchstick size
    2. Thumb size
    3. Pencil size

- The Forest School Leader will construct and light the fire. The fire will never be left unattended.

- The fire will be put out by the Forest School Leader by spreading the ashes and pouring water from the bucket over the embers. Check the fire is out by holding the back of the hand over the embers to check for heat.

Health and Safety at Forest School

The Woodland Nursery have a comprehensive Safeguarding Policy which describes in detail the great importance we place on ensuring each child's, member of staff and visitor's safety and well-being. This policy can be accessed on The Woodland Nursery website. The following list relates to additional health and safety measures that are taken during Forest School sessions.

- Every adult assisting the Forest School Leader understands that they have a responsibility to take all reasonable measures to safeguard each child participating in Forest School activities.
- The Forest School Leader will always carry an Emergency Bag which will contain all of the essential items listed in the Emergency Bag section of this document.
- In an emergency the Forest School Leader will be responsible for contacting the emergency services.
- The Forest School Leader will review the site risk assessments and activity risk assessments prior to each Forest School session. In addition, they will be responsible for conducting a visual risk assessment of the site upon arrival and ongoing risk assessments during each activity.
- Tools and equipment will only be used in the ways specified in the 'Use and Storage of Tools' section.

Risk Assessment

The Forest School Leader is responsible for carrying out a site risk assessment at the beginning of each half term. Prior to each session a daily check will be carried out to ascertain any changes and potential new risks. All activities that may hold risks will also be risk assessed and documented by the Forest School Leader. Risks are assessed using the following process:

- Look and identify potential hazards.
- Consider who might be harmed and how.
- Evaluate whether the existing safety precautions are suitable or whether additional measures need to be implemented.
- Record all findings on the appropriate Risk Assessment forms.
- Review and update all risk assessments as necessary.
- Inform all assisting adults of the identified risks for each session.

Accident and Emergency Procedures

In the event of an emergency during a Forest School session the Forest School Leader will maintain control of the whole group. Other adults will be required to assist and the Forest School Leader will delegate responsibility as necessary and appropriate according to the situation. When dealing with an emergency the Forest School Leader will implement the following strategy (these steps may not necessarily be covered in the exact sequence outlined below):

- Assess the extent of the emergency as quickly as possible.
- Ensure that other members of the group are adequately supervised and safe from immediate harm.
- Alert the emergency services and next of kin passing on the details of the casualties.
- Carry out all appropriate first aid.
- Ensure that an appropriate adult accompanies the casualty to hospital.
- The adult must be DBS checked
- Record the details of the incident including all relevant facts, witness details and preserve any vital evidence.

- Keep a written account of all times, events and contacts after the incident.
- Complete an accident report form as soon as possible. Contact HSE (RIDDOR).

Other Emergency Incidents

Lost or Missing Child

- Make an immediate search of the area using the '1,2,3 where are you?'
- Ensure the safety of the rest of the group and keep them together.
- Follow The Woodland Nursery procedure for lost and missing children:
    - All available adults to search.
    - Contact the police.
    - Contact the next of kin.

Uninvited Persons

- Challenge the intruder and politely ask them to leave.
- Remove all children from the area.
- Inform the police and follow their advice.
- Inform all parents of the incident.

Adverse Weather Conditions

- If the weather conditions are deemed unsafe the Forest School Leader will decide whether or not to run the session from our indoor space or alternatively whether to take the children to another suitable place.
- In the event that the weather changes during a session to an extent that the Forest School Leader feels that it is unsafe, the children will be removed to a safe indoor space.

Behavioural Problems

- All trained staff will implement positive behaviour strategies to maintain a safe environment.
- If a situation with a child is escalating staff may remove the child from the immediate area and attempt to calm the child. If physical restraint has been used, parents will be informed and all details will be recorded in the Nursery Incident Record.
- If necessary, the rest of the group will be removed from any potential risk. All relevant nursery policies will be adhered to at all points.
- When the situation has calmed down the child will be spoken with and parents informed if necessary.
- The incident will be recorded in the Nursery Incident Record.

Equal Opportunities

The Woodland Nursery have a full and comprehensive Equal Opportunities policy showing our commitment to equal and fair opportunities for all children, members of staff and visitors. This policy will be implemented and adhered to for all Forest School sessions.

Where children have additional needs, these will be assessed and the appropriate measures and strategies implemented to ensure that our practice is as inclusive as possible and all children have access to our sessions.

It is very important for all parents and carers to understand that their child/children need to be suitably equipped with the correct clothing and footwear they need to participate in outdoor activities in all weather conditions. In addition, we would like to make parents aware that the children will take part in activities and games that involve a certain amount of mud and mess. We encourage carefully calculated risk taking under

the close supervision of adults in order to let the children explore the environment and their own limitations. The children will be encouraged to work cooperatively with all members of the group regardless of whether or not they normally work or play together to strengthen their communication and team working skills. Our activities are carefully planned to 'set every child up to succeed' raising self-esteem and confidence. Each and every child has the same entitlement to these experiences and our wonderful outdoor environment.

Child Protection

The Woodland Nursery have a full and comprehensive Child Protection Policy and each member of staff has received Child Protection Training. This policy and training will be applied to all Forest School sessions.
It is important to note that all adults working in Forest School sessions must be aware that children may become more confident, feel secure and develop risk taking during Forest School. In these circumstances they may be more likely to make a disclosure about a child protection issue. In these circumstances the following points from the Child Protection Policy must always be followed:

- Never promise to keep a disclosure a secret.
- Listen to the child but never ask leading questions.
- Comfort the child as necessary.
- Inform the Child Protection Officer as soon as possible after the event.
- As soon as possible make a detailed written report on the disclosure.

In the event that an allegation is made against a member of staff the Nursery's Allegations policy will be implemented.

Signed:	Tracy Paskins
Position:	Nursery General Manager
Review Date:	October 2027