

1. The History and Ethos of Forest School

What is Forest School?

Forest School is an educational approach which provides opportunities for children to learn and fulfil potential in all areas: intellectual, emotional, artistic, social, physical and spiritual. By building a long-term relationship with a woodland environment, exploring and engaging in a range of activities, children become confident, independent, self-motivated and resilient learners. Links to research evidencing the wide range of benefits of Outdoor Learning can be found at <https://www.forestschoolassociation.org/reading-list/>.

History

The Forest School movement originated in Denmark in the 1950s. Since children start school later in Scandinavian countries, parents would meet with their preschool children informally in woodlands, playing in the woods, cooking on fires and using tools. School teachers noticed that children who had spent time in the woods were more confident and social and had higher academic achievement. This led to the Danish Government formalising these 'Forest Nurseries'. In the early 1990s Bridgwater College in Somerset established the first British Forest Nursery. The idea spread and in 2003 practitioners formed a 'Forest School Network' leading to a formal qualification. In 2012 a National Governing Body, The Forest School Association, was formed.

The Six Principles Underpinning Forest School

1. Regular and frequent visits to the same woodland

Learners become relaxed in the woodland environment and confident to explore and try new ideas.

2. The development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world

A woodland is a dynamic and stimulating environment which changes with the weather, time of day and seasons. Learners are inspired to love and value the natural world and enjoy being in the moment, with the beauty and interest of the natural woodland surrounding them.

3. The promotion of holistic development (intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual development)

Forest Schools recognises that individuals differ in learning styles and needs. The woodland environment and the range of different activities initiated both by learners and leader ensure that everyone benefits in some or, more likely, many ways!

4. The opportunity for supported and appropriate risk-taking

There is a wide and growing body of evidence that children need to engage in adventurous play to learn and develop, both emotionally and physically. Those who engage in adventurous play are better able to risk assess, gain independence, self-esteem and physical skills. Forest School provides opportunities for children to experience the benefits of engaging in adventurous activities within safe boundaries.

5. Qualified practitioners who continue to develop their practice

Forest School leaders have completed their Level 3 Forest School Practitioner qualification and have a strong understanding of learning theories, environmental education and woodland skills to

maximise the learning potential of the Forest School experience. They undertake Continued Professional Development in order to maintain best practice.

6. Learner-centred and often learner-initiated processes

Forest School treats all children as equally unique and valuable; competent to explore and discover for themselves; entitled to take appropriate risks, initiate their own learning and experience regular success; and entitled to develop strong, positive relationships with themselves, others and the natural world.

2. Forest School Policies and Procedures

Forest School adheres to all policies of the Federation of North and South Cowton Community and Melsonby Methodist Primary School, which are available online <http://melsonby.n-yorks.sch.uk/policies/> and <http://nouthsouthcowton.n-yorks.sch.uk/policies/> or by request from the school offices.

The site and all activities are fully Risk Assessed and good practice, as established by the six principles of the Forest School Association is followed, including ongoing monitoring of the ecological impact of our activities in collaboration with landowners <https://www.forestschoolassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice/>.

3. Staffing

Our Forest School is organised and run by a Level 3 Forest School Practitioner with Emergency Outdoor and Paediatric First Aid and Food Hygiene qualifications. All staff and volunteers have undergone an appropriate selection procedure to assess their skills and suitability for working with children and have been subject to enhanced DBS checks. All staff have access to a suitable First Aid kit. The ratio of leaders to children is not above 1:10.

4. What does a typical Forest School session look like?

- *Welcome*

On arrival in the wood, we proceed to our base. We remind ourselves of the boundaries of the woodland and our agreed Forest School Guidelines for having fun safely.

- *Child-initiated activities*

We spend time each session exploring through child-led activities. The leader's role is to facilitate without taking over: for example, if children decide to build rain-proof shelters, the leader provides appropriate equipment, but allows the children to problem solve and be creative without interference. When children find something curious or interesting, we gather to discuss and share the exciting find.

- *Leader-initiated activities*

An activity will be planned either building on child-initiated activities from the previous session or introducing a new idea. If children have been excited about shelter building, for example, but

frustrated about knot tying, we may spend some time looking at knots. If children haven't initiated many activities relating to nature, a Scavenger Hunt or Nature ID game might be played, to draw the attention of the children to the endless possibilities of activities afforded by the natural world. Where possible, children are linked imaginatively with the current school Topic: for example, "Imagine we're in the Stone Age: how would we survive?"

- *Review and reflection*

At the end of the session we review using simple, open questions such as, "What did you most enjoy? What did you find out that you didn't know before? What did you find the biggest challenge together?" Each person contributes. We might tour the wood so that children can show each other what they have been building or any interesting flora and fauna they have found.

5. Forest School Activities

Activities are almost unlimited, but include:

- Nature awareness, for example identifying flora and fauna
- Minibeast hunts
- Birdwatching
- Scavenger hunts
- Shelter building using natural materials
- Shelter building using tarpaulins and ropes
- Nature art such as mud self-portraits
- Nature crafts such as mobiles, stars, picture frames
- Learning to safely use tools to make crafts and furniture
- Making fires and cooking on fires
- Making rope swings
- Building fairy/teddy shelters
- Games such as blindfold tree hugging and camouflage
- Making musical instruments
- Tracking animals
- Making bows and arrows
- Orienteering
- Treasure hunts

6. John Muir Award

During Forest School, Key Stage 2 pupils are completing their John Muir Award. The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme focused on wild places. It helps people connect with, enjoy, and care for wild places. It's non-competitive, inclusive and accessible. The children complete Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share challenges in order to complete the award

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award>.