



Forest School Handbook





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The Forest School Ethos

Forest School is a unique educational experience and process that offers children the opportunity to succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment.

Children engage in motivating and achievable tasks and activities throughout the year and in almost all weathers. Children will work with tools, play, learn boundaries of behaviour; both physical and social, grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world.

The Forest School concept originates in Denmark, originally aimed at pre-school children, where it was found that children who had attended forest school then arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, having the ability to work in groups effectively, generally had high self-esteem and a confidence in their own abilities. These foundations helped them to raise their academic achievements.

A Forest School encourages children to:

- Develop personal and social skills
- Work through practical problems and challenges
- Use tools to create, build or manage
- Discover how they learn best
- Pursue knowledge that interests them
- Learn how to manage failures
- Build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk
- Develop practical skills
- Understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- Explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- Regularly experience achievement and success
- Reflect on learning and experiences
- Develop their language and communication skills
- Improve physical motor skills
- Become more motivated
- Improve their concentration skills



Purpose of Forest School

Forest School sessions provide children with the opportunity to explore and experience the natural world through practical activities in the outdoors, which will in return help, promote confidence, independence and self esteem. Also by using resources available in the wood and the children's interests we hope to stimulate further imagination, creativity and enquiry skills. Forest School sessions shall not be limited to children of a certain age instead all children will have the opportunity to attend a block of sessions before they leave the school. The children will visit the site regularly throughout the year and in all weather.

Suggested Activities for Forest Schools

Activities for Forest Schools are diverse and numerous but it should be reminded that we are trying to create independent learners who are inspired to try out their own ideas, explore their own interests and to attempt new ideas.

Some activities might include:

- Shelter building
- Fire lighting
- Tool use
- Studying wildlife
- Playing team and group games
- Sensory activities
- Tracking games
- Cooking on an open fire / Using a Kelly Kettle
- Rope and string work
- Art and sculpture work
- Woodland and traditional craft
- Developing stories and drama, and meeting imaginary characters
- Physical movement activities

Ecological Impact

Whilst using the Forest School site we shall try and minimise the harm caused to local plant species and wildlife. The site is also likely to incur a higher level of erosion due to increased use. During the Forest School sessions the children shall be encouraged to be more responsible for the protection of plants and wildlife. We shall also work to improve the site by adding bug hotels and hedgehog houses to encourage further wildlife. We shall abide by The Countryside Code as well as The Forest School Rules.



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

Toileting Procedure

If a child needs the toilet they shall have to inform a member of staff who will then give them permission to return to the school and use the school toilet.

Role Specifications

Forest School Leader

To ensure the safety of children and adults as they travel to and from the forest school site.

Ensure the safety of children and adults whilst at the site.

Provide clear guidance and expectations to adults and children.

Carry out a safety check of the site prior to visiting.

To assess the site on a quarterly basis.

Carry out a safety sweep before each session

Support Staff

Ensure the safety of children and adults as they travel to and from the forest school site.

Partake in children's activities.

Ask open-ended questions rather than directing them to activities/ telling them what to do.

Record observations.



Equipment

Emergency Bag (kept in a backpack)

Register with emergency numbers/contact numbers

Medical forms

Mobile phone/ Means of communication

Newspaper

Matches

Wet wipes

Protective gloves

First aid kit including plasters, bandages and scissors.

Water bottle

Blanket

Species List for site

Container for medical items

Carrier Bags/Black sacks

Hot chocolate and snack

Risk assessment



Health and Safety Policy

Bamburgh School's Health and Safety Policy (See Separate Document) sets out a clear statement of intent regarding the School's approach to the health and safety of its children, staff and visitors to the School. The following is a 10 point list of additional measures relating directly to Forest School sessions.

1. However many adults accompany Forest School sessions the person in charge is always the trained 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 sign and date a form to show they have read this handbook and appropriate risk assessments and understand and agree to comply with the general operating procedures for Forest School.
4. Whenever sessions are being carried out the Forest School Leader will inform staff of the group's whereabouts and for how long we intend to stay.
5. The Forest School Leader or Assistant will carry the Emergency Bag.
6. The Forest School Leader will ensure that the Emergency Bag contains:
 - Essential survival equipment;
 - A contact list for each child undertaking the activities, and;
 - The School's telephone number.
7. The Forest School Leader will always carry a mobile phone/walkie-talkie.
8. In the event of an emergency, the Forest School Leader will ensure that the School contacts the emergency services.
9. The Forest School Leader will review the risk assessments before every session.
10. When tools are used the adult: child ratio will always be 1:1



Fire Policy

Aim- To use fire safely as part of the Forest School experience.

Method

Fires must only be lit after a risk assessment has been carried out and they must only be within the fire circle area. This includes the use of Kelly Kettles. There must always be a trained adult present within the fire circle when a fire is lit or hot embers remain, never leave a fire unattended.

There must be an adequate supply of firewater close to the fire basket to ensure there is enough water available to extinguish the fire if it gets out of control. A fire blanket must be brought into the woodland to wrap round someone if their clothes become alight. Fireproof gauntlets should be kept at the fire area to allow adults to pick up hot items.

Before visiting the area the children should have had the opportunity to ask questions and be given information about fire safety. When at the fire circle the rules should be demonstrated for the children to see. There should be no more than 2 people, adults and children, within the fire circle next to the fire at any one time. The best position for cooking is on one knee so you can move backwards easily and remain stable. Long hair should be tied back and scarves removed.

Medical Procedure

Parents shall be asked to complete a Medical form when they give permission for their child to attend forest school. The form shall be carried at all times in case of an emergency.



Accident and Emergency Procedure

If an emergency occurs on a school visit the group leader should maintain or resume control of the group overall. She will, however, delegate responsibility when necessary, so all adults accompanying the visit must read and sign the visit handbook before the trip begins.

The group leader will:	details
Establish the nature and extent of the emergency as quickly as possible.	See scenarios
Ensure that the entire group are safe and looked after and kept together.	<i>All other adults will be told as soon as possible and allocated roles; roles may be changed as needed.</i>
Establish the names of any casualties and get immediate medical attention.	<i>Children's names and medical details will be in the emergency bag. First Aid box will be on site.</i>
Phone for an ambulance if appropriate.	<i>Another adult may be asked to do this.</i>
Ensure that a teacher or teaching assistant accompanies casualties to hospital with any relevant medical information	<i>In extremis a CRB checked adult may have to take this role</i>
Inform the school of the name of the casualty and details of their injuries plus action taken so far.	<i>Head will notify the police if necessary</i>
Pass on to school details of nature, date and time, location of the incident.	<i>Head will notify parents, providing as full a factual account of the incident as possible.</i>
Write down accurately and as soon as possible all relevant facts and witness details and preserve any vital evidence.	<i>The group leader will give copies of notes and reports to the head teacher.</i>
Keep a written account of all events, times and contacts after the incident.	
Complete an accident report form as soon as possible.	<i>Report forms are kept in the head teacher's office.</i>
Keep receipts for any expenses incurred – insurers will require these.	



Scenarios

First aid

1. Ensure the rest of the group is safe – where appropriate delegate responsibility.
2. If appropriate, remove the danger or people from the danger.
3. Qualified First Aider called to check A-B-C, administer First Aid and if necessary call for further assistance (999).
4. Have medical form details available in emergency bag and call parent/guardian as appropriate.
5. Record full details through school incident procedure back at school.
6. Follow up to parents as usual.

Lost or missing child

1. As soon as child is found to be missing, make an immediate search of vicinity and use 1, 2, 3 procedure.
2. Assemble rest of children and ensure they are safe.
3. Call School to alert and then School calls police (and parent/guardian).
4. Follow School critical incident procedure.

Death or serious accident

1. Follow First Aid procedure.
2. Stay with casualty, but ensure rest of the group are removed from the situation and they are safe.
3. School to call parent/guardian/next of kin ASAP.
4. Follow School critical incident procedure.
5. Gain advice on follow up from police.

Irregular occurrence, uninvited person/stranger

1. The intruder will be challenged and asked to leave politely.
2. If a child is involved then the police should be called and the child/children involved should be removed from the situation and made to feel safe.
3. Follow School's critical incident procedure
4. Parents/guardian should be briefed by Forest School leader asap.
5. Inform School Child Welfare Officer and gain advice.



Poor weather conditions

1. If trees blowing more than 20 degrees, or if group leader feels uncomfortable take emergency 'safe' route out ASAP.
2. Use indoor areas or shelter outdoors (away from trees) areas as alternative.

Behaviour problems (See behaviour policy)

1. Trained members of staff to use de-escalation strategies.
2. Remove other children from area of risk (if deemed necessary).
3. If thought necessary, trained members of school staff to use appropriate restraint technique.
4. Debrief child after calm down period.
5. Log incident.
6. Inform parents/guardian.



Tool Procedures

Tool	Bow Saw
Purpose	Cutting wood
Use at Forest School (activity ideas)	Cutting wood, making tools, shelters.
Safety Equipment or design feature	Hand guard on frame, plastic strip to cover saw teeth.
Personal protective equipment. (PPE)	Work glove for hand holding work piece.
Adult: Child ratio	One to one/one to two if two students are using the saw in tandem.
Transportation	Carry with blade down and cover strip in place.
Working space	Arm plus tool length.
Body stance	If using at ground level, respect position (kneeling on one knee see photo) if cutting a branch feet apart to give a stable stance.
Method of use	If using in tandem one student holds the handle in the hand guard the other holds the frame on the bend. If right handed both students hold the work piece firmly to stop it from moving with their left hands wearing a work glove on that hand. The work piece is rested on a log of stump to raise it off the ground. The students cut on their pull stroke keeping the saw frame upright in slow fluid movements.
Inspecting	Check to make sure the blade is strained correctly and that the teeth are sharp and none are missing. Ensure the correct blade is fitted for the job being undertaken, wet or dry timber.



Tool	Fixed blade knife.
Purpose	For modelling and shaping or as a gutting tool.
Use at Forest School (activity ideas)	To whittle and make tools
Safety Equipment or design feature	Short strong blade with rounded end so cannot stab.
Personal protective equipment. (PPE)	A work glove can be worn on the hand that holds the work piece.
Adult: Child ratio	One to one
Transportation	Knife carried in sheath at all times when not in use.
Working space	Arms length plus tool length.
Body stance	Kneeling or sitting
Method of use	<p>Depending on the work being carried out the user should be either sitting on a log or stump or as in the photo kneeling, using the log as a work bench. Always make sure that the log or stump that you are sitting on is safe and will not fall over or roll. if the user is right handed, hold the work piece in the left hand with work piece resting on the log pointing downwards (as seen in the photo) Firmly hold the knife in the right hand and draw it down the work piece away from the body, taking off a thin sliver of wood. If the user is left handed use the same procedure but hold the work piece in the right hand. (a work glove can be worn on the hand holding the work piece) The knife can be used in the sitting position as in this picture, Sit on a log or stump, if the user is right handed, hold the work piece in the left hand with the left hand resting on the right thigh pointing the work piece downwards. Hold the knife in the right hand with the thumb on the back of the blade for control and firmly draw it down the work piece away from the body, taking off a thin sliver of bark or wood. If the user is left handed use the same procedure but hold the work piece in the right hand. (a work glove can be worn on the hand holding the work piece)</p> <p>The students must sit or kneel when working with tools for safety; it prevents wandering about with sharp tools.</p> <p>Please note the knife sheath on the log in the first picture, ready to put over the knife blade when the work is finished!</p>

Inspecting	The knife should be checked before and after use to make sure it is sound and there is no damage to the handle or blade and that it is sharp.
Cleaning and maintenance	The tool should be wiped clean after use and sharpened if necessary by a competent person
Storage	The tool should be securely stored in a dry place when not in use to prevent unauthorized use and damage from rusting.



Tool	Brace and Bit
Purpose	Drilling/boring holes in wood
Use at Forest School (activity ideas)	Making a dead/drift wood Christmas tree
Safety Equipment or design feature	Swivel grips to avoid blisters
Personal protective equipment. (PPE)	Work gloves can be worn on hand if some one else is holding work piece.
Adult: Child ratio	One to one until confident and competent.
Transportation	Carry with bit pointing down.
Working space	Arms length plus tool length
Body stance	Feet apart to give good balance, or kneeling
Method of use	Make sure the bit is firmly held in the brace chuck. Make a centre mark on the work piece where you want the centre of the hole to be Push the point of the bit into the mark and rotate the brace in a clockwise direction to drill the required hole. There is no need to push the brace as the screw on the bit point will pull the bit into the wood. DO NOT TRY AND USE THIS TYPE OF BIT IN AN ELECTRIC DRILL!
Inspecting	Competent person to check for sharpness of the bit and to make brace rotates freely works.
Cleaning and maintenance	When finished with the bit should be wiped clean with a damp cloth then lightly oiled to prevent rusting.
Storage	The tool should be securely stored in a dry place when not in use to prevent unauthorized use and damage from rusting.



Tool	Flint and steel
Purpose	Making a spark
Use at Forest School (activity ideas)	Fire lighting
Safety Equipment or design feature	Good non slip handle to hold steel
Personal protective equipment. (PPE)	None
Adult: Child ratio	One to one until competent
Transportation	In small water tight tin with cotton wool for tinder
Working space	Arms length
Body stance	Kneel on one knee next to the fire being lit.
Method of use	If right handed, hold the steel by its handle over a small ball of cotton wool. Hold the steel in the right hand between the thumb and first finger and draw it down the steel with a slight flicking action to shower sparks on the cotton wool or other tinder being used. If left handed as above but hold in opposite hands. Take care when using cotton wool because it lights very easily.
Inspecting	Visual check for wear and tear
Cleaning and maintenance	Keep clean and dry.
Storage	Store in its watertight tin with other forest school cooking equipment.



Tool	Bill Hook
Purpose.	For cutting and laying hedges.
Use at forest school (activity ideas)	Dressing poles and logs, splitting wood to making tools, pointing stakes.
Safety equipment or design feature.	Handle to hold bill hook
Personal protective equipment.(PPE)	Work glove for hand holding work piece. Safety foot wear, long sleeves and trousers.
Adult child ratio.	One to one/one to two if two children are working together, EG making a mallet
Transporting.	Blade must be kept covered when not in use, and should be carried blade down. Carrier MUST WALK, NEVER RUN.
Working space.	An exclusion zone of an arms length plus the length of the tool must be maintained all the time the tool is being used (except when two people are working together, EG making a mallet but no other persons will be closer)
Body stance.	Kneeling on one knee is the position to work in. This will be known as the RESPECT POSITION. The knee on the ground being the right knee if the tool user is right handed left if the tool user is left handed.
Method of use.	When using for splitting wood when making a mallet, spatula or pegs the work piece must be placed on a solid wooden surface like a stump or log. The bill hook user will place the blade in the place they want to make the cut holding the hook by its handle and the end of the blade. When they are happy they will give their partner using the mallet the signal to tap the blade edge, I use the command "strike." After each tap (strike) the bill hook user will check to make sure the blade is positioned to their liking before proceeding.
Inspecting.	The blade and handle must be checked to make sure they are securely attached to each other to prevent the blade from flying off in use. The handle should be checked for splits, cracks and splinters. The blade must be checked to make sure it is sharp and that it is in good condition
Cleaning and maintenance.	When finished with the blade should be wiped clean with a damp cloth then lightly oiled to prevent rusting, the handle also should be wiped clean and occasionally oiled with linseed oil to prevent drying and cracking.

Storage.	The tool should be securely stored in a dry place when not in use to prevent Unauthorized use and damage from rusting.
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Tool	Vegetable peeler
Purpose	For peeling fruit and vegetables.
Use at Forest School (activity ideas)	Can be used for whittling and removing bark from sticks to make bark rope.
Safety Equipment or design feature	It has a covered blade that is designed to take thin slices and has no stabbing point. Can be used right or left handed.
Personal protective equipment. (PPE)	A work glove can be worn on the hand that holds the work piece.
Adult: Child ratio	One to four.
Transportation	Carry held downward.
Working space	Arms length.
Body stance	Use in a sitting position.
Method of use	<p>Sit on a log or stump, if the user is right handed, hold the work piece in the left hand with the left hand resting on the right thigh pointing the work piece downwards. Hold the peeler in the right hand and firmly draw it down the work piece away from the body, taking off a thin sliver of bark or wood. Rotate the work piece in the left hand and repeat until the work piece is clean of bark or is the desired thickness. If the user is left</p> <p>handed use the same procedure but hold the work piece in the right hand. (work glove to be worn on the hand holding the work piece)</p>
Inspecting	Check that the blade swivels freely and is not blocked or rusty.
Cleaning and maintenance	Wipe clean after use, wipe with thin oil or spray with WD40 occasionally to prevent rusting.
Storage	Store with other tools in a secure dry place.



Campfire procedure

<p>Choosing a fire site</p>	<p>Permission must be gained before fire lighting. The fire site should be level with all trip hazards removed. The floor must be earth, not peat or pine needles/dead leaves. There should be no overhanging branches for 5 metres directly above the fire.</p>
<p>Adult to student ratio</p>	<p>The ratio should be one to one when students are tending the fire or using the fire to cook.</p>
<p>Managing the site</p>	<p>The fire must be built inside a 1.5m square made from branches, this is the exclusion zone. No one to enter this area. A 5m walking boundary should be set using logs as seats, these must be fastened down to prevent rolling. An ingress/egress route should be established. Only one person tending the fire at one time, this should be done from the kneeling position to prevent falling on to the fire. People moving around the fire site must walk not run around outside the seats.</p>
<p>Extinguishing the fire and leaving the site.</p>	<p>This should be done by the group leader or another adult. The fire must be completely out and cooled using water. If the site is permanent it should be left tidy. If the site is temporary all traces of the fire should be removed, ashes scattered over a wide area and the site returned to as near as possible to its original state.</p>
<p>Health and Safety</p>	<p>A fire blanket will be placed at the fire site in an easily accessible position and all staff are trained to use it. Water is available to extinguish flames and cool burns. A first aid kit is available at all times and there will be at least two members of staff present that are first aid trained.</p>



Hygiene procedure

Toilet	<p>Students should go to the toilet before leaving school, but at both off school sites toilet facilities are close by.</p> <p>At Well Wood permission to use the toilets at the local social club has been given.</p> <p>At Pontefract park there are public toilets in the car park. Students will be accompanied to the toilet by an adult.</p>
Cooking	<p>Water, hand wash, wipes, gloves and paper towels are carried in the forest school kit.</p>

Rope or string use procedures

Rope or String use	<p>When using rope or string in forest school it should be made clear from the start that tying each other up is not acceptable and can be very dangerous. Make the students aware of friction burns from rope or string. Any structures build using ropes or sting should have the knots checked by an adult to make sure they are safe and secure.</p>
Rope swing;	<p>Examine rope to see if the rope is frayed, badly damaged or not suitable. If so replace the rope. Check the swing site and tree; inspect the tree. Is the branch or tree dead or rotten? Is there evidence of fungal growths? Is there a risk of crashing into the tree or support?</p> <p>Fall Height; measure the fall height from the end of the rope at its highest likely swing point. OK if 2 metres or less.</p> <p>Fall Zone; Check the fall zone for hazards such as sharp objects, rocks or if the fall zone is over deep or fast flowing water. Are there other trees around the site that are dead, rotten or blowing over? Does the tree or location have value that could be seriously harmed by the activity?</p> <p>Knot; make sure that a suitable knot is used to secure the swing to the tree and that it is securely fastened, test the swing with an adult first.</p>



Disposal of food & waste Policy

A responsible Forest School must ensure that we make no detrimental impact on it's natural surrounding environment, this includes the correct management and disposal of food, litter and waste. To achieve this the following procedures will be followed at every session:

Recap with the group our responsibility to the environment and the need to keep it clean and uncontaminated.

All litter must be put straight into a designated rubbish bag or box, making sure there is no risk of any rubbish being blown away by the wind.

Wastewater that is not contaminated by food scraps or chemicals can be tipped away or used to douse the campfire.

If water has been contaminated by food scraps then dig a hole, tip the water in and cover it with earth to prevent animals from finding it.

Any water that has been contaminated with chemicals should be transferred into a suitable container and taken back home/school to be disposed of.

Any leftover/waste food should be put into the designated rubbish bag/box and taken back to school/home to be disposed of.

At the end of every session a thorough check of the site must be undertaken to ensure no litter or waste is left behind.

Recycling bins will be available during Forest School activities, which will be removed from site at the end of each session. We will try to minimise the amount of food waste we have on site and will be compost any fruit waste.



Full principles and criteria for good practice



The Forest School ethos has six principles, which were agreed by the UK Forest School community in 2011.

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

Principles and criteria for good practice

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, work and /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.



- Forest School is led by qualified Forest School practitioners, who are required to hold a minimum of an accredited Level 3 Forest School qualification.
- 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-centred processes to create a community for development and learning



- A learner-centred 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.