



Stanhope Primary School

Forest School in the Early Years

The Forest School Ethos

Forest School is a unique educational experience. Sessions provide children with the opportunity to explore and experience the natural world through practical activities in the outdoors, which in turn will help promote confidence, independence and self-esteem.



Forest School takes place in a natural environment to support the development of a relationship with the natural world, and our role and responsibility towards it. The natural world is the ideal setting for children to develop essential foundations for learning as it gives children space to develop physically through movement and exploration as well as the freedom to be noisy, playful, inquisitive, experimental and socially interactive.



Forest School is for all ages and abilities and is fully inclusive. It aims to develop the individual's personal, social and emotional development through experiences that are both motivating, challenging and achievable.

Forest school builds on an individual's innate motivation and positive attitude to learning, offering opportunities to take supported risks appropriate to the environment. The ethos encourages child led learning and learning through play.

Forest School takes place on a regular basis throughout the year and in all weathers. Children learn firsthand from the four seasons and environmental changes.

Stanhope Primary Forest School operates on the school site. The idea grew from the staff's desire to provide a curriculum that encourages children to understand and appreciate the natural world in which they live. We believe everybody should have regular, long-term access to a woodland or natural environment.

Activities

Our Forest School activities in the early years include:

- Natural exploration and woodland management
- Building dens and other structures
- Fires and cooking
- Games and imaginative play
- Natural crafts
- Using tools, such as mallets and peelers
- Scavenger hunts and adventures
- Seasonal celebrations



Ecological Impact

During the sessions children will be encouraged to be more responsible for the protection of plants and wildlife. We shall work to improve the site by adding bug hotels and hedgehog houses to encourage further wildlife, and to work on developing the site by planting and extending the range of plants on site. We will abide by the Countryside Code as well as the Forest School rules.

Entering the Forest School and Ecological Impact.

The forest School site is likely to incur a higher level of erosion due to increased use, therefore we shall try to minimize the harm caused to local plant species and wildlife. We respect the environment and take responsibility for looking after the plants and wildlife. We have high expectations of behaviour and follow our Forest School rules as well as the Countryside Code that helps us to learn how to respect, protect and enjoy the countryside.

Boundaries

Before each session begins children are reminded of our Forest School boundaries. Red flags indicate to children which areas should not be accessed. Whistle blow '1, 2, 3, come to me' is the signal we use to bring children back to the circle. Adults are positioned around the site, allowing children the freedom to explore independently yet never out of sight.



Forest School Rules

- Look after our Forest School
- Do not pick anything growing
- Do not put your fingers or anything else in your mouth
- Stay within the boundaries marked
- Stay out of the fire circle (fire risk assessment)
- Always walk to avoid slips and trips
- Look above, below and around for hazards
- If rubbish or glass is found an adult will pick it up
- Carrying sticks should be no longer than your arm
- When you hear the whistle 1, 2, 3 come to me, return to the circle.
- Watch out for nettles, thorny plants and leaves.
- Do not throw objects in Forest School
- Listen carefully to the Forest School Leader

Carrying and Transporting Materials

Children are encouraged to roll, lift, and drag and to pull materials, either by using their hands or by using ropes.

We encourage safe lifting by bending our knees and keeping our back straight.

Heavier objects should be rolled, carried, or lifted by more people working together.



Tree Climbing

The ground cover is checked for 'sharp objects' and the tree identified as suitable. An adult must be present and near enough to catch if a child should fall. Children are allowed to explore to their own limits or to a maximum height of 1.5m

Rope and String use

We encourage connecting and transporting materials but prevent children tying themselves or other children up. Introducing ropes provides the opportunity to teach children about knots and the safe use of ropes and knots should be modelled to children.

Protecting the site

Children may carefully move soil to look for insects, but avoid digging holes. Wood can be collected for all sorts of activities but should be collected sparingly to avoid disrupting creature habitats.

Toileting

Children are always encouraged to use the toilets before we leave the school building. If children need to use the toilet during a session a responsible adult will take them back to use the facilities in groups of no more than 2 at a time.



Eating and drinking

Children are constantly reminded of our forest school rule that we do not put fingers or anything else in the mouth. We do not eat anything found in the woods, such as berries or seeds. We use wipes to clean our hands before eating snacks or drinking from a cup.

Leaving the Site

When leaving the site at the end of the session, we follow the ethos 'leave no trace'. All litter will be taken back to school, structures are removed, and equipment returned to the storage shed.

Operating Procedures



Forest school in the early years takes place every week on a Thursday for the nursery class. Following the register, the group put on their outdoor waterproof clothing and wellies and walk down to the site (usually singing our little song). There are three adults including the Forest School leader.

The session follows the format of our indoors session with a meeting and greeting time where children are reminded of our Forest School rules and introduced to new resources. At this time, we discuss the red flags and any issues that have resulted from the weather or risk assessments that the leader has identified prior to the session.

The children have independent work time, where the adults support them in their play and engagement with the environment. Snack time is followed by focused activities; this may include games, sharing stories, working with tools and investigating various areas and resources in our Forest.

At the close of the session we form a closing circle where we review our learning. We return to school at the end of the session, remove our waterproof clothing in time for the bell at the end of the day.

Should the session be cancelled for any reason the children participate in activities within the classroom.

Clothing for the Forest School

Forest School takes place throughout the year and in almost all weather. Effective clothing is so important to enable sustained play. We work on the principle “there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing’

Children will need to be dressed appropriately. They will need to have their arms and legs covered with long sleeved tops and full length trousers to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes.

Appropriate footwear must be worn at all times. It can often be cooler than expected under the shade of the trees; children need to be prepared with coats in the event of rain.

***L Warrington
Early Years Lead
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