

WOODLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL, HEDGEHOGS NURSERY & SUNBEAMS CLUB



Forest School and Outdoor Learning Policy

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Introduction

At Woodlands Primary School, Hedgehogs Nursery & Sunbeams Club (the school) our Forest School approach promotes sustainability and environmental responsibility, supporting the school's Eco-Schools and biodiversity goals.

Forest School and Outdoor Learning is an outdoor based learning and development approach where children are given opportunities to develop their self-esteem, confidence, social skills, language and communication, physical motor skills, and knowledge and understanding of the environment. The children will learn through hands on learning experiences in our school grounds and woodland site, led by school staff or the Forest School practitioner. The children will be given the opportunity to learn and develop at their own pace and they will also be given opportunities to freely explore the natural environment.

Legislation

All Forest School and Outdoor Learning sessions will be held on the school site. School policies and procedures must be followed like any other normal school day. These can be found on the school website and can be electronically forwarded at request to any other party. All adults working with the children have a DBS check in place. The school follows all statutory policies. This policy aligns with guidance from Cheshire West and Chester Council and the National Forest School Association (FSA) best practice (2025 update). All staff are also required to complete annual safeguarding training and be familiar with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy (updated 2025). In practice, this means that the Forest School Leader plans and delivers sessions following the six key FSA principles, including learner-centred development, long-term planning, and connection with nature and the Forest School practitioner will adapt these principles to our school environment. Staff receive induction on how these principles are applied day-to-day, ensuring that every session reflects best practice rather than only referencing it on paper.

Health and Safety

The school recognises its duty of care for the health, safety and well-being of its employees. It will take effective steps to ensure that this is achieved, so far as is reasonably practicable. In discharging this responsibility, it will take into account its parallel obligations for the health and safety of pupils, visitors and others who might be affected by its operations. The provisions in this policy are intended to ensure that health and safety is an integral part of the general process of risk management which the school operates. The health and safety of all children and staff is paramount in our school. The staff are expected to work in the school grounds or forest school area as they would inside of the school. All parent/guardians will receive a letter prior to any planned sequence of outdoor learning or forest school sessions, containing a brief outline of activities and clothing requirements to take part. Children who do not have items such as waterproof clothing will be provided with school clothing. The leader will take a group register to each session which will include relevant medical details.

In addition to promote health and safety during each session the following items will be available for use:

Essential Equipment List

- First Aid Kit
- Burns First Aid Kit (when lighting a fire)
- Register and medical details of participants
- Mobile phone – for immediate contact to school office
- Accident forms (within first aid kit)
- Risk Assessments
- Water
- Tarpaulins
- Fire bucket/fire blanket and fire bag; fire gloves, matches, striker, cotton wool and paper (when lighting a fire)
- Hand wash bowl/washing up bowl with washing up liquid/antibacterial hand wash and 2x towels
- Work gloves
- String, rope and scissors
- Refreshments bag/box when needed (hot chocolate, fruit, milk, cutlery, cups and any other relevant resources)

Risk Assessment Procedure

A comprehensive risk assessment will be in place and it is designed to protect all that are involved in any outdoor learning or forest school session. By carrying out the risk assessment we are protecting those that deliver and those that participate. HSE have advised to follow the five-step procedure to identify and address the risk:

1. Identify the hazards
2. Assess the risks
3. Control the risks
4. Record your findings and implement them
5. Review the controls

The site will be risk assessed prior to beginning each course of Forest School sessions. This is to remove/become aware of any hazards to participants and members of staff to then minimise risks. There will also be a risk assessment carried out prior to each session by the forest school leader or other members of staff outlining the possible risks linked to the activities being carried out, for example; if using tools during a particular session highlight the risks of using them on that day in line with the requirements outlined by the forest school practitioner in the daily risk assessment form. There will be two risk assessments in place:

- i. Forest School/Outdoor Site Risk Assessment
- ii. Forest School/Outdoor General Activities Risk Assessment

Daily Procedures

➤ Pre-session

- Carry out risk assessment linked to activity/site
- Ensure resources are available and sufficient
- Ensure essential equipment is on site (listed in Health and safety section)
- Ensure session can go ahead in line with weather procedure

➤ During Session

- Record any new risks/hazards and report to forest school leader
- Implement health and safety of self/participants
- Ensure correct use of tools and equipment

➤ End of session

- Ensure all tools and equipment are checked and correctly stored
- Remove any litter/resources from site

➤ Post session

- Replenish resources used
- Complete session evaluation form if required/needed
- Report any necessary points to forest school leader

Tool procedures

- Prior to using tools for the first-time staff will meet with the forest school leader to discuss safety requirements or anytime during sessions
- When tools are not in use, they will be stored off the forest site for health and safety purposes
- When required on site the tool kit must **not** be left unattended
- Staff will be asked to follow the description cards provided in tool kit for safe use and teaching
- Staff will ensure that they check and count out each tool before and after use
- Staff must report any missing or damaged tools to the forest school leader promptly
- Children will **not** be left unattended with tools (ratio increased at discretion of forest school leader)
- Staff will remind children of working in safe bubble
- Staff will ensure all tools are cleaned at the end of each session

All Forest School sessions adheres to the latest Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance on managing risk in outdoor learning (2024). To embed this guidance, the Forest School Leader uses dynamic risk assessments before and during each session, adjusting activities to reflect current site conditions. Children are also encouraged to take part in simple risk awareness discussions to build responsibility and understanding of safe outdoor practice.

Fire safety procedures

At the school we have an established area for building a fire. It will be located with an 8ft or higher clearing from above. The seating around the fire will be 1.5metres away from the fire. The fire space will be enclosed by a log triangle, whilst ensuring that the ground space is clear preventing any trip/fire hazard.

- Fire must never be left unattended
- Adult to supervise at all times
- When dealing with fire/hot things, fire gloves must be worn with sleeves rolled back
- All loose clothing/jewellery secured and hair tied back
- Children will follow the fire circle rules at all times even when there is no fire
- When cooking or working by fire adhere to 1:3 ratios (adult: children)

Fire Circle Rules

- ✚ Only the forest school leader and assisting practitioners will be allowed in the circle
- ✚ Children may enter the circle with supervision by the leader or supporting practitioner
- ✚ Children must walk around the outer part of the circle to get from one point to another
- ✚ To sit down, children must enter from the side of the stumps/logs and then sit down in their chosen spot
- ✚ To leave they must stand and leave from the side again and walk around to destination
- ✚ Whilst working with or a lighting fire, staff will use a safe stance (kneel on one knee and one knee up for balance)
- ✚ Staff to ensure fire is safely extinguished when finished

Food safety, toileting and hygiene procedure

Food - Prior to handling food staff/children will wash and dry hands thoroughly. Food shall be handled and prepared with care, for example; do not mix meat and vegetables. Any food being served needs to be cooked thoroughly in line with group dietary requirements. All food shall be stored appropriately in plastic containers and biscuits in a tin.

Toileting – all children and adults to ensure they have been to the toilet prior to session. During the session the school toilet should be used as the forest school is on school site, children to be accompanied by a member of staff due to the location of the site.

Hygiene – before and after handling food, hands will be thoroughly washed and dried using the hand wash, bowl and towel provided. Wipes are available to use if necessary (mucky hands).

Emergency procedures/First aid procedure

At Woodlands Primary School all forest school and Outdoor Learning sessions will run with a qualified first aider present on the school site. If an injury occurs during a session the first aider will examine and determine the severity of injury.

- If no treatment is required, then TLC is sufficient.
- If treatment is required, then complete accident form to send home and also school record sheet (both located in first aid bag).
- If injury cannot be dealt with in school then give immediate first aid to ensure safety of individual, inform school and dial 999 for emergency services and inform parent/guardian.
- Forest school or Outdoor Learning session may then need to be cancelled/postponed (at the discretion of FS leader) as the child may need to be accompanied and/or it may not be safe to continue the session

Irregular occurrence/ uninvited guest/ stranger procedure

All visitors to the school are issued with a visitor badge and asked to sign in at the main office. Any person who is on school grounds without a visitor badge will be challenged by a member of staff. All pupils are reminded at the start of a forest school or Outdoor Learning session that they should inform a member of staff if they notice anyone in the school grounds who is not wearing a visitor badge. If there are any visitors on site, then the school practitioners will be informed on the day to expect outside visitors. As the forest school and Outdoor Learning is on site there should be no danger to children from uninvited guests. However, in the event of uninvited visitors:

- Staff will gather whole group to ensure safety using the signal for rounding up (1, 2, 3 come to me or whistle – arranged with individual groups).
- Lead practitioner to approach the individual and escort them to the school office.
- If unsuccessful in directing the visitor to the school office, then notify office immediately.
- If children are at risk, they should be escorted to the school building immediately.
- Staff will contact the school office immediately if there is a risk to health and safety

All Forest School sessions adhere to the latest Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance on managing risk in outdoor learning (2024). To embed this guidance, the Forest School Leader uses continues to use dynamic risk assessments before and during each session, adjusting activities to reflect current site conditions. Children are also consistently encouraged to take part in simple risk awareness discussions to build responsibility and understanding of safe outdoor practice.

Weather

- Forest school and Outdoor Learning sessions are planned to run-in all-weather conditions.
- Children and practitioners are advised to dress in layers so that they can be warm or cooled down.

- Waterproof clothing will be in school for all sessions provided by parents (school also has spare).
- If the forest school leader feels that the weather is too severe to work in, then it will be cancelled at the discretion of the leader.

Behaviour

- During the forest school and Outdoor Learning session, the leader, together with the group will set out site rules. These will be identified by the children (do/don't).
- These rules can then be displayed and referred to throughout the sessions.
- Adults to reinforce expected behaviour during sessions and act as role models.
- Anyone found misbehaving will be reminded of the rules.

Photo and media

The school ensures parent/guardian consent has been sought as part of whole school policy for sharing via any social media platforms. Child progress for EYFS is also recorded on Tapestry in direct observations and photographic evidence for which a separate consent has been authorised and for children in Y1-Y6 Seesaw is used to communicate with parents – again, permission is sought prior to any photos being shared on this platform.

All digital photographs and media will be stored securely following the school's Data Protection and GDPR Policy (2025 update). Social media posts will comply with the school's Online Safety Policy. The Forest School Leader ensures only authorised staff capture or share images, using school-owned devices. All content is checked before uploading to ensure it meets data protection and safeguarding standards.

Play

The school believes that all children should be encouraged to learn through their curiosity and exploration. *Evidence shows that providing good quality free play opportunities is essential for children's physical, emotional and social well-being. The term free play is used here to describe play that is self-directed by the children rather than structured activities directed by adults. Free play is vital to the development of children's imaginations and creative interests and abilities. It has also been shown to help children adjust to settings and to enhance children's readiness to learn, to develop effective learning behaviours, and build problem-solving skills (Play England).*