WOODLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL HEDGEHOGS NURSERY & SUNBEAMS CLUB

FOREST SCHOOL & OUTDOOR LEARNING POLICY

Updated: October 2026

Review date: October 2027

Introduction

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

Forest School is an outdoor learning approach that supports children's development through regular opportunities to explore, investigate, play and learn in a natural environment. It aims to develop children's self-esteem, confidence, independence, social skills, language and communication, physical skills, problem-solving abilities and knowledge and understanding of the natural world.

Children are given opportunities to learn through practical, hands-on experiences within the school grounds and designated woodland area. Sessions are led by appropriately trained staff or the Forest School Leader, with activities planned to reflect children's interests, developmental stages and individual needs.

Children are encouraged to explore the natural environment, take appropriate risks, develop resilience and learn from their experiences. Activities may include nature exploration, den building, seasonal observations, natural art, practical investigations and, where appropriate, supervised tool use and fire activities.

Forest School and Outdoor Learning are inclusive approaches. Activities will be adapted, where necessary, to enable all children to participate meaningfully and safely.

Legislation and Guidance

Forest School and Outdoor Learning sessions take place on the school site. The school's policies and procedures apply during all sessions, including those relating to safeguarding, health and safety, behaviour, first aid, inclusion, data protection and online safety.

The school will have regard to relevant legislation and current guidance, including:

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance on risk assessment and managing health and safety.
- Department for Education guidance on health and safety in schools.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education, current edition.
- The school's current Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- Relevant guidance and principles published by the Forest School Association.

All staff and volunteers must follow the school's safeguarding procedures. Adults working with children must have the appropriate recruitment checks and authorisation for their role. Staff must complete safeguarding training in line with school requirements and know how to report concerns or disclosures.

The Forest School Leader is responsible for planning sessions in accordance with the principles of Forest School, where these apply, and for ensuring that activities are suitable for the setting, the children and the available staffing.

Staff supporting Forest School sessions must receive appropriate induction and guidance on the activities they will supervise, including any relevant safety procedures.

Health and Safety

Woodlands Primary School recognises its responsibility to protect the health, safety and well-being of staff, pupils, visitors and others who may be affected by its activities. Health and safety will be considered as an integral part of planning, delivering and reviewing Forest School and Outdoor Learning sessions.

Staff must follow the school's health and safety procedures and take reasonable steps to ensure that activities are conducted safely. The Forest School Leader and supporting staff are responsible for remaining alert to changing conditions and responding appropriately to hazards.

Before sessions begin, parents and carers will be informed of planned activities and any relevant clothing or equipment requirements. Children who do not have suitable outdoor clothing will be provided with available school clothing wherever possible.

A register will be taken for each session. Staff must have access to relevant medical information, emergency contact arrangements and details of any individual needs that may affect participation or safety.

Staff must be aware of allergies, medical conditions, medication requirements and individual risk assessments where relevant. Any medication required during a session must be accessible in accordance with the school's medical and medication procedures.

Staffing levels must be appropriate to the children's ages, needs, activities, site conditions and identified risks. Staff must be able to supervise the group effectively and respond to an emergency. Additional adults may be required for activities involving tools, fire or other identified hazards.

Essential Equipment List

The following equipment will be available as appropriate to the planned session:

- First aid kit.
- Burns first aid supplies where fire activities are planned, in accordance with school first aid arrangements.
- Register and relevant medical information.
- Charged mobile phone and means of contacting the school office.
- Access to emergency contact information.
- Accident and incident reporting forms.
- Relevant risk assessments.
- Drinking water.

- Tarpaulins and suitable shelter equipment, where required.
- Fire safety equipment, where fire activities are authorised.
- Suitable handwashing equipment, soap, clean water and hygienic drying materials.
- Work gloves and other appropriate protective equipment.
- String, rope, scissors and other resources required for planned activities.
- Refreshments and food preparation equipment, where required.
- Any additional equipment identified through the risk assessment.

Equipment must be suitable for its intended purpose, checked before use and stored safely after sessions.

Risk Assessment Procedure

Risk assessments are used to identify hazards, consider the likelihood and seriousness of harm, and put appropriate control measures in place. The school will follow its health and safety procedures and relevant HSE guidance.

Risk assessments will be proportionate to the activities being undertaken and will be reviewed when circumstances change, following an incident or near miss, or when existing control measures may no longer be adequate.

The risk assessment process involves:

1. Identifying hazards.
2. Assessing the risks associated with those hazards.
3. Deciding and implementing appropriate control measures.
4. Recording significant findings and communicating the arrangements to relevant staff.
5. Reviewing the assessment and updating control measures when necessary.

The designated Forest School or Outdoor Learning area will be assessed before a programme of sessions begins. The assessment will consider the condition of the site, boundaries, access, trees and branches, uneven ground, water hazards, plants, animal faeces, litter, weather-related hazards and other relevant features.

A pre-session site check will be completed before each session. Staff must remain alert to changing conditions and carry out dynamic risk assessments throughout the session. Activities must be adapted, postponed or stopped if risks cannot be controlled adequately.

Separate activity-specific assessments will be completed where required. These may include:

- Forest School and Outdoor Learning site risk assessment.
- General activities risk assessment.
- Tool-use risk assessment.
- Fire and cooking risk assessment.
- Individual risk assessments or additional control measures where required for particular pupils or activities.

Children will be encouraged to recognise hazards, discuss safe choices and understand appropriate risk-taking. This learning will always take place within adult supervision and established safety boundaries.

Any new hazard, accident, near miss or concern must be reported to the Forest School Leader and, where appropriate, the school office. Relevant risk assessments and procedures must then be reviewed.

Daily Procedures

Pre-session

Before each session, staff will:

- Check the site and complete the required risk assessment.
- Check weather conditions and decide whether the planned activities can proceed safely.
- Ensure that activities and resources are appropriate for the children and their individual needs.
- Check that essential equipment is available and in good condition.
- Ensure that first aid arrangements and communication with the school office are in place.
- Check that relevant medical information and emergency arrangements are accessible.
- Confirm appropriate staffing and supervision arrangements.
- Ensure that children have suitable clothing and footwear, providing available school equipment where necessary.
- Take the register and remind children of the relevant site and activity rules.

During the session

Staff will:

- Maintain appropriate supervision and carry out regular headcounts.
- Keep children within the agreed boundaries and designated areas.
- Monitor the site, weather and activities for changing hazards.
- Report and respond to new risks or unsafe conditions.
- Ensure that equipment and tools are used safely and appropriately.
- Reinforce the school's behaviour expectations and Forest School safety rules.
- Adapt activities where necessary to meet children's needs or reduce risks.
- Stop any activity that cannot be carried out safely.

End of session

Staff will:

- Account for all children before leaving the site.
- Check and count tools and equipment.
- Ensure that any fire has been fully extinguished, where applicable.

- Remove litter and equipment that should not remain on the site.
- Leave the area in a safe condition.
- Report damaged, missing or unsafe equipment.

Post-session

Staff will:

- Return equipment to its designated storage area.
- Replenish resources where necessary.
- Record accidents, incidents and near misses in accordance with school procedures.
- Complete a session evaluation where required.
- Report any concerns, changes to site conditions or recommended improvements to the Forest School Leader.

Tool Procedures

Tools will only be used where appropriate to the children's age, developmental stage, experience and individual needs. Their use must be planned, risk assessed and supervised by staff who have received appropriate instruction.

Before using tools for the first time, supporting staff must receive guidance from the Forest School Leader or another suitably competent person. Staff must understand the safe-use procedures for each tool and how to teach these to children.

The following procedures apply:

- Tools must be suitable for the activity and the children using them.
- Children must receive clear instructions and a demonstration before use.
- Staff must establish and maintain a safe working area or 'safe bubble' around each tool user.
- The level of supervision must reflect the tool, the activity, the children's needs and the risk assessment.
- Children must never be left unattended with tools.
- Tools must not be left unattended when brought onto the site.
- Tools must be counted out and counted back in after use.
- Staff must follow the relevant safe-use instructions.
- Damaged, unsafe or missing tools must be reported immediately and removed from use where necessary.
- Tools must be cleaned, checked and stored securely after each session.

Staff must stop tool use immediately if safe working arrangements cannot be maintained.

Fire Safety Procedure

Fire activities will only take place when they have been planned, risk assessed and authorised in accordance with school procedures. They must be led by a suitably competent adult and supervised throughout.

The designated fire area must be checked before each use. Staff must consider overhead branches, surrounding vegetation, ground conditions, nearby combustible materials, wind direction and strength, the position of children and adults, and the availability of suitable fire safety equipment.

The fire must be positioned and managed in accordance with the approved site and activity risk assessments. The area must be kept clear of trip hazards, and children must remain within clearly established boundaries.

The following procedures apply:

- A fire must never be left unattended.
- A suitably competent adult must supervise the fire at all times.
- Children must follow the fire circle rules throughout the activity, including when no fire is lit.
- Fire gloves and any other required protective equipment must be used when handling hot equipment or tending the fire.
- Loose clothing and jewellery must be secured, and long hair tied back.
- Children must be taught the relevant safety rules before approaching the fire area.
- Only approved materials and safe methods may be used to light and maintain a fire.
- Water and suitable fire safety equipment must be immediately available.
- Staff must ensure the fire and any embers are fully extinguished before leaving the area.
- Children must not be allowed to handle hot equipment or embers.
- The activity must stop if conditions become unsafe.

Where children are cooking or working near a fire, staffing arrangements must follow the fire risk assessment and the school's approved procedures. The school's stated minimum adult-to-child ratio of 1:3 must be maintained for these activities unless a more restrictive arrangement is required by the risk assessment.

Fire Circle Rules

- The Forest School Leader or designated competent adult controls access to the fire circle.
- Children may enter the fire circle only when permitted and directly supervised by an authorised adult.
- Children must walk around the outside of the circle when moving between locations.
- Children must enter and leave the seating area in the way demonstrated by the supervising adult.
- Children must remain seated or positioned as instructed and must not run or play within the fire area.
- Children must follow all instructions immediately.
- Staff must model safe positioning and handling when working near the fire.
- The fire must be fully extinguished before the group leaves the area.

If a burn, fire-related injury or other emergency occurs, staff must follow the school's first aid and emergency procedures.

Food Safety, Toileting and Hygiene Procedures

Food safety

Food preparation and cooking activities must be planned and supervised appropriately. Staff must check relevant dietary requirements, allergies and medical information before food is provided.

The following procedures apply:

- Children and adults must wash and dry their hands before handling food and after using the toilet.
- Food must be stored and handled safely, with appropriate measures to prevent cross-contamination.
- Raw and ready-to-eat foods must be kept separate where relevant.
- Food must be cooked thoroughly and served safely.
- Suitable drinking water must be available.
- Food and equipment must be stored in clean, suitable containers.
- Staff must follow school procedures for allergies, dietary requirements and food hygiene.
- Food must not be served if its safety is uncertain.

Toileting

Children and adults should use the toilet before sessions where appropriate. As the Forest School area is on the school site, school toilet facilities should be used during sessions.

Children who need to return to the school building to use the toilet must be accompanied or supervised in accordance with school procedures and staffing arrangements. Staff must ensure that the rest of the group continues to be safely supervised.

Children's privacy, dignity and individual toileting needs must be respected. Any additional support must follow the school's intimate care and safeguarding procedures.

Hygiene

Hands must be washed with suitable soap and clean water and dried hygienically before eating, after toileting and whenever necessary during or after outdoor activities.

Staff must take appropriate precautions when children handle soil, natural materials, plants or other items that may present a hygiene risk. Cuts and grazes must be covered appropriately, and any concerns about contamination or possible exposure to harmful substances must be addressed in line with school procedures.

All equipment used for food preparation must be cleaned appropriately after use.

Emergency Procedures and First Aid Procedure

Forest School and Outdoor Learning sessions will only take place when appropriate first aid arrangements are in place, including access to a suitably qualified first aider in accordance with school procedures.

Staff must know how to contact the school office, where first aid equipment is located and how to summon emergency services.

If an injury or illness occurs:

- Staff must make the situation safe and assess the immediate risk.
- A suitably qualified first aider must provide assistance in accordance with their training.
- The school office must be informed where necessary.
- Emergency services must be called on 999 if the situation requires urgent medical assistance.
- Parents or carers must be informed in accordance with school procedures.
- The rest of the group must remain safely supervised. Additional staff support must be requested where necessary.
- Accidents, injuries and incidents must be recorded in accordance with school procedures.
- The session must be stopped or adapted if it is no longer safe or appropriate to continue.

In the event of a serious incident, staff must not delay calling emergency services while attempting to contact the school office. Staff should provide the emergency operator with the school's address, the location of the incident on the school site, the nature of the emergency and any other information requested.

Missing child

If a child is found to be missing during a session, staff must:

- Raise the alarm and inform the Forest School Leader and school office immediately.
- Keep the remaining children together in a safe, supervised location.
- Check the register and establish when and where the child was last seen.
- Follow the school's missing child and safeguarding procedures.
- Ensure that appropriate staff undertake any search in accordance with school instructions.
- Contact emergency services where required by the circumstances or school procedure.
- Ensure parents or carers are informed by the appropriate member of staff.
- Record and review the incident in accordance with school procedures.

Staff must not leave the remaining children unsupervised while responding to a missing child incident.

Evacuation or serious threat

If the site becomes unsafe because of fire, severe weather, an intruder, a hazardous discovery or another serious threat, staff must stop the activity and move children to the designated safe location in accordance with the school's emergency procedures.

Staff must take the register or account for all children as soon as it is safe to do so and contact the school office. Where appropriate, the school's fire evacuation, lockdown or other emergency procedure must be followed.

The Forest School Leader must not restart the session until it is safe to do so and the relevant concerns have been addressed.

Irregular Occurrence, Uninvited Visitor or Stranger Procedure

All visitors must follow the school's visitor procedures, including signing in and wearing the appropriate visitor identification.

Staff must remain alert to anyone on the school grounds whose presence is unexpected or who may pose a risk. The fact that Forest School sessions take place on the school site does not remove the need for vigilance.

If an uninvited or concerning visitor is seen during a session:

- Staff must alert the Forest School Leader and school office immediately.
- Children must be brought together and kept under close supervision.
- The group must move to a safe location if necessary.
- Staff must not put themselves or children at unnecessary risk by approaching or confronting a potentially threatening person.
- Staff must follow instructions from the school office or senior leaders and the school's safeguarding, security and lockdown procedures as appropriate.
- Emergency services must be contacted where there is an immediate threat to safety.
- Any incident or concern must be reported and recorded in accordance with school procedures.

Children should be reminded, in an age-appropriate way, to tell an adult if they notice someone unfamiliar in the area. They must not be made responsible for challenging or managing visitors.

Any safeguarding concern or disclosure arising during a session must be reported promptly in accordance with the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Weather

Forest School and Outdoor Learning sessions may take place in a range of weather conditions, provided that the site and activities remain safe.

Children and staff should wear suitable clothing and footwear for the conditions. Layers, waterproof clothing and spare clothing should be used where available and appropriate.

The Forest School Leader must check the weather before each session and continue to monitor conditions during the activity. The site and planned activities must be reviewed if conditions change.

Sessions must be adapted, relocated, postponed or cancelled where weather or ground conditions present an unacceptable risk. Particular consideration must be given to:

- Strong winds, storms and the risk of falling branches or trees.
- Lightning and thunder.
- Extreme heat, cold or other conditions that could affect children's well-being.
- Flooding, standing water, slippery surfaces or unsafe ground conditions.
- Any other weather-related hazard identified through the risk assessment.

Children must have access to drinking water and appropriate opportunities to warm up, cool down or return indoors when required.

The Forest School Leader is responsible for stopping or changing an activity when conditions are no longer safe. The safety and well-being of children and staff take priority over completing a planned session.

Behaviour

Forest School and Outdoor Learning are based on respect for people, the natural environment and the agreed safety boundaries.

At the beginning of sessions, staff will establish and reinforce clear expectations with the children. Where appropriate, children will contribute to developing site rules and understanding why these are necessary.

Expectations will reflect the school's Ready, Respectful and Safe values and the school's Behaviour Policy.

Staff will:

- Model positive and respectful behaviour.
- Explain safety boundaries clearly and consistently.
- Encourage co-operation, independence and responsibility.
- Support children to recognise the impact of their actions on others and the environment.
- Adapt support and expectations to reflect children's individual needs.
- Address unsafe behaviour promptly and proportionately.
- Stop an activity where a child's actions create an unacceptable risk.

Any behaviour that presents an immediate danger must be addressed straight away. If a child cannot participate safely in a particular activity, staff will consider suitable adjustments or an alternative activity in line with school procedures. Any decision to end a child's

participation in a session must be managed in a way that maintains their safety, dignity and inclusion.

Photo and Media

Photographs, videos and other records of children's participation in Forest School and Outdoor Learning must be managed in accordance with the school's safeguarding, data protection and online safety procedures.

Staff must:

- Follow the school's current arrangements for parental consent and children's privacy.
- Use school-authorised devices and approved platforms.
- Ensure that photographs and recordings are appropriate and necessary.
- Store and share images securely and only for authorised purposes.
- Check that sharing an image is permitted before uploading it to a school platform or using it in communications.
- Report any concern about the use, storage or sharing of images in accordance with school procedures.

In EYFS, Tapestry may be used to record observations and learning, where authorised. For pupils in Years 1–6, the school's approved communication and recording platforms may be used in accordance with current procedures.

Staff must not use personal devices to photograph or record children unless this is expressly permitted by the school's current policy.

Play Policy

Woodlands Primary School believes that children should be encouraged to learn through curiosity, exploration and play.

Self-directed play provides opportunities for children to develop imagination, creativity, independence, problem-solving skills and positive relationships. Outdoor play can also support physical development, emotional well-being, resilience and engagement with learning.

Within Forest School and Outdoor Learning, children will be given opportunities to explore the natural environment, make choices, follow their interests and learn through practical experiences. Adults will observe, support and extend learning where appropriate without unnecessarily directing children's play.

Children will be encouraged to take appropriate risks and learn to recognise and manage hazards within clear safety boundaries. Adults remain responsible for supervision and must intervene when necessary to protect children's safety and well-being.

Play opportunities will be inclusive and adapted where needed so that all children can participate meaningfully. Staff will respect children's ideas and interests while ensuring that the site, resources and activities are used safely and responsibly.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed in accordance with the school's policy review cycle and sooner if required following changes to legislation or guidance, changes to school procedures, significant incidents or changes to the Forest School site or activities.

The Forest School Leader and relevant school leaders will ensure that the policy continues to reflect the school's actual practice and that staff are aware of their responsibilities.

Risk assessments and associated procedures will be reviewed regularly and whenever circumstances change. Any amendments to this policy will be considered and approved through the school's usual procedures.

Reviewed by: Arzoo Ahmad

Date: October 2026