



# Forest School Handbook

Contents

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Page 3       | The Forest School Ethos                   |
| Page 4       | Principles and Criteria for Good Practice |
| Page 5       | What Happens at Forest School             |
| Page 6       | The Benefits of Forest School             |
| Page 7       | Forest School Staff                       |
| Page 8       | The Forest School Site                    |
| Pages 9-10   | The Forest School Code of Conduct         |
| Page 11      | A Typical Forest School Session           |
| Pages 12- 14 | Equipment for Forest School               |
| Pages 15-16  | The Forest School Day                     |
| Page 17      | Risk Assessment Information               |
| Pages 18-21  | Use of Tool Policy and Risk Assessments   |
| Pages 22-25  | Fire Safety Policy                        |
| Pages 26-32  | Health and Safety Policies and Procedures |
| Page 33      | Safeguarding Children                     |
| Pages 34-35  | Equal Opportunities and Forest School     |
| Page 36      | Risk Assessment Guidelines                |
| Page 37      | Poor Weather Procedure                    |
| Page 38      | Designated Person Responsibilities        |
| Page 39      | Insurance Requirements                    |
| Page 40      | Letter to Parents                         |
| Page 41      | Parental Agreement form                   |
| Page 42      | Volunteer Agreement form                  |
| Page 43      | Appendices                                |
| Page 44      | Appendix 1 Policy and Procedure Documents |
| Page 45      | Appendix 2 Risk Assessments               |

## **The Forest School Ethos**

At Penshurst Primary School teach using our school values of Resilience, Respect, Aspiration, Responsibility, Integrity, and Kindness.

We also value a holistic approach to education.

The Forest School approach encompasses the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and social aspects to learning and development. Over time children enhance their sense of self, community, belonging and sense of achievement. Forest School takes place in the outdoor environment involving open ended purposeful experiences for all, focussing heavily on the process of learning, encompassing all learning styles.

Learners are encouraged and supported to follow their own lines of enquiry, exploring freely in our safe environment whilst also having the opportunity to take suitable risks.

This type of enquiry-based learning has been proven to develop self-esteem and confidence.

This concept originates from the Danish approach to environmental learning and places a huge importance on outdoor learning and the positive impacts this has on a child's development.

Penshurst Primary aims to give every child the opportunity to reach their full holistic potential.

**There are NO Forest Schools 'Activities'.  
There are ONLY Opportunities and  
Experiences. – Sarah Blackwell**

The Forest School ethos has 6 principles:

- 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.
- 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.
- Principle 3: Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners
- Principle 4: Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- Principle 5: Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.
- Principle 6: Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

## **What Happens at Forest School**

At Penshurst our sessions are designed and led by our Forest School leader. These take place on a weekly basis in small groups of children.

The session lasts for a minimum of 2 hours. The sessions are designed to involve hands on learning and aim to increase learner's confidence in their own skills and abilities.

Learners are given freedom to explore and engage with the site at their own individual pace.

Sessions are child centred, and children are encouraged to explore their own interests.

Sessions involve the use of natural materials for activities such as:

- Building a range of shelter
- Art and creative activities
- Learning about using knots
- Fire lighting and cooking on fire
- Bug hunts
- Bird spotting
- Story telling
- Investigating and identifying the wildlife and plant life in the area
- Climbing and balancing
- Woodworking to make a range of items
- Creating bug homes and bird feeders and bird boxes
- Collecting, identifying and sorting natural materials such as leaves
- Team games

The experiences that take place have strong links both to the Early Years Foundation Stage and the national curriculum. Covering areas such as maths and English, art, science, geography and history

## **The Benefits of Forest School**

Forest School is open to all ages and abilities; it aspires to develop the learners holistically. It adds value to children's learning and for those children in particular that may struggle to learn in the classroom environment.

Forest School sessions are proven to enhance children's skills. These skills are then transferred into the classroom environment where learners are found to be more motivated and show elevated levels of concentration.

- Confidence: children had the freedom, time, and space to learn and demonstrate independence
- Social skills: children gained increased awareness of the consequences of their actions on peers through team activities such as sharing tools and participating in play
- Communication: language development was prompted by the children's sensory experiences
- Motivation: the woodland tended to fascinate the children, and they developed a keenness to participate and the ability to concentrate over longer periods of time
- Physical skills: these improvements were characterised by the development of physical stamina and gross and fine motor skills
- Knowledge and understanding: the children developed an interest in the natural surroundings and respect for the environment

## **Forest School Staff**

Our Forest School at Penshurst is run by Mrs Smith who is working towards her Level 3 Award for Forest School Practitioners. Mrs Smith is a qualified First Aider and has access to a recommended first aid kit and all the safety equipment required for Forest School.

Mrs Smith also holds a Food Hygiene Certificate, Food Allergy Awareness and Anaphylaxis certificate, Certificate in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for Primary Schools and an Annual Certificate in Fire Safety for Primary Schools.

## **The Forest School Site**

Our Forest School takes place in a designated area at the bottom of our school field. We will also carry out some activities on the large well-established trees on the school site. We also have a sensory garden and a small, wooded area near to the allotment area.

The woodland will develop over time, and we hope to develop a deeper diversity. The site is within school grounds and is not accessible to the public. Children taking part in Forest School will also be encouraged to minimise their impact on the site.

This will include:

- Finding out about the different animals and plants that live in and amongst the trees
- Learning to respect animals' homes
- Careful observation of live animals
- Leaving lying deadwood in place
- Taking all materials and litter with them when they leave
- Ensuring that the site is left like they found it
- Fires will only be lit in the fire pit and will be fully extinguished before we leave the site

## **Forest School Code of Conduct**

### **Entering the Forest School area**

Learners will be briefed before entering the area. We show respect for our surroundings and the flora and fauna within. We always adhere to the Forest school expectations.

### **Boundaries**

We have a set area within the school grounds that is used for our Forest School sessions. At the beginning of our session children will be made aware of the boundaries and the area we can learn in. Adults will move around the areas to ensure that they always have sight of the children.

### **Lighting a fire**

The Forest School leader will plan and be in control of fire lighting. There will always be an adult present when the fire is lit. The fire will only be lit when all safety measures are in place. Fires will only be lit in our purpose build area.

### **Fire circle**

The open fire will be lit in the centre of the fire circle. The seating for the fire circle is 2 metres away from the fire square. All learners must ask for permission to enter the fire circle and receive a response from the leader before they are allowed to enter. Learners are not permitted to run near the fire circle. Only items can be brought into the fire circle by an adult. If the learners are required to leave the fire circle or need to change seating space – they must step out of the fire circle and walk around the outside of the seating. When the area is not in use, we still treat it as if a fire is lit.

### **Use of tools**

There is a wide range of tools used at Forest School and require a range of Personal, Protective Equipment and correct use techniques (Please see specific Use of Tools policy for more details). There is also a full Risk Assessment for all tools used at Forest School.

### **Digging**

We discourage learners from digging large holes. During sessions learners can move soil carefully when looking for insects.

### **Tree climbing**

A risk assessment will be carried out before the learners are allowed to climb. The area will be checked for sharp objects and any dangers. The tree will also

be checked for its suitability. Children are permitted to climb to a maximum of 1.5 metres. A staff member will always be present.

### Carrying and transporting materials

During sessions children can move resources around the site. The learners are taught to move and handle varied materials safely.

### Toileting

We do not have any toileting facilities in the Forest School area. Learners will have the opportunity to use the facilities before we leave the school building. When on site, children can use the facilities in school if needed.

### Leaving the site

We work according to the ethos that the Forest School site should be 'left as it was found'. All natural materials harvested and transported will be put back where they were found. Artefacts that are made or found will be photographed and not removed from the Forest School site. Any equipment used will be taken back and stored in the safety boxes. All rubbish will be taken into school and disposed of.

### **A Typical Forest School session**

Before we venture out into our Forest School area, we make sure we are prepared, all learners are dressed appropriately for the weather and that we have the resources that are needed for the session.

As a group we will discuss the rules, expectations, and routines.

We then walk to the Forest school area and gather at the fire area. This area is a central meeting place where the group can get together both at the start of the session to discuss the session, talk about what children have enjoyed at the last sessions and what they may be planning to do during the current session. Many of the Forest School experiences take place in the vicinity of the fire area. This includes art, games, and woodwork.

During the session, the group will gather back together to have a drink and snack. This can include helping to build and make a fire within the fire pit in the fire circle.

At the end of each session, all learners and staff work together to collect and put away all materials and tools that have been used. The natural resources are returned to where they were found.

## **Equipment for Forest School**

The Forest School leader will always carry an emergency bag. The contents of this are dependent on elements such as the weather, the plans of the session and the individual learner needs.

This bag contains a range of essential items alongside any tools or equipment used for sessions.

Set of spare clothes

Spare transparent plastic bags and bin liners

Wet wipes

Facial tissues

First aid kit

Tarpaulins & tent pegs

Penknife

Disposable gloves

Whistle for use in emergencies

String and rope

Sun cream (summer)

Insect repellent (summer)

Pen and paper

**In a storage box will be the following for use at the fire circle -**

Washing up bowl & antiseptic hand wash gel

Fire blanket, bucket and fire safety gloves, fire striker, and cotton wool/kindling

Drinking water in jerry can (this is filled with fresh water prior to each session).

Spare water in jerry can

Drinking cups

Bowls and plates

Kettle

Dutch oven and pans

Children's cutlery

Cooking utensils

Squash and Hot chocolate powder

### **Emergency procedure information**

Mobile phone with emergency contact numbers – in school. (on visit)

At a glance sheet - children's medical information and medication for individuals  
Staff handbook and emergency procedures in water-proof folder

Risk assessments

Map of forest school site with postcode and / or grid reference (on visit)

Accident forms

### **First aid kit**

First aid guidance booklet

Disposable gloves (latex free)

Sterile non-medicated dressings

Eye bandage

Triangular bandages

Cleansing wipes

Instant ice pack

Space blankets x 2

Burn cool x 4

Safety pins

**Art and Craft Equipment** - this can vary from week to week depending on planned session

Wool, ribbon, string

Felt pens and charcoal

Scissors

Paint brushes

Wood glue

Masking tape

Cotton sheet

Pots for mixing natural dyes

Sieves

Stories Activity bags

ID sheets

### **Tools**

Tool bags and toolbox

Knives x 10 in lockable box

Bow saw

Hack saws 12" x 4

Loppers

Potato peelers x 2

Work gloves - adult's: 1 & children's: 10

Tent pegs (blunt ended) x 20

Rope – assorted sizes Inc. poly prop.

Pruning saws x 1

Billhooks x 4

Palm drills x 10

Mallets x4

**Any tools will be in the locked box and only opened by the Forest School leader and safely handed to the children – these will be safely collected back in at the end of the session.**

\*Any further equipment taken to the site must be deemed appropriate by the Forest School Leader.

## **The Forest School Day**

### **INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS, STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

Forest School is a child-centred inspirational learning process, that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions.

It is a long-term program that supports play, exploration and supported risk taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting.

### **Responsibilities**

#### **Clothing**

It is our responsibility to ensure that children are appropriately dressed for Forest School sessions. Any child not wearing appropriate clothing will not be able to participate.

We will provide a shelter from the elements using a high shelter made from tarpaulin. It is still important that all learners wear clothes that are warm and that are OK to get wet and muddy. This type of clothing also protects from cuts and scrapes. It must also meet any religious requirements.

#### **Clothing list:**

- warm trousers
- long-sleeved jumper
- fleece or t-shirt
- a vest or t-shirt underneath
- thick socks
- wellington boots
- waterproof coat with hood
- waterproof trousers
- gloves and woolly hat (wintry weather)
- sun hat (warm weather)

At Peshurst the regular group of Forest School children have a waterproof suit and wellington boots provided.

#### **Behaviour Management**

Whilst on site we follow our Forest School Rules for safety and the Peshurst Behaviour rules still apply.

### Safety and First Aid

The Forest School Leader (Mrs Smith) is a qualified first aider and carries a recommended first aid kit. All activities are risk assessed prior to the session and staff continually monitor the safety of the group. An emergency plan is detailed further in this handbook in the unlikely event of a serious accident.

### Cancellation

Forest school sessions take place in most weather conditions. However high winds are extremely dangerous, and sessions will not take place if this occurs. Sessions will where possible be moved to another suitable day.

## **Risk assessment Information**

Food safety and cooking procedure

The Forest School Leader holds a food hygiene safety certificate.

We will provide hand washing facilities at each session and will ensure that all staff, volunteers, and participants follow the Forest School food hygiene rules.

### **Forest School food hygiene rules**

Everyone involved in Forest School should be involved in food safety and follow the food hygiene rules below. If you spot a problem, please point it out to the Forest School Leader.

When involved in food and drink preparation you should:

- Wash hands before and during cooking.
- Not handle food if they are ill with stomach problems, such as diarrhoea or vomiting.
- Cover sores and cuts with a waterproof dressing.
  - Avoid handling food when possible, and instead use spoons, tongs or other suitable implements.
- Tie hair back.
- Keep food that is waiting to be cooked separate from food that is ready to be eaten.
- Use separate chopping boards for preparing different foods, especially raw and ready-to-eat food.
- Prepare food on a suitable surface, e.g. chopping board, cup, saucepan and not on the ground.
- Ensure food is cooked thoroughly before serving. Food should be cooked right through and piping hot in the middle.
- Not reheat food more than once.
- Keep utensils clean and regularly wash tea towels and cloths.
- Store food in clean plastic containers with non-leaking lids.
- Take all rubbish and food scraps away with them at the end of the session to avoid attracting vermin to the site.

Food allergies and special dietary requirements: Participants are asked to state any food allergies and special dietary requirements they may have on their Parental Consent and Medical form.

### **Use of Tool Policy and Risk Assessment Information**

Learning to safely use appropriate tools are an important part of a child's development. They enable a child to fashion instruments for both practical usefulness and pleasure. Tools help children learn how natural materials feel and change and when used safely, help to develop coordination, dexterity, and ingenuity.

Only Level 3 Qualified Forest School Leaders will train children to use tools and will be responsible for the care and safety of all individuals when using tools, including implementing the safe tool use policy and procedure.

All tools have their own clear code of conduct for correct use which will include consideration of specific personal protective equipment, correct use of a specific body posture, and consideration of the appropriate types of activity that each tool may be used for.

At Peshurst we will encourage the use of the following tools:

- wooden mallets
- potato peelers
- palm drill
- small hacksaws
- bowsaw
- loppers
- secateurs

The following guidelines are to be followed when using tools:

- Hand tools are to be maintained in good order by the Forest School Leader and will be inspected before each session to ensure safety.
- Only tools that are in safe working order will be used.
- Children and adults will be taught how to handle tools properly and to treat them with respect.
- Individual tools will be introduced to children in a structured way, clearly showing how to use each tool safely.
- Whilst using hand tools the staff-to-child ratio is increased to a minimum of 1:2.

- Tools will be kept in a locked Forest School Toolbox and removed only by the Forest School Leader.
- All tools will be counted out at the beginning of the session  
Tools will not be removed from the designated area.  
This area will not be included in 'free flow'. Children will be reminded not to run, walk around with, or point tools at others.
- Children will lose permission to use tools if the guidelines are not followed.
- All tools must be counted back into the tool bag at the end of the session.
- Staff and volunteers must receive training on the use of individual hand tools before being permitted to use them with children.
- Safe working distances will be maintained at all times. Children will be made aware of their personal space and of not entering other's space when using tools.
- Initial tool use will be monitored and inform a re-assessment of risk.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): All group members will wear suitable boots/shoes/gloves and outdoor clothing for the activity they take part in.

### **Tool specific procedures**

#### **Hammers and Mallets**

- 1:3 adult to child ratio when using hammers.
- Items to be hammered should be on the ground or a firm surface, not held in the hands or on the body.
- Nails and stakes will only be dispensed by an adult in small quantities and with careful supervision.
- All nails and stakes will be accounted for and collected back in after use.

#### **Drills**

- 1:2 adult to child ratio when using drills.
- Items to be drilled should be on the ground or a firm surface, not held in the hands or on the body.

#### **Peelers**

- 1:2 adult to child ratio when using peelers.

- Peelers will be kept sharp as a blunt peeler is more likely to cause an accident.
- When using peelers or knives to whittle, this must be done at the side of and downwards of the body. Children will be carefully instructed on position and technique and will need to demonstrate they have grasped this before they are given a peeler.
- Children must stay in their own space for safe working distance. This means that they cannot reach or touch another person at full arms' stretch.

### Saws

- 1:1 adult to child ratio when using saws, unless two children are using one bowsaw together, in that case 1:2.
- Gloves are to be worn when using any type of saw.
- Saws must have a blade guard in place when not in use.
- Blade guards to be removed and replaced only by the Forest School Leader.
- Wood being sawn must be supported on a sawhorse or a natural sawing break – hands must be kept clear of blade.
- Children will be carefully instructed on position and technique and will need to demonstrate they have grasped this before they are allowed to use a saw.

### Loppers and Secateurs

- Use of loppers and secateurs must be supervised 1:1.
- Tools must be kept sharp as blunt loppers and secateurs pose a greater risk.
- Children must stay in their own space for safe working distance. This means that they cannot reach or touch another person at full arms' stretch.
- Secateurs must have a blade guard in place when not in use.
- Blade guards to be removed and replaced only by the Forest School Leader.
- Buy secateurs with safety catches.

### Rope and String Use

- All string and rope use will be supervised by an adult.
- When hanging ropes are not in use, they must be hooked up out of the reach of children.
- We do not allow children to tie up each other.

- If a child has an innovative idea and wants to tie up something, for example a tarp or a swing, an adult should help them as needed, modelling appropriate knot tying and modelling how to talk through ideas and decisions.
- Adult to check swing before use each session - daily site check.
- Replace rope/stick when worn.
- Rope swing use always supervised by an adult.
- Rope swing hung out of children's reach when not in use.
- Area around swing kept clear when rope swing is in use.
- Adults talk to children about safe use.

### Tool Storage

- Tools will be kept in a locked Forest School Toolbox and removed only by the Forest School Leader
- All tools will be counted out at the beginning of the session.
- All tools must be counted back into the toolbox at the end of the session.
- Tools will remain in the locked box even when in indoor/outdoor storage.
- The toolbox should be waterproof to prevent rusting. Tools should be checked regularly by the Forest School leader and maintained as required e.g. oiling, sharpening and so on. Maintaining tools properly reduces risk.

## **Fire Safety Policy**

Campfires form an important aspect of learning during Forest School sessions. Children experience and take part in experiences such as singing, making and sharing food, sharing stories and listening together.

At Penshurst we believe that we have a responsibility to teach children about how fire should be respected, the dangers associated, safety and responsibility and about the fire triangle – (oxygen, fuel and heat) and how we can safely build a successful small fire.

At Penshurst we ensure those participating will do so with as minor risk to health as possible, within a safe manner and contained in a safe, secure environment.

A risk assessment will always be carried out prior to a fire being lit.

### **Location:**

- Only the purpose build area will be used for campfires – this is in the fire pit area.
- We have an open fire area surrounded by fixed seating 2 metres from the fire pit.
- Forest school learners are allowed in this area only during Forest School sessions.
- The fire area is positioned in an area of the field away from all sites exits. An adult will always be present in the fire area when the fire is lit. The school will ensure that no other children are present in the area during Forest School session. The school will always have notice of when the fire will be lit.
- Children may only enter the fire area when permission is granted. They must ask the adult in charge 'May I enter?'.

Prior to sessions, all children will be taught how to enter, exit, and move around the fire area.

- When access is granted, children must walk around the outside of the seating logs and wait for permission to step over. Once inside the area, the learners must sit ensuring legs are drawn in and not outstretched.
- Once the learners are seated around the fire, they must not move from their seat unless directed by the adult.
- Learners are taught to stand up and step over the seating to move out of the fire area. Learners will then walk around the outside of the seating to change spaces or leave the area. Learners must never cross the inner circle and running is not permitted.

- Learners are not permitted to throw anything into the fire.
- Learners will be given advice on the appropriate way to deal with smoke: turn head to one side, placing their hand across their face, to close their eyes and count to 30 – they can ask an adult or a peer to count for them.
- If there is a clear wind direction then seating in the line of smoke is to be avoided.

## **FIRES WILL NOT BE LIT IN STRONG WINDS**

### Safety and responsibility

1. Lighting and keeping fires burning. When lighting a fire, the Forest School leader will take control of the operation, and all accompanying adults will be briefed before we start. A lit fire will not be left unattended at any point. A fire may not be lit until it has been confirmed to all that our fire safety equipment is in place. Open fires will be built within a fire square.
2. Storm kettles are only used on a stone slab and any woodchip or leaf litter must be brushed away before use.
3. No flammable liquids or plastics are to be used on the fire.
4. If sessions involve children adding fuel to the fire, this must be done with one-to-one adult supervision.
5. Water must always be to hand during campfire sessions.
6. At the end of the session, the fire must be extinguished with water until all smoke and steam has ceased.
7. The bowl will be filled with water (this will drain through the holes at the bottom) and the lid placed over it.
8. These items will be essential whenever a fire is lit:



- Fire blanket
- Heatproof gloves or gauntlets
- Clean emergency water supply
- Burns first aid kit.

### Fire Risk Assessment (see separate risk assessment)

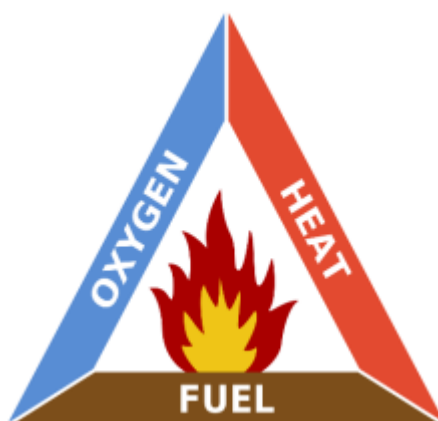
- The Forest School leader may teach a Year KS2 child 1:1 how to build a small fire.
- Fires are lit using tinder of various kinds, fire steels or matches.
- No flammable liquids are to be used to light or accelerate fires.
  - No plastics are to be burnt.
- If sessions involve children adding fuel to the fire, this must be done with one-to-one adult supervision.
- Sticks/wood must be placed, not thrown, from the side of the fire.
- The hand should never go over the fire.

### Extinguishing fires

- All fires must be extinguished at the end of a session.
- Water should always be to hand during campfire sessions.
- Whenever possible, all fuels should be burnt off to ash.
- Forest School leader should ensure that any large remains of wood are separated from one another.
- At the end of the session, the fire must be doused down with water and stirred until all smoke and steam has ceased.

### Education about fire and fire lighting (notes for adults at Forest School sessions)

For a fire we need fuel, fire, and oxygen – the fire triangle



Children will collect tinder (dry grasses, very dry leaves, birch bark from the floor, fine twigs, pine needles or open pinecones) to make an apple sized tinder bundle.

- They collect their kindling. Forest School leader will also have alternative tinder if wet. Small twigs are best as it is the thickness not the length that counts!

They will be separated into piles of varied sizes - fine twigs (a few mm diameter, size of a toothpick), slightly larger twigs (diameter of a pencil), and bigger twigs (approx. diameter of adult thumb).

- Forest School leader will explain that those that make a nice snapping sound when you break them are drier, and good for fire lighting, whereas if they bend, then they are not very dry and not good for fire lighting. Bone dry wood and small twigs make less smoke, and standing dead wood is better than wood from the ground.
- Forest School leader will also have fuel: a few larger diameter pieces of dry wood, own supply of charcoal, dry sticks, or small split logs.

### Starting the fire

- A few slightly larger pieces of wood will be put in the base of the fire pit to create a dry platform and keep the tinder off the floor.
- Tinder will be lit with a spark from fire striker (fire steel or matches). The finest tinder will then go on, e.g. paper-thin bark, pine needles, dry grass, dry (dead) nettles, hay, super thin twigs.
- Gradually add larger sized tinder and kindling. As one-piece lights, add another - too much too soon can suffocate the fire of oxygen and put it out.
- We will explain the purpose of a particular fire. For example, the above method is best for getting a fire started, 'grid fires' are good for cooking (a Criss cross piece of metal over it, so that pans and kettles can be heated on a flat surface). Long fires are long burning and are good for keeping us warm overnight, but we will not be using these at Penshurst as we have no need to. Fires will be built with the session length in mind and with an aim for them to extinguish naturally by the end of the session.

## **Health and Safety Policies & Procedures**

Penshurst Primary School sets out clear statements of intent regarding the Whole School's approach to the health and safety of its children, staff and visitors to the School and the School Site.

Provided below is a list of additional points and measures which relate directly to our Forest School sessions. There is always a qualified Forest School Leader at Forest School and the appropriate number of staff to child ratio. This means that participants can safely participate in experiences like climbing trees, walking across logs blindfolded, lighting (controlled) fires and using knives that are usually considered too risky in other situations.

It also means that Leaders can give individuals one-to-one attention when needed, and to lead small group work. All experiences are thoroughly risk assessed before the start of each session and Leaders continue to monitor the safety of the group as activities evolve. There is always a trained first aider present at each session and a written emergency plan to follow.

Participants are also involved in completing their own risk assessments throughout the sessions. This gives them ownership of the process and helps them to be aware of, and calculate, the risks involved in the session. They are asked to state what risks and hazards they should be aware of and what steps they can take to reduce or mitigate them.

### **DAILY PROCEDURES**

The Forest School Leader has a duty of care to ensure that all staff and learners are safe during the sessions. The Leader will risk assess the site before every session and carry out a range of checks before, during and after the session.

Pre-visit checks

- Check the area for and remove all visible litter and faeces.
- Check the site risk assessment and amend where necessary.
- Check for trip hazards and remove where possible.
- Remove any loose overhanging vegetation.
- Ensure risk assessments are completed for all activities.
- Erect shelter(s).
- Set up Forest School circle.
- Set up hand washing station.

- Check that the forest school rucksack contains all necessary items (see section on Forest School equipment), including all emergency procedure information, a stocked and in date first aid kit, fire blanket and dated fresh water.
- Check you have all the materials and resources needed for the session you have planned.
- Check that all tools you are planning to use are in good working order.
- Check that your phone is in working order and is fully charged.

#### At the start of the session

- Take register and head count.
- Remind children about physical boundaries (use visual cues when needed) and that they must stay within these. In the first sessions, and at the beginning of each session play a game to reinforce this.
- Remind children how they should behave and how to stay safe on site (see site risk assessment).
- Explain the need for, and principles of, fire safety.

#### Throughout the session

- Be vigilant.
- Remind children of how to stay safe by highlighting potential hazards (see individual risk assessments), reminding them of the boundaries and asking that they make an adult aware of any hazards that they spot.
- Carry out regular head counts.
- Take photos and make observations of individual children.
- Use de-escalating techniques whenever possible when dealing with behavioural issues

#### At the end of the session

- Carry out a final head count and escort the group back to the school.
- Count and pack up all equipment.
- Count and pack up all resources.
- Place all tool back into locked storage area.
- Clear fire area and make safe. Remove ash and cover over the site of fire.
- Evaluate the session.

## Adult Roles & Responsibilities

The Trained and Named Forest School Leader is always the person in charge of Forest school sessions.

- The Forest School Leader has overall duty of care for the children in their charge. However, all adults involved in the Forest School session are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe.
- All adult helpers MUST sign and date a form to show that they have read and understood this handbook and the risk assessments appropriate to the session in which they are helping. They must sign and date the form stating that they comply with the general operating procedures for Forest School (code of conduct).
- The Forest School Leader or Assistant will always carry and take a first aid kit into the forest at every session.
- The Forest School Leader or Assistant will always carry an Emergency Bag into the forest for every session.

The Forest School Leader will ensure that the Emergency Bag contains:

1. Essential survival equipment
2. A register of all children attending the session
3. The school's telephone number (and location details for the emergency services)
4. The Forest School Leader will always carry a mobile phone and will ensure that there is easy access to a land line if the group is out of range.
5. In the event of an emergency, The Forest Leader will ensure that the school contacts the emergency services. If contact with the school is lost the Leader will contact the emergency services.
6. The Forest School Leader
7. When tools are used the adult child ratio will be 1:1 (There is one exception to this – when using peelers for whittling the ratio can be 1:2).
8. The Forest School leader is responsible for the maintenance and checking of all tools and equipment to be used at Forest school, prior to their use.
9. The Forest Leader is responsible in training the children in how to use the tools and equipment safely and appropriately.
10. The Forest leader will be responsible for the pre visit check of the Forest School site prior to a Forest School session.

### Emergency procedure

1. Locate all group participants and call back in the agreed manner (this is set at the beginning). Stop (where safe to do so) all activities. Withdraw the group to a safe space away from harm.
2. Where casualties are present, the first aider must attend with an adult helper where possible to do so to continue to adhere to adult to learner ratios. As a minimum – 1 first aider must always be present on site. A record of all first aid administered will be kept. This also includes any changes that may occur to the state of the casualty and if anything is administered.
3. School management will be informed of any major incident as soon as possible.
4. Where necessary the emergency services are to be contacted. Mobile phones are carried by all staff. The school will also be contacted, and a member of the site team will be waiting to greet the emergency service vehicle. Address to be given: Penshurst Primary School, Winthorpe Road, Hessle, Hull HU13 9EX.
5. The rest of the group will be escorted into the main school building.
6. The head of school or a designated member of school will inform the next of kin as soon as possible in line with the schools operating policy.
7. The incident will be reported in line with the schools operating policy and any partner agencies informed. All policies and risk assessments will be review and the incident noted.

### Missing person procedure

The following procedure should be followed by the Forest School Leader responsible for a group in the event of any person (adult or child) going missing from the Forest School group.

- Carry out the call routine. This signals that everyone should move to the Forest School circle.
- Conduct a head count to check that all other members of the group are present.
- Have two members of staff or volunteers stay with the group at the Forest School circle and await further instructions.
- Send the remaining staff and volunteers to search the immediate area for an agreed length of time (e.g. 10 minutes). Arrange for them to return to the agreed meeting place at an agreed time.

- Ensure that each of the searchers has a mobile phone with sufficient credit and battery life. Searchers should stay within an area they know and be aware of their own safety.
- If the missing person is not found in the agreed length of time, everyone should walk to the school. Here the rest of the group can wait in safety and comfort.
- Alert school staff to the fact that there is a missing person.
- Organise a second search party. Any staff member who knows the site can be recruited to help this second search. Searchers should work in pairs with at least one carrying a mobile phone with sufficient credit and battery life. Arrange for them to search for a specified length of time (e.g. 20 minutes) and return to reception at an agreed time. If the missing person is not found by this second search, then with SLT consent, contact the police. The decision may be made to do this while the second search is in progress depending on circumstances. At this point, a decision will need to be made regarding the rest of the group, in consultation with the SLT. It is likely that once they have changed out of their waterproofs, it will be best for the children to return to normal lessons.

Areas for search:

- All outside playgrounds, field, and areas.
- The school car park
- Toilets within school
- All classrooms and cloakrooms in school

After the incident is over, complete a full report using the Incident Report Form.

### Fire procedure

- In the event of a fire that cannot be put out quickly and safely by the Forest School Leaders, blow repeated long whistles to alert the group.
- Gather everyone together, conduct a head count and evacuate area to a safe location – Playground meeting point in case of fire.
- Alert SLT where the school will then contact the emergency services Campfire procedure

Penshurst Forest School provides opportunities for children to get closer to nature and the outdoors through a variety of activities, which include learning about fire safety and how to make fires. Children may also get the opportunity to light their own fires. This will only take place under strict supervision, with a one-to-one adult to child ratio. All Forest School Leaders are skilled and practiced in fire-building and management. Fires only will be used and lit in the centre of the

Forest School circle in the fire pit. All Forest School sessions are rigorously risk assessed. Sessions are planned in such a way as to introduce higher risk opportunities to children over a period. This allows Leaders to get to know the children in the group and for the children to learn how to behave responsibly and to build knowledge and understanding of the activity.

### Boundary setting

In the first Forest School session, both physical and behavioural boundaries are agreed with the children. At each subsequent session, these boundaries are revisited and reinforced.

### Developing routines – Sessions 1 and 2

- When they arrive at the Forest School site, children are shown how to sit round the Forest School circle (step over mats/benches and sit down).
- The need for, and principles of, fire safety are explained. This will include the rule that when a fire is being used in the centre of the circle, only one child at a time is permitted to approach the fire, on instruction from the Forest School Leader.
- The children are shown how to move around the circle (step out of circle and walk around outside).
- A game is then played to reinforce this – Leaders call out different statements that will relate to certain children in the group. E.g. “Everyone who has brown hair step outside and move around the circle” and so on. In subsequent sessions, children will be asked to recall how they should behave at the Forest School circle. Depending on the behaviour and ability of the group, the use of lit fires will usually be introduced in much later sessions. Forest School Leaders’ daily campfire and use of campfire procedures to ensure that everyone stays safe on site and that risk is managed effectively, Forest School Leaders will follow a daily campfire procedure.

Forest School Leaders will:

- Keep igniters in a safe location.
- Ensure there is a supply of water/soil/sand to douse the fire.
- Always carry a fire blanket.
- Carry out a pre-visit site check and risk assess the site and the activity.
- Be prepared to abandon the session planned in the event of unforeseen circumstances rendering the session planned unsafe and have another session plan on standby.

- Alert the fire brigade in advance if necessary to avoid false alarm and misidentification of Forest School fires as being uncontrolled.
- Douse fires at completion and check them after 30 minutes to ensure that they have not spread. When lighting fires, Forest School Leaders will:
- Not wear loose clothing, tie long hair back and ensure that children have their hair tied back and have no loose clothing.
- Wear gloves.
- Allow only one child at a time to help with fire construction / approach the fire.
- Try to keep away from the smoke.
- Put out the fire with water when finished.

### **Toilet and shelter facilities at Forest School**

#### Toilet facilities

There are no toilets on the Forest School site. Children are advised to use the toilets in school before the start of the session. If children need to use the toilets during the session, then they will go back to the school in pairs. The younger learners will be accompanied by a member of staff.

#### Shelter at the Forest School site

In the case of adverse weather conditions, we will provide a tarpaulin shelter on the Forest School site, to provide shade during the summer months and to protect from rain, wind, and snow in the winter months.

#### Litter and Waste Water Procedure.

During the sessions there is a small amount of waste created. All waste and litter will be collected and disposed of appropriately.

- The Forest School Leader will provide waste containers.
- All waste produced or found on site during the Forest School session will be placed within the waste containers
- At the end of the Forest School session the Forest School Leader will remove the waste containers for appropriate recycling/disposal. A small amount of wastewater is created at Forest School, from hand washing and washing up. Solid debris is removed from the water for disposal in the waste containers. The wastewater is then disposed in the woodland over a wide an area as possible, so it will evaporate quicker.

### **Safeguarding Children, Confidentiality and Forest School**

All staff follow The Consortium Academy Trust Safeguarding and Confidentiality Procedures.

Any volunteers or visitors to the site are made aware of the procedures. Discuss procedures – taking forms out etc. – see risk assessment – everyone's responsibility.

## Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Forest School

At Penshurst Primary School we are committed to giving each child every opportunity to achieve the highest of standards, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, attainment, age, disability, gender, or background. We actively seek to remove the barriers to learning and participation that can hinder or exclude individual children or groups of children. We aim to provide all our children with the opportunity to succeed, and to reach the highest level of personal achievement.

We will:

- Ensure equality of access for all children
- Employ a range of styles, including collaborative learning, so that children can value working together
- Seek to involve all parents in supporting their child's education
- Take account of the performance of all children when planning for future learning and setting challenging targets
- Make best use of all available resources to support the learning of all groups of children.

Our teachers ensure that our children:

- feel secure and know that their contributions are valued
- appreciate and value the differences in others
- take responsibility for their own actions
- participate safely, in clothing that is appropriate to their religious beliefs
- are taught in groupings that allow them all to experience success
- use materials that reflect a range of cultural backgrounds, learning styles and linguistic needs, without stereotyping
- have a common curriculum experience that allows for a range of different learning styles
- have challenging targets that enable them to succeed
- are encouraged to participate fully, regardless of disabilities or medical needs. Forest School does mean Forest School **FOR ALL**.

We encourage a level of risk-taking, always under close adult supervision, and actively foster friendships and collaboration between all children and adults. Forest School sessions are always designed to produce success and enjoyment, even when this is of a transitory nature.

The Forest environment is an environment to which we are all entitled, and we strongly believe that the experiences we will have there will linger in the memory for years to come. Children with medical needs or disabilities will be helped so that they can take part fully in each Forest School session. Those children with challenging behaviour will be risk assessed and may need one to one supervision, but their entitlement to participate in Forest School remains the same.

## **Risk Assessment Guidelines**

A SITE risk assessment is undertaken each week, and a DAILY risk assessment and check is made prior to every Forest School session at our Forest site. In addition, a benefit risk assessment will be established prior to any opportunity planned that may require it. These will include whittling, cutting wood, shelter building, fire lighting and cooking on an open fire, and palm drilling. Specific additional risk assessments will be undertaken for children whose medical condition or whose behaviour requires them.

The risk assessment process is detailed below:

- We look for potential hazards.
- We decide who might be at risk of harm.
- We think about how harm may occur and the worst outcome that we could face.
- We evaluate the current level of risk.
- We decide on a course of action or set of precautions that will be put in place to minimise the potential risk.
- We then re-evaluate the level of risk once our course of action and precautions have been put in place.
- We create a risk assessment and collate them in the Forest School file.
- We inform all adults with accompanying the group and require them to sign each relevant risk assessment to show that they have read and understood the assessments
- We regularly monitor and review each risk assessment, half termly and as an action is needed.

### **Poor Weather Procedures**

Forest School cannot run in weather conditions that pose a danger to the health and safety of the learners and staff. This includes high winds, during thunderstorms, or during periods of extreme cold. We will use the BBC weather online forecast to make judgments about the expected conditions.

The Forest School Leader will make the decision to continue with Forest school or postpone due to severe weather. When it is wet, we have access to a shelter on site.

### **Designated Person Responsibilities**

Forest School Leader: Iris Smith

First Aider 1: Iris Smith

Additional First Aiders in the school include: All staff in school hold either paediatric first aid or a general first aid certificate.

Designated Safeguarding Lead: Maxine Adams

### **Insurance Requirements**

Penshurst Primary School, Winthorpe Road, Hessle, HULL HU13 9EX

pps.office@hessleacademy.co.uk

The school holds full insurance for Forest School activities to take place within the school grounds.

## **Letter to Parents**

This is a copy of a letter that will go out to parents when children are going to participate in Forest School

Dear Parent/Carer

We are pleased to inform you that your child has been selected to participate in Forest School.

Forest School is run on the school site by Mrs Smith, who is a Level 3 Qualified Forest School Leader. Please read the following information, fill in the Parental School Agreement and return it to the school office.

## **Information about Forest School**

Forest School is run by a qualified Forest School Leader and aims to build up children's confidence, skills and abilities, week by week by providing many hands-on experiences in the outdoors. It gives them the opportunity to explore, learn and discover at their own pace in a safe and secure environment.

Forest School uses natural resources to stimulate imagination, creativity, and investigation.

Forest School Experiences can include:

Woodwork using tools

Shelter building

Fire lighting

Using knots

Creating wildlife habitats

There are many benefits to Forest School, for example it can:

Develop physical abilities and help participants to stay active and healthy

Heighten self-awareness and improve emotional and social skills

Promote team working

Encourage children to take care of themselves and others

Foster care, appreciation and respect for wildlife and places

Broaden knowledge and understanding of the natural world

Your child will be providing with the relevant outdoor clothing and wellington boots for the sessions.

**Parental Agreement**

This is a copy of the Parental Agreement to be signed by children and parent/carers before starting Forest School

**Please read and sign the below with your child and return to the school office -**

| <b><u>The school</u></b>   | <b><u>The Family</u></b>   | <b><u>The child</u></b>  |
|--|--|--|
| <b><u>We will aim to work in partnership with parents and carers to:</u></b> | <b><u>I/We will aim to work in partnership with the school and staff to:</u></b>         | <b><u>I will aim to follow the rules of the Forest School:</u></b> |
| Provide high quality learning through a wide and varied curriculum           | Respond promptly to school correspondence  | I will listen to others  |
| Value each child as an individual  | Ensure that my child is equipped appropriately for Forest School                         | I will take care of my kit   |
| Understand that each child has their own learning style                      | Ensure that the school are made aware of any issues that may affect my child's behaviour | I will try my best   |
| Encourage each child to achieve their best                                   | Support the school in supporting good behaviour  | I will be honest   |
| Encourage collaborative learning   |  | I will respect others  |
| Encourage children to take risks in their own learning                       |  | I will look after the environment                                  |
| Keep myself and others safe  |  | I will take care of school property                                |
| Promote the care of the environment  |  | I will keep myself and others safe                                 |
| <b><u>Signed:</u></b><br><b><u>Dated:</u></b>                                | <b><u>Signed:</u></b><br><b><u>Dated:</u></b>  | <b><u>Signed:</u></b><br><b><u>Dated:</u></b>                      |

## **Form for Volunteers**

This is a copy of a form that will be signed by volunteers to Forest School.

I \_\_\_\_\_ (volunteer at Forest  
**School**)

**Have read and understood all that is stated in this handbook and had the opportunity to have any questions answered about its content or my role.**

**I understand that the Forest School Leader oversees the sessions, and I have read the relevant risk assessments. I have provided medical and emergency details to Penshurst Primary School and notified the Forest School Leader of any relevant information.**

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_ **Dated**

# Appendices

# **Appendix 1**

## **Policy and Procedure**

### **Documents**

# **Appendix 2**

# **Risk Assessments**