

Braywood CE First School



Forest Schools Policy

'From tiny acorns, mighty oak trees grow, watered and nurtured by God.'

Aim

We aim to give children a shared understanding of the ethos of a Forest School experience. This powerful approach enables young children to be independent, self-motivated, courageous, considerate and sets them up for life long learning. It particularly supports the development of self-esteem and self-confidence.

There are many important issues to be considered here and we aim to remain true to the Forest School ethos and approach.

*"This is the best kind of classroom,
It's a journey through time and space,
From the smallest seed to the largest tree,
This is a Forest and a learning place.*

*This is the best kind of classroom,
Where the seasons don't happen in books.
Where the learning is watching and thinking and talking
And everyone notices, everyone looks.*

Principles

Through the 'Forest School our children have the opportunity to:

- Build independence and self esteem,
- Take managed risks in a different environment,
- Combine freedom with responsibility,
- Experience the changing seasons and all weathers
- Discover their abilities without fear of failure.

'Forest School' is a Scandinavian concept where the outdoors is used as an area for learning. Many of the activities evolve from the children's interests and ideas, and the natural materials found in the outdoors rather than paper, pens and worksheets. At Braywood we have a specific area devoted to this form of learning.

The children who work in our outdoor classroom are in a learning environment where the rules are minimal and easy to understand, there is no right and wrong, learning is lifelong and there is risk-taking within a controlled environment. Children are encouraged to move away from adult interaction and to become more responsible for each other and themselves.

Forest School has environmental awareness at the heart of its ethos. Wherever possible, environmentally friendly products and recycled materials should be used. Good practice should be modelled by adults showing children that the world in which we live in should be cared for.

Conservation of our land and respect for the wildlife is fostered at all times. Involving children in site checks and planning environmental games will help support this.

The benefits of a 'Forest School' experience include:

- Health and fitness – being active in an outdoor, natural classroom.
- Increased emotional well-being – exposure to nature providing a relaxing experience.
- Social development – communicating and negotiating with peers and adults to solve problems and share new experiences.
- Skills development – practising fine and gross motor skills to increase coordination.
- Gaining knowledge and understanding – multi-sensory, real-life learning about the world around us.
- Individual learning – careful observation allows leaders to tailor support to children's own interests and stage of development.
- Curriculum links – forest school supports all areas of the 'Early Years Foundation Stage' framework, many areas of the National Curriculum and the International Primary Curriculum.

Health and Safety Considerations

The Forest School programme will support young children to develop responsibility for themselves and others. It will even encourage early risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others.

Children are expected to wear appropriate clothing such as Wellington boots, old clothes etc. to ensure their safety together with suitable protection against extreme hot and cold weather.

Child and Vulnerable Persons

Forest School Leaders and practitioners should regard their duty of care when working with young persons as extremely important. To ensure all individuals (children, workers, volunteers) are safe and protected we strongly recommend the following:

- Everyone involved in Forest School is fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities. Staff and volunteers should be made aware of the relevant school policies and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them
- Key members of staff will have Child Protection Training and will have an enhanced level CRB check. Any concerns about a child's physical or mental well-being should be shared with the schools named Child Protection Person.
- We regard safety and good practice as extremely important and it is the responsibility of individual staff and volunteers to ensure general safety during working.
- Confidentiality should be maintained at all times.

Considerations for Equality and Inclusion

In Forest School sessions all persons should be treated equally.

We aim to and are committed to:

- providing a secure environment in which children can flourish and in which all contributions are valued;
- including and value the contribution of all children and adults to our understanding of equality and diversity;
- make inclusion a thread which runs through all of the activities of Forest School

Guidelines

- Set clear and safe boundaries
- Plan for a variety of learning styles, intelligences and schemas
- Encourage children to take responsibility for their own learning
- Support the children in their activities – rather than doing them for the children.
- Encourage the children to think things through, even if they come to the wrong conclusions,
- Trust children to take supported risks
- Encourage the children to walk without holding hands
- Promote equal opportunities
- Enjoy

Activities may include

- Picture making – using sticks, leaves, berries,
- Angels in snow, leaves, frost
- Shelters for toys, people
- Using senses e.g. listening smelling,
- Cooking – toasting crumpets, bread, soup,
- Earth pizza – stones, soils sprinkle water over soil and add leaves, grass, berries,
- Seed socks – big pair of white socks over shoes and walk through grass, collect seeds etc.
- Leaf lines – symmetry
- Nesting materials – make nests, bird food, etc
- Charcoal – from willow sticks cooked in tin with hole in top
- Nature bracelet- collect natural materials to stick on it
- Treasure box – collect small treasures
- Stories, songs, games etc

Evaluation Procedure

In order to develop the Forest School program and to ensure good practice is maintained a number of evaluation tools are recommended. Experiences are aimed at improving the children's self esteem, academic progress and understanding of the world.

An evaluation is undertaken by our Environmental/Sustainability Leader and Eco Gang to ensure progress and involves:

1. Evaluation of session – looking at what dispositions and attitudes are being developed.
2. Evaluation from children.
3. Evaluation from all staff involved in Forest School.

Reports are made to the Governing Body and Headteacher.

This policy and approach towards teaching and learning will be evaluated every three years with our governors, staff and parents.