

Altrincham CE Primary School



Grow Strong and Bear Fruit

Forest School Policy

Date of Policy	May 2024
Ratified by Governors	
Signature of Chair of Governors	
Reviewed	
Date of next review	May 2026

ACE Forest School Policy

Our Ethos

Forest School is an inspirational process that offers children opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through play and hands on learning experiences outdoors.

Forest School builds on a child's innate motivation and positive attitude to learning, offering them the opportunities to increase their self-reliance and independence, take risks in a well-managed, safe environment, make their own choices and initiate learning for themselves.

The Forest School environment provides opportunities for children to form positive relationships with others, to develop a growing awareness of their emotional needs and the needs of others, to learn to cooperate and work with their peers and adults and to develop strategies in order to take risks within the boundaries of safety. At Forest School nobody fails. Forest School is about exploring and experiencing the natural world and has a significant impact on children's creative and spiritual development. It is a very powerful way of helping children to appreciate the spiritual dimension of their locality and allows them to learn how to become creative within it. This is achieved through practical activities using natural objects that they find and opportunities to stop and wonder at the world around them.

The children go out in all weathers, all year round, exploring and learning from the seasons and environmental changes. The children's interests, along with the varied natural resources in our school grounds, are used to stimulate creative thinking, problem solving and skill development, all in the guise of play.

Our Goals

- To provide a welcoming, stimulating and secure outdoor environment for all.
- To value all students and staff as individuals and support them to reach their full potential.
- To provide broad, balanced and stimulating sessions that meets the needs of all and promotes the social and emotional aspects of learning.
- To deepen and enrich the school's relationship with Governors, Parents, Community and church.
- To cherish and nurture responsibility for the environment.
- To strive for excellence in all we do.

Activities

Our activities will depend on the age, ability and experience of participants.

Examples of ACE Forest School activities include:

- Nature exploration and knowledge
- Building dens and other structures
- Fire and cooking
- Imaginative play
- Natural crafts
- Tool use
- Knots

Environmental Considerations

One of the principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. The children are taught about respect and responsibility for the world around them. Both the children and adults are encouraged to respect their environment and to be aware of conservation issues of the woodland around them.

The aim is to engender ownership and pride in the local environment as well as promoting respect for the wildlife. We aim to instil in the children a love and respect for the environment and a sense of awe and wonder about their world.

If appropriate, reclaimed, recycled and sustainable resources will be used to maintain and develop our forest school site.

Health and Safety Considerations

We believe that, while there are risks that must be considered, there are also a wide range of potential benefits that can be gained by those involved. We also recognise that taking risks is an important part of learning and developing and we want to provide a safe and supportive environment in which participants can learn about risks, challenges and personal safety. Consequently, we will use a risk/benefit analysis in our assessment of our sites and activities

The Forest School programme will support young children to develop responsibility for themselves and others. It will encourage early risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others which will help them to make better decisions later on in life.

Staff and Training

We have qualified and experienced staff to lead all Forest School sessions at ACE. All staff have up to date DBS checks and are first aid trained. Adequate training and support is available to ensure all staff and volunteers are confident and competent.

Risk / Benefit Analyses

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On Site Risk Assessment Procedure

Our Forest School site must be safe and easily accessible, so whenever possible the FSL will visit and assess the site before activities take place. During the assessment the FSL will seek to identify significant hazards and take action or precautions to reduce the risk to a safe level. See 'Site Sweep' checklist.

Whilst doing this we will identify any hazards and implement the necessary controls and check for mobile phone coverage and access in case of emergency. We will ensure all staff are provided with a copy of the risk assessment prior to an activity.

There are five steps to risk assessment:

1. Look for the hazards, such as windblown trees or litter
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done
4. Record the findings
5. Review the assessment and revise if necessary

Safeguarding

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, and volunteers) are safe and protected we always ensure the following:-

- Everyone involved in Forest School is fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities. Staff and volunteers will be made aware of the relevant school policies and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them.
- Forest School Leaders have an up to date DBS check, along with any regular volunteer attending Forest School should also have this. Where a volunteer or member of staff does not hold a current DBS certificate then they should not be left unsupervised with children.
- Any concerns about a child's physical or mental wellbeing should be shared with the schools named Child Protection Officer (Mrs Chrysler – Headteacher) so that the schools child protection policy can then be followed. CPOMS report logged where necessary.
- 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 will be maintained at all times. Any concerns will only be shared with those who need to know such as the Forest School Leader or Class Teacher who can then ensure the correct channels are then informed.

Ratios

The following minimum adult ratios will ensure appropriate support and supervision of vulnerable groups at all times:

EYFS - 1 adult: 4 children

KS1 - 1 adult: 8 children

KS2 - 1 adult: 8 children

These ratios are for guidance only and suitable levels of support should be determined in advance depending on the types of activity and needs of the group.

Photos & Video

Parental permission will be requested for ACE staff to take photographs of participants for monitoring and evaluation purposes and suitable use in publications for leaflets/materials/website. Where permission is refused, we will aim to avoid photographing and videoing that child and blur out faces wherever they do appear in recorded material.

Emergency & Serious Incident Procedure

Emergencies are never wanted, but they are a possibility, and so we at ACE ensure that all leaders are familiar with appropriate emergency procedures.

Most emergencies can be resolved on-the-spot by the leader removing the group from potential threat and providing first aid.

However, in the event of a serious incident, which could arise as a result of an injury, illness or threat, emergency services should be contacted and the following procedures followed:

1. **Secure safety of whole group** from further danger. Stop all work/activities if safe. Call in and locate group promptly as agreed with group in advance. If possible, remove whole group from any further danger or threat of danger.
2. **First Aider to attend to any casualties** with adult helper and with regard for maintenance of required supervision ratios for the rest of the party. At least one first aider must be on site at all times. A record of changes in casualties' state and anything administered to them to be made if possible.
3. **Emergency services contacted as necessary**, ideally by an adult helper.

A charged mobile phone and walkie talkies are carried by the Forest School leader. Despatch a member of staff to meet emergency vehicle at the entrance where possible/necessary. Give following site location information to the 999 operator...

Grid reference - SJ764882

Postcode - WA14 4DS

What3words - shapes/good/tiger

4. **Safety of the rest of group** will be maintained by the remaining staff and adults away from the scene of the incident. Contact school office, inform Headteacher of incident and request emergency back-up staff
5. **Informing next of kin** should be carried out as soon as practicable after the incident by the designated member of staff according to our health and safety policy.
6. **Incident / Near miss report** should be filled in on site if possible. This should be filled in whenever the emergency plan is used even if no one was harmed and it was just a near miss.

Lost or missing person procedures

1. All the group will be immediately called back in, by prearranged emergency whistle, and counted and missing member determined. The time will be noted.
2. The Group Leader must ensure the safety of remaining pupils. At least two adults must stay with them at all times.
3. One or more adults should immediately start searching for the missing group member – calling and whistling as appropriate.
4. While the initial search is made, the session leader will make enquiries of all adults to establish the last sighting and time, clothes that the child was wearing, and the mental state of the child etc
4. If the missing group member is not found within 5 minutes, the group Leader must contact police by telephoning 999
5. Leaders must recall and write down a description of what the missing person was wearing and any distinguishing features. Any information on their last known location and time should be noted. In addition, if they have any special medical or learning needs then these need to be noted down. All information then must be passed to police or other agencies.
6. The parent or carer will be contacted. Telephone lines remain as free as possible so that messages are not delayed.

Parental involvement

- We recognize parents as their children's first and most important educators.
- We inform all parents about how forest school is run and its policies via email, the school website, social media and through regular informal communication
- If parents wish to participate in forest school they are made welcome
- We welcome the contributions of parents, in whatever form these may take
- We will provide parents with opportunities to be involved in Forest School and outdoor learning sessions through workshops and seasonal celebrations

Weather

The FSL will keep a close eye on the weather using the BBC weather app. FS will go ahead in all weathers except high winds (above 40mph – FS to measure with anemometer and weather app) or thunder and lightning. In these conditions, where possible, FS will still take place outdoors but be relocated to a safer site without trees. If necessary the session will take place indoors. FSL will have a selection of indoor FS activities available.

Clothing

Clothing advice will be sent to parents /carers prior to the start of their child's 6-week FS block.

Winter: waterproofs/coats, fleece/jumper, hats and gloves

Summer: waterproofs, sun hat, long sleeved tops and trousers, sun screen and insect repellent

Footwear: wellies or strong/sturdy (ideally waterproof) outdoor shoes and warm socks.

We will keep spare sets of waterproofs/wellies/warm clothes in case of a participant arriving without adequate protection.

Toileting

Everyone will be encouraged to use the toilet before coming on site.

If a child needs the toilet during a Forest School session KS1 children will be accompanied to the school building by a Teaching Assistant. Children in KS2 will go to the toilet in pairs, without an adult.

Dogs & Members of the Public

Some of our sessions will take place in John Leigh Park, which is open to the public and so there may well be other people out enjoying the natural environment.

Most people will be happy to pass by the Forest School group without hindering activities, but there is the possibility of unwanted attention from a passer-by.

In this event a leader will step in and speak to the member of public. If the situation escalates to a dangerous level staff will use a mobile phone to call the police and use the Emergency & Serious Incident Procedure.

Some participants may be unused to or even afraid of dogs. If this is known to be the case for any particular participants please inform any/all leader(s) prior to arrival on site. If a dog appears the fearful participant can be joined by at least one member of staff. If a dog approaches the group and appears to likely to cause trouble all participants will be advised not to run or act excitably. Ideally keep arms by their sides, voices low and stay as still as possible. A leader will speak to the owner.

Behaviour

We want to allow the greatest potential for each participant's forest school experience to be transformational and therefore wish to welcome each participant from an open and unbiased viewpoint with regards to their behaviour and abilities. Whilst recognising that it is useful to have previous information about participants' needs, we believe that no child is inherently 'naughty' and hope that the greater freedoms offered by a forest school environment will allow for a more flexible interpretation of positive engagement.

We will work with each group to develop a clear set of boundaries and guidelines. Each participant will have the opportunity to voice their own feelings.

Talking about how they wish to be treated and listening to the feelings of others is important as it will allow the group to work together, understand one another and ultimately become more supportive and cooperative. It will also contribute to making the forest school a safe and enjoyable space.

Where necessary incidents will be reported on CPOMS.

De-escalation

If a situation arises in which participants are behaving in a way that threatens the safety of the group, the forest school leader will ensure that the following steps are taken:

1. Recount the facts of the incident as observed, in simple language and without judgement, and if possible mutually agree on these. Remind the participants involved of any guidelines they have not followed.
2. Listen to the involved party or parties, if necessary gently separate them from the group for this. Ask about how they feel about the incident, empathise with them to help them to express themselves and take responsibility for their feelings. Ask them to imagine how they think their behaviour has affected everyone else.
3. Talk with them to establish what their needs in the situation were and to understand how they were not being met. Discuss what their needs might be now and encourage them to consider the needs of everyone else present.
4. Help them to express any requests they might have clearly and in positive language. These can be requests of themselves, others, situations or of the environment.

5. Encourage discussion of new strategies, so that if a similar situation arises the participant(s) feel able to communicate their needs without resorting to negative behaviours.
6. Where necessary incidents will be reported on CPOMS.

Special Educational Needs

- Forest School aims to provide a welcome and appropriate learning opportunity for all children providing an environment in which all children are supported to reach their full potential.
- We welcome children with special needs who can participate in forest school, if appropriate, after consultation between all relevant parties. Changes and adaptations can be made to the programme of activities to meet children's specific needs.
- If the child has a one-to-one worker within our school it is expected that they would accompany the child. They would not be counted within staffing ratios.
- We recognise the developmental needs of a wide range of SLD children including gifted children and endeavour to meet them within the forest school programme
- We work in partnership with parents, the school and other agencies in meeting individual children's needs.
- We Aim to have regard to the DFES Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs and also the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs Act of 2001)

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

The legal framework for this guidance is:

Race Relations Act 1976;

Race Relations Amendment Act 2000;

Sex Discrimination Act 1986;

Children Act 1989; and

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Equipment and resources

- We aim to provide children with resources and equipment which help to consolidate and extend their knowledge, skills, interests and aptitudes.
- we provide a sufficient quantity of equipment and resources for the number of children.
- we provide equipment and resources which promote continuity and progression.
- provide sufficient challenge and meet the needs and interests of all children
- we provide natural and recycled materials which are in good condition and safe for the children to use.
- we check all resources and equipment regularly.
- We repair and clean, or replace any unsafe, worn out, dirty or damaged equipment.
- We use the inventory to: record the dates and results of checking the resources and equipment.
- we plan the provision of activities and appropriate resources so that a balance of familiar equipment and resources and new exciting challenges is offered.
- We ensure that a working mobile phone and walkie talkie is accessible to all adults.

Session Routines

Daily FSL kit list

FS Handbook
First Aid Kit
First Aid book
Inhalers/EpiPens
Tissues/Wipes/Hand sanitiser
Mobile phone
Walkie Talkie
iPad
Shed and gate keys
Shelter
Water
Session plan and resources

Setting Up

1. Carry out a pre-session site sweep
2. Collect necessary equipment and restock first aid
3. Register groups in the classroom
4. Check phone signal

Session Opening

1. Headcount and introductions of any new faces
2. Make the group aware of any new hazards or medical considerations
3. Check that they are all wearing suitable clothing and footwear
4. Walk the group to the FS site
5. Form an opening circle
6. Describe or walk the boundaries for the session
7. Engage children in the development of rules and guidelines for the session
8. Describe the afternoon's activities

During the Session

- Visually check all equipment before use
- Check on pastoral needs of group
- Conduct a head count, as needed
- Ensure appropriate personal protective clothing is worn

Closing the Session

1. Extinguish any fires properly
2. Count any tools used into their bag
3. Remove structures
4. Check for litter etc.
5. Collect the equipment
6. Form a closing circle
7. Reflection/mindfulness with the group
9. Thoroughly check equipment
10. Hand washing
11. Complete session evaluation

Tool Use Procedure

Using a range of tools will be necessary in many activities and is an important part of our work as it enables participants to develop new practical skills that help develop self-confidence. ACE aims to ensure that all people participating in sessions with tools do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. Tools that may be used include potato peelers, bow saws, pruning saws, loppers, knives, drills and hatchets. The following guidelines are to be followed when using tools:

- The forest school leader will check all tools are fit for continued use before the session
- Only tools that are in safe working order shall be supplied for use
- Correct and safe use of sharp tools will be demonstrated to all staff and participants
- Tools should be counted when handed out and counted back in again when finished
- All groups are to be supervised closely by competent leaders until deemed competent to work with limited supervision
- Tools should be kept in a designated safe area when not in use - none should be left unattended outside this area
- All knives will be closed/ sheaved immediately after use
- Saw guards will be replaced immediately after use
- Walking around with open/ unmasked tools will not be permitted
- Safe working distances and suitable ratios must be maintained at all times

All group members will wear suitable boots/shoes and outdoor clothing for the activity they take part in. Where any cutting or felling is taking place, helmets should be worn, and gloves provided for handling brush etc.

Knife Guidance

Designate a specific zone for those using knives

Always carry knife with sheath firmly on

Always pass knife with sheath firmly on and in demonstrated manner

Always keep knife in sheath when not in use

Leader to count knives out & back in

Ensure participants have had demonstration before use (& leader is confident of participant's ability) including grip and body position

Knife work is always supervised by a responsible adult

Each person to sit well out of reach of others

Fire Procedure

Fires and the use of storm kettles are an important part of Forest School and other sessions. ACE aims to ensure that all people participating in sessions with fires and/or storm kettles will do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. Fires will only be used where it is appropriate to do so and where there has been an agreement with the site owner prior to the session.

- Leaders will explain to participants the importance of using only dead wood for fires and also of the importance of dead wood as a habitat
- Smoke inhalation will be reduced by burning dead wood. Those in smoky areas will be encouraged to move to less smoky areas
- Fires will only be lit in suitable defined spaces or in a fire wok
- Participants will only be allowed to light fires under direct supervision of a trained leader using suitable materials and equipment
- All participants will be given clear guidelines about how to behave and move around the area when the fire or kettle is lit
- A lit fire will be supervised by an adult at all times, as will all cooking activities
- Related safety equipment, including heat-proof gloves, a fire blanket, a burns kit and water will be kept within close range of fires
- All fires should be fully extinguished and all traces removed at the end of a session

Food Hygiene & Eating

During some sessions, we may cook items such as popcorn, damper bread or marshmallows over the fire. All participants on activities will be encouraged to wash their hands with water and soap, or use a hand sanitizer gel which will be provided, before cooking or eating food.

Hazardous Plants & Fungi

Part of the risk assessment will be to identify any particularly hazardous plants and point them out to the group so that all members are aware of the dangers. The sap or hairs from some plants can cause rashes and blistering when in contact with skin, or after the skin is then exposed to sunlight. Most rashes are caused by stinging nettles, though giant hogweed may also be a problem. Both of these plants are easily distinguishable and if either is seen growing on site all members of the group will be taught how to distinguish and avoid coming into contact with it.

Serious poisoning from ingestion of leaves, berries or mushrooms rarely occurs, even when curious children are involved. However, ingesting even small amounts of some species can cause nausea, vomiting, and stomach cramps; and large amounts are potentially fatal. Consequently, we disallow all participants from foraging and eating anything that has not been agreed safe by a Forest School leader.

If a member of the group is exposed to a hazardous plant or fungi, so that they have a reaction a leader must be informed and appropriate First Aid given. If the nature of the reaction is more serious the Emergency & Serious Incident Procedure must be followed.

Biting & Stinging Insects

Insect bites and stings can be common, particularly in spring and summer, and usually cause only minor irritation. In rare cases, people can have a serious allergic reaction to a bite or sting that requires immediate medical treatment - if this is the case then a leader will refer directly to the Emergency & Serious Incident Procedure.

If ticks are known to exist in proximity to a site then all participants need to check or be checked for ticks as soon as possible following any activity on site. Where a tick is found on a participant, a plaster should be placed over it and parents/carers informed at the end of the session so that they can remove it safely.

Safe Lifting

Forest School activities can be physically demanding for participants and staff, for example when handling heavy objects, so it is wise to be aware of best practice. One of the greatest causes of back injury is lifting or handling objects incorrectly. Here are some tips:

- Think and plan where and how you are going to move an object before you lift
- Keep the load close to your waist and the heaviest side of the load next to your body
- Adopt a stable position with feet apart and one leg slightly forward if possible
- Ensure a good hold on the load, hug it close to your body if possible
- Avoid bending your back, only bend at your hips or knees if possible
- Avoid twisting the back or leaning sideways especially if bending at the back
- Keep your head up and look ahead, not down at the load once it is held securely
- Move smoothly
- Know your limits - don't lift or handle more than you can easily manage without help
- Put the load down if you need to adjust it
- Where possible, use ropes to drag objects such as trees

Evaluation Procedure

In order to develop the Forest School program and to ensure good practice is maintained a number of evaluation tools are recommended. Evaluation of activities undertaken.

1. Evaluation of session – looking at what dispositions and attitudes are being developed.
2. Evaluation from children.
3. Case studies of specific children will be taken and developed over the year.
4. Evaluation from all staff involved in Forest School.

Written July 2019

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