

Forest School Norfolk



Forest School - A Guide for Practitioners Information Pack

www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/go/forestschools

Document last updated – October 2009

Contents:

1. What is Forest School? – page 3
2. Benefits and Research – page 8
3. Forest School and National Initiatives – page 12
4. Forest School Training – page 18
5. Providing ‘Forest School’ – page 21
 - Using external providers
 - Health & Safety
 - Funding
 - Selecting a site
 - Kit and Equipment
6. Norfolk Network & Support – page 25
7. Supporting Organisations – page 26

Contact Information:

For further information please contact

Louise Ambrose
Forest School Norfolk Coordinator
l.ambrose@mail.com
01263 579754
07787 930030

1. What is Forest School?

Forest School England defines Forest School as:

'... an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults, regular opportunities to achieve, and develop confidence and self esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a local woodland environment.'

Forest School Norfolk believes that, although every Forest School will be unique, each should adhere to 6 key principles:

Forest School is a long term, repetitive learning process that uses a natural outdoor space. It is a specific ethos of learning that focuses on processes rather than products and allows learners time and space to develop at their own rate. Learners develop a strong sense of space through repeated contact with the natural world (ideally woodland, but not always) throughout the year and in all weathers.

Forest School empowers children and young people to take responsibility for their own learning and development. The ethos encourages child-led learning and learning through play. Choice increases enjoyment, participation and motivation. Children are set up to achieve and supported to take appropriate risks through developing trust in themselves and in others.

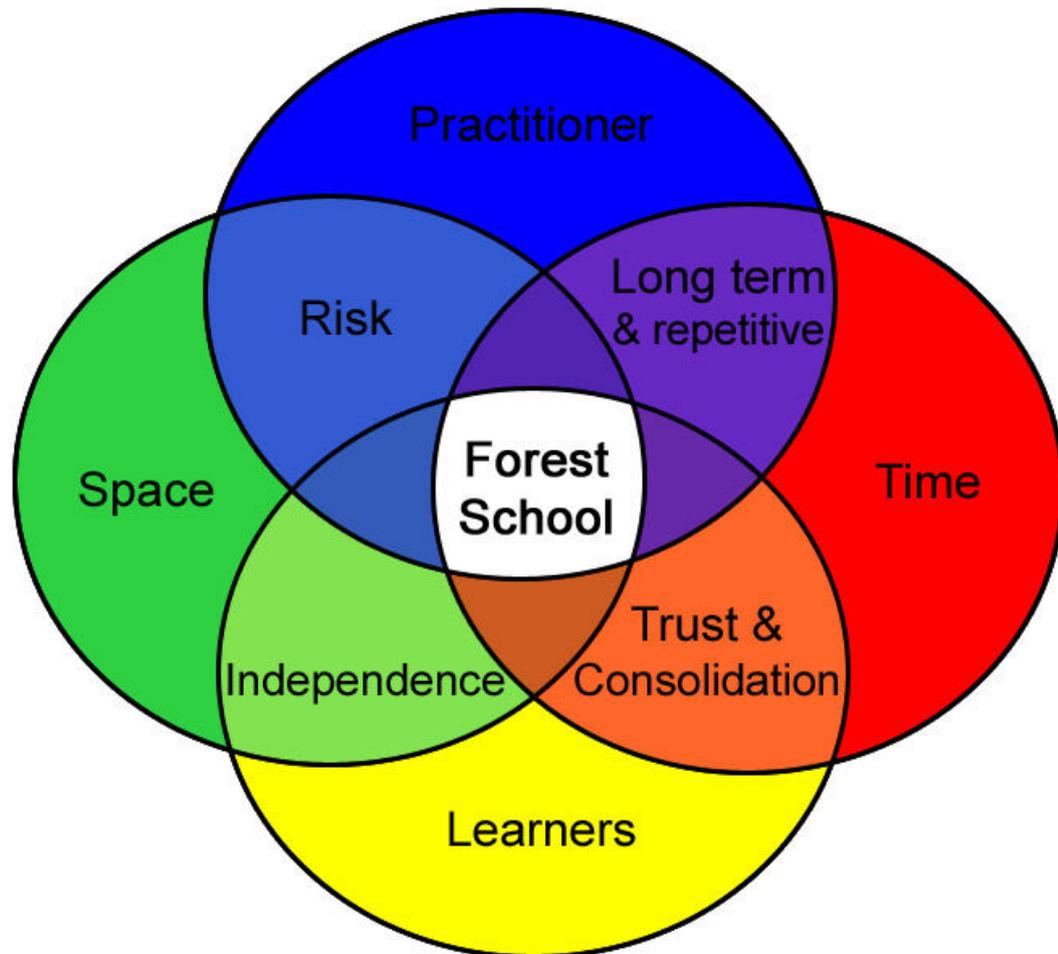
Forest School promotes holistic, individualised learning and development. It is for all ages and abilities and its ethos is fully inclusive. It is most effective in smaller than class size groups (12-16 mainstream children, fewer for those with specific needs) with a high adult to child ratio. The natural environment provides stimulus for all senses, all areas of development and all learning styles; visual, auditory and kinaesthetic.

Forest School encourages emotional growth, self esteem, confidence and independence. It gives learners the time and space to be themselves, find peace and communicate with others in a safe and caring environment. Emotional literacy is actively practiced by adults and children within a Forest School.

Forest School is facilitated by qualified Level 3 Forest school Practitioners. Receiving a nationally recognised level 3 qualification in Forest School is essential for practitioners to link theory to practice and create the Forest School ethos. Training ensures practitioners provide safe, skilled and appropriate learning experiences. Practitioners build a trusting relationship and make careful observations of the group to then provide well planned, individualised support for each learner.

Forest School instils a deep respect and awareness for the natural world and reconnects participants to their environment. The repetitive ethos builds a deep, instinctual connection to the natural space and reconnects all to their ancient heritage. Being in nature allows learners to observe real life, witness cause and effect and consider our roles and responsibilities towards it.

The Forest School ethos is created by a number of overlapping factors, illustrated by the diagram below.



The 4 distinct overlapping factors are;

- **Practitioner** – Qualified Level 3 Forest School practitioner, with their own speciality and value judgements that facilitate appropriate and safe learning experiences.
- **Learners** – A group of individual learners who have unique needs, abilities and interests and are at different stages of development.
- **Time** – Regular (at least weekly) sessions of an appropriate length throughout the year (at least 1 year). Children are allowed the time to revisit, build on and consolidate learning.
- **Space** – Appropriate, secure and safe physical space, social space and emotional space. Learners are able to choose to work alone or with others.

The History of Forest School

Forest School in the UK has been adapted from a Scandinavian approach to learning. The original source of the concept was from Sweden in the 1950's and spread to other Scandinavian and European countries. The Danish Forest Schools, established for pre-school children (under 7 years) in the 1980's stemmed from their Early Years Education or måbørnspædagogik.

In the mid 1990's a group of nursery nurse students and lecturers from Bridgewater College, Somerset visited Denmark and witnessed the benefits of the Danish Forest Schools firsthand. They were so inspired that they brought the concept back to the UK and started what is now recognised as 'Forest School'. Since the 90's interest in the Forest School concept in the UK has been growing exponentially. Presently, most parts of the UK have some Forest School happening, although it is organised in different ways.

The Forest School Process

"You cannot teach anybody anything. You can only help them discover it within themselves." ~ Galileo

The process of Forest School is a gradual transition from adult directed activities to children leading and controlling their own learning. The process will work at different rates and depends on the individuals attending. Some learners may move through the process within 3 months, for others it may take years.

The process can be broken into 3 different stages:

1. ***Acclimatisation and Discovery*** – Learners become familiar with the site, the leader and the various routines. Safety is a key theme and learners discover that they are safe at Forest School physically, mentally and emotionally. Relationships and trust are built between the group and adults. Learners' confidence grows as they become familiar with systems. Much of the time in this stage is adult directed or modelled.
2. ***Scaffolding and Modelling*** – With repetitive contact with the natural world learners start observing changes and begin questioning and investigating. The practitioner harnesses these questions and interests into a meaningful learning experience through selective introduction of skills, knowledge, ideas and resources. The time in this stage is a balance between child led and adult directed. The adults need to observe the children's interests and existing levels of development and then scaffold learning for individuals by directing certain skills and knowledge.
3. ***Consolidation and Independence*** – Learners are confident enough to undertake their own projects and are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to undertake these projects independently. Children trust adults enough to ask for support if required, but the time is predominately child-led.

In addition to the 3 stages above there is also a fourth factor that encompasses the whole process:

4. **Transference** – The holistic skills, understanding and experiences developed through a Forest School experience are transferable to the rest of a learner's life. Improved confidence, self esteem, problem solving, social, emotional skills and independence are particularly relevant lifelong skills. Forest School also transfers to the wider community. Once children enjoy playing in natural places this enthusiasm spreads to their family increasing visits to wild places and encouraging them to use gardens more frequently and widely. The wider community and local landowners also may become involved in Forest School.

Content of Forest School Programmes

Every Forest School will be unique depending on the learners, site, practitioner and length of programme. Most sessions will be regular (e.g. once a week) throughout the year and in all weathers (unless the practitioner deems it dangerous to be outside). Forest School sessions usually will have a special routine; this routine will depend on the group, the site and the practitioner.

Generally, a session can be split into the following categories:

- **Meet and Greet** – Practitioner greets group and assesses needs.
- **Health and Safety** – Practitioner shares any specific hazards from daily risk assessment with group. At the beginning of a programme certain procedures may need to be practiced through games e.g. behaviour around fire area.
- **Travel to site** – Certain procedures may be in place for this e.g. walking on a rope chain, crossing roads, singing a song, carrying kit.
- **Idea 'seeds'** – Practitioner gives an introduction to the session using a story, song, game, activity, special item, puppets, characters etc., to 'seed' ideas in the children. The specific 'seed' would be selected based on observations from previous sessions.
- **Free Choice** – Children choose which activities they would like to engage in, adults may model certain ideas and skills to support learning.
- **Circle time** – Time at the end of a session to reflect and share.
- **Closing** – A song, action, story, activity that takes place to signify the end of the session.



At the beginning of a programme the sessions would dedicate more time to establishing routines and health and safety procedures (Stage 1 of the Forest School process). As the programme develops and time passes it would be expected that a much higher percentage of the session time is dedicated to free choice (Stage 3 of the Forest School process).

Activities

“If we value independence, if we are disturbed by the growing conformity of knowledge, of values, of attitudes, which our present system induces, then we may wish to set up conditions of learning which make for uniqueness, for self-direction, and for self-initiated learning.” ~ Carl Rogers

Forest School has no set of prescribed activities. Nearly any type of outdoor learning activity could be undertaken as part of a Forest School process. It is the ethos in how the activities are delivered that make it part of Forest School.

Within a Forest School:

- Learners have a choice in what activities they undertake.
- Practitioners observe learners carefully in order to plan for next steps.
- Practitioners introduce relevant skills, knowledge and resources based on what the learners are interested in and need to develop.
- Practitioners set up learners to achieve by breaking tasks into small achievable chunks.
- Practitioners focus on process rather than product.
- Tasks are open – no right or wrong way of doing things (exceptions to this are health and safety procedures).

The types of outdoor activities learners undertake within a Forest School may include the following, and countless more. Activities selected will depend on the learner’s age, stage of development and interests:

- Field Studies Activities – minibeast hunts, pond dipping, tree identification, bird watching, life cycle games
- Sensory Activities – games to do with colour, smell, sound, touch, blindfold games
- Bushcraft – shelter building, knot use, fire lighting and cooking, cordage making, wild foods, whittling
- Woodland crafts – willow crafts, natural jewellery, weaving, natural dyes, traditional crafts
- Teambuilding and trust games – blindfold games, circle games, problem solving activities, team games
- Wildlife conservation – tree planting, nest box construction, coppicing, fence/path building
- Imaginative activities – story telling, drama, role play, songs
- Physical play – tree climbing, balancing, log dragging, digging
- Construction – shelter building, rafts, rope swings, tree houses, pulleys



2. Benefits and Research

Benefits of children being outdoors

There are countless pieces of international research that highlight the importance of children spending time in natural outdoor spaces.

To summarise some of the main themes of theories and research:



- **Physical Health benefits** – Increased oxygen levels outside increase brain function. Increased gross motor movement reduces chance of obesity and increases bone density (reducing chances of osteoporosis). Sunlight increases vitamin D production. Increased resilience to illness.
- **Mental Health benefits** – Spending time in green spaces reduces Cortisol (a stress chemical) levels in the brain, therefore has a calming influence. The reduction in Cortisol also increases receptivity for building neural pathways (learning) in the brain.
- **Social benefits** – Research suggests that in natural play areas the leaders tend to be the most intelligent and imaginative, compared to hard-top play areas where the dominant children are those who are the physically strongest. When playing outside communication, teambuilding and language skills are developed.
- **Risk Awareness** – Playing outside allows children to learn about risk assessment and taking. Children that are exposed to acceptable levels of risk at a young age are less likely to make bad judgements in the future.
- **Behaviour** – Due to the calming effect on the brain and the increase in physical space outside, improved behaviour is often noticed. Research also is looking at ADHD and the outdoors, as ADHD symptoms are not as apparent when children are playing in a natural space.

Links & Further Reading:

- Last Child in the Woods, Richard Louv, ISBN: 156512605X
- Toxic Childhood, Sue Palmer ISBN: 0752880918
- Children & Nature Network (USA) www.childrenandnature.org

Benefits of Forest School – National Research

Several pieces of research specifically on Forest School as an approach have been undertaken in the UK. A summary of the key findings of the research are as follows:

O'Brien, L and Murray, R (2003- 2007)

Have undertaken several evaluations of the impact of Forest School on children in England and Wales. Their findings have identified eight key themes. The themes were:

- **Confidence** – This was developed by the children having 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 and Concentration** – 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.
- **New Perspectives** – Forest School gave teachers a new understanding of the children as they observed them in a different setting.
- **Ripple Effects** – Children took their experiences home and talked about them to friends and family, which sometimes led to families visiting woodlands more frequently.

Worcestershire LEA

Sam Massey, an Early Years Mentor Teacher produced a report 'The benefits of a Forest School Experience for Children in their Early Years'. Nine benefits were identified:

- The Forest School program evolves from the needs of the child and includes the child's interests.
- Children developed good self esteem in a climate of small achievable steps.
- Provides a real context for language.
- Provides the practitioner with an alternative view of the child and further insights into a child's particular development.
- Beneficial to a child's all round development, particularly in the areas of personal, social and emotional, language and communication.
- Underpins the principles laid down in the foundation stage guidelines.
- The Forest School experience has been very well received by all those involved with it.

- Provides opportunities for the children to take risks, problem solve and use thinking skills.
- Complements learning in the classroom and can be transferred.

Links & Further Reading:

- Forest Research - www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/INFD-6HKEMH
- Worcestershire County Council – www.worcestershire.whub.org.uk/home/worcs_forest_school_research-2.pdf
- Forest Schools and Outdoor Learning in the Early Years, Sara Knight, ISBN: 978-1-84787-277-7

Local Norfolk Research

Norfolk Environmental and Outdoor Learning team – NCC (2005)

The first Norfolk Forest School was piloted in 2005 by Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Wildlife Trust at Houghton Hall. From this pilot nine key benefits and principal outcomes were highlighted



- *Forest Schools; reflecting best early years practice* - A more sensitive approach to planning the next steps for individual children's learning was a principal outcome.
- *Partnerships with parents* - The principle outcome observed here was securing meaningful parental involvement early on, which has the potential to positively influence a child's school life.
- *Fostering early years opportunities for good citizenship and learning for sustainability* - The opportunity for children to have a voice and make informed choices was recognised as a principle outcome.
- *Appreciation, love and respect for the natural environment* - Learning outdoors motivated the children to develop the values, attitudes and skills required to appreciate, respect and care for their natural environment. This principle outcome is a foundation on which higher order learning opportunities can be built, such as recognising detail, questioning and investigation.
- *Risk taking and safety* - Handling responsibility, rising to expectations and understanding the consequences of actions, led to the principle outcome of safety and risk awareness appropriate to their age and activity.
- *Teachers' attitudes and 'emotional teaching'* - The principle outcome is that positive teacher attitudes have a significant effect on children's self esteem

and thus potential learning. The outdoor environment offers an appropriate context in which to achieve this.

- **Children's emotional intelligence** - The Forest Schools ethos offers itself as a powerful tool for developing emotional intelligence and could potentially set up children with life-long learning skills.
- **Health and mental well-being** - Allowing children as naturally active explorers the opportunity to learn and develop in this kinaesthetic way.
- **Behaviour and learning styles/schema** - Allowing individual children the opportunity to learn in a way that suits their schema/learning style had an especially significant impact on the behaviour on those whose inclinations were not easily catered for in the classroom.

Erpingham Primary School (2007)

A pilot study in the effects of forest School on writing was undertaken. Literacy scores of Key Stage 2 children were compared before a Forest School experience and then after one. The results showed an average increase of 1 sub-level in their writing scores after a Forest School experience.

Avocet House Children's Home (2008)

A pilot study was undertaken to consider using Forest School as a context for developing personal, social and emotional skills in Looked After Children. The following benefits were recorded:

- **Confidence and Self esteem** – The children grew in confidence, gradually taking control of their learning.
- **Speaking and Listening** – Significant increase in appropriate communication, particularly for learners with severe learning difficulties.
- **Attendance** – Forest School motivated learners to attend, even when there was a high percentage of absconding from other lessons.
- **Behaviour** – Improved behaviour was apparent.

Early Years Research (2009)

Currently two quantitative studies are being undertaken comparing Foundation Stage Profile data of Early Years children who attend a Forest School and those that do not. This research is due to be available by the end of 2009 and will be uploaded to the website.

Links & Further Reading

- Norfolk Research and case studies – www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/myportal/index.cfm?s=1&m=1654&p=1128,index

3. Forest School and National Initiatives

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”

~ **Albert Einstein**

Forest School supports holistic learning and development. Its ethos can be mapped to various key documents. The initiatives are explored through mind maps on the following pages:

- Every Child Matters
- SEAL
- National Curriculum Key Skills
- EYFS Principles
- EYFS 6 Areas Of Learning



Learning to be Healthy

The importance of eating sensibly, staying physically active and getting enough rest:

- ★ Forest School encourages active exploration of the environment – walking, climbing, balancing, digging, lifting and rolling materials etc. – thereby developing gross motor skills, strength and coordination.
- ★ Healthy eating and good hygiene can be introduced through campfire cooking or natural foods.
- ★ The outdoor environment has greater quantities of oxygen than the indoor environment essential for healthy brain development and learning

How to make positive choices and take sensible actions:

- ★ Forest School encourages children to take responsibility for themselves and those around them. This is done by sharing the risk assessment process with the children and negotiating boundaries with the group.
- ★ The repetitive nature of Forest School allows learners to build a sense of respect and care for the space.

How to protect their emotional, social and mental wellbeing:

- ★ The outdoor natural environment is a space conducive to wellbeing and lowering of stress levels.
- ★ The presentation of tasks in small achievable chunks increases chances of success and therefore increasing self esteem.
- ★ The environment encourages group work where learners can develop their social skills.
- ★ Provides space and time where learners can find an identity and work out issues in a non-threatening environment.

Learning to Achieve Economic Wellbeing

The qualities and skills needed for adult working life:

- ★ Forest school develops confidence, self-esteem, motivation, problem-solving, independence, personal and emotional skills.
- ★ Children will learn new skills, using real equipment for real purposes.

Learning to Stay Safe

How to identify and minimise risk:

- ★ Risk assessment processes are shared with pupils and negotiated boundaries agreed.
- ★ Adults model agreed behaviours and procedures at all times.

How to make informed and safe choices:

- ★ Pupils supported to make appropriate choices at all stages.
- ★ Choices discussed whenever appropriate.

How to voice their opinions and resist unhelpful peer pressure:

- ★ Various circle time opportunities can be explored, to encourage group to value everyone's opinions.

How does 'Forest Schools' meet the Every Child Matters Agenda?

Learning to make a Positive Contribution

To form positive relationships and avoid bullying and discriminatory behaviour:

- ★ Forest School is an environment where all are valued and recognised as individuals.
- ★ Adults support learners to work positively in groups to achieve a common goal.
- ★ The repetitive nature allows the group to build bonds and a sense of community.

How they can contribute to their own school and the wider community:

- ★ The repeated use of a space builds a deep connection with the learners and encourages a sense of respect and care.
- ★ Part of Forest School is to care for the site – which may be based in school or the wider community.

How to work effectively with others:

- ★ Children are encouraged to support each other and work positively in groups.

Learning to Enjoy and Achieve

How to work imaginatively and creatively to develop new ideas, insights and ways of doing things:

- ★ Learners are carefully supported to follow their own lines of enquiry and interest.
- ★ Careful observations enable adults to plan next steps for individuals and extend their learning.
- ★ Adults facilitate rather than direct – thereby allowing children to discover and explore at their own pace.
- ★ Problem-solving and independence is encouraged and supported.

How to assess their skill, achievements and potential in order to set personal goals and achieve their best:

- ★ Adults support learners by breaking down tasks into achievable chunks – careful open questioning allows learners to reflect on their projects and plan developments.
- ★ Forest School provides the potential to develop numerous practical (e.g. tool use) and theoretical (e.g. species identification) skills.

The joy gained from successful learning:

- ★ Individual achievements are recognised, valued and celebrated.

OVERLAYING ETHOS – Linking to all 5 aspects

- Whole school approach.
- Adult role as a facilitator and role model.
- Long term repetitive programme – allows time to revisit and consolidate.
- Inclusion – all learners can access at their own level and through their own style.

SELF AWARENESS

- Children are learning through multi-sensory first hand experiences.
- Learners given ownership and responsibility for themselves and the site.
- Learners are involved with assessing potential risks and given responsibility for their own risk management.
- All individuals are able to access learning at their own level and pace through their own style.
- Builds confidence and self esteem through small achievable tasks.

SOCIAL SKILLS

- Repeated experience creates a sense of belonging to a community.
- Supported to make appropriate choices in a safe environment.
- Opportunities to choose who to work with – based more on interests rather than ability, towards a common goal.
- Opportunities to problem solve, negotiate, test and evaluate.
- Language skills developed through talk for thinking and new, specific vocabulary.

How does Forest School support the development of the 5 aspects* of social and emotional learning?

MANAGING FEELINGS

- The environment provides learners with time and space to work alone or alongside others as they choose.
- Discussions about feelings can take place in a relaxed and non-threatening environment.
- Some learners encouraged to develop coping strategies for managing some emotions.

MOTIVATION

- Child led learning gives learners freedom to chose and direct own learning, based on interests and skills.
- Activities intrinsically motivated by learner – adults carefully support when necessary.
- Children's questions are encouraged and explored for as long as the learner needs to.
- Outdoor environment presents countless opportunities for learning in many different areas along many different themes.

EMPATHY

- Discussions about how everyone is feeling are encouraged.
- Learners develop risk management skills for the safety of themselves and others. A code of conduct is negotiated within the group.
- Repeated contact with site give a deep sense of place, love and care for the environment.
- Allowing children to learn in their own style at their own level and pace allows all learners to understand and value that everyone is different.

COMMUNICATION

- Opportunities for developing language for thought – in sharing ideas, planning activities, problem solving and evaluating.
- Opportunities for developing language for communication – a real life need for cooperation, negotiation, leadership etc.
- Develops vocabulary - children quickly learn the specific names for species, tools, tasks etc.

WORKING WITH OTHERS

- Repetitive experience creates a sense of community within the group.
- The environment provides learners with time and space to work alone or alongside others as they choose.
- Opportunities to choose who to work with – based more on interests rather than ability, towards a common goal.
- Often there is a real need to work with others to achieve a task.
- Children often take different group roles in the outdoors to those that they take in the classroom.

APPLICATION OF NUMBER

- Opportunities to apply number in a real life context for a real life purpose:
 - Measure – e.g. stick handling, firewood collection, construction
 - Shape – e.g. species identification
 - Space – e.g. blindfold games, map work
 - Number – e.g. counting (legs on bugs, no. in group)
 - Calculations – e.g. through careful questioning

How does Forest School support the development of the 6 Key Skills of the Primary National Curriculum?

IT

- Opportunities to use IT in a real context as a method of recording activities e.g. Cameras, video.
- Could use IT to communicate to others what Forest School is e.g. Presentations, films.

PROBLEM SOLVING

- Children are learning through multi-sensory first hand experiences.
- Presents a real life context for overcoming problems with a real need to succeed.
- Children are encouraged to make choices for themselves; their questions are not answered by adults but they are supported to find out the answers for themselves.

IMPROVING OWN LEARNING

- Child led learning gives learners freedom to chose and direct own learning, based on interests and skills.
- Builds confidence and self esteem through small achievable tasks – which transfers to all areas of life.
- Activities intrinsically motivated by learner – adults carefully support when necessary.
- Adults support children's understanding through use of open questions and valuing children's contributions.
- Children's questions are encouraged and children are supported in discovering an answer for themselves.

A Unique Child

- A child centred approach to learning.
- Planned around individual's interests, schemas and stage of development.
- Supports children to take appropriate risks safely and how to keep safe.
- Physical health benefits of being active outside.
- Mental and emotional health benefits – various research across the world indicates that contact with a natural environment induces wellbeing.

Enabling Environments

- The natural world is an ever-changing, stimulating environment. Through repeated visits, children will grow in confidence and familiarity with it and will notice changes.
- Session planning is adaptable and based on observations of individual's interests and skills.
- Builds confidence and self esteem as children are supported to achieve through small challenging but achievable tasks.
- Potential to network with other settings, schools, children's centres, landowners, community groups through a cluster support system.

How does 'Forest School' support the Early Years Foundation Stage Principles?

Positive Relationships

- Encourages social skills such as co-operation and negotiation as children work together to solve problems.
- The adults' role is to model, facilitate and observe children's learning.
- Can create strong links between setting and home as parents are encouraged to participate as helpers.
- Can influence parenting style (of parent helpers) as parents become facilitators and model skills rather than directors.

Learning and Development

- Allows for high quality play in an outdoor context.
 - Huge opportunities for kinaesthetic learning.
 - Allows repetition of activities so children can consolidate skills.
 - Allows time and space for learners to develop at their own pace.
 - Encourages creative thinking and problem solving skills.
- .Supports all 6 areas of learning (please see 'How Forest Schools supports the 6 areas of Learning' document).

Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)

- Activities engage children's interests and children will concentrate and persist for extended periods of time.
- Children gain confidence by trying new activities and gaining new skills, including 'high risk' activities such as using real tools and cooking on a fire.
- Opportunities for teamwork and development of social skills through working together to create an item/solve a problem.
- Develops an understanding of risks and the rules and boundaries in place for safety.
- Learning to dress/undress into wet weather gear.
- Develops understanding of personal hygiene.
- Children are encouraged to select and use resources independently.

Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy (PSRN)

- Opportunities for counting and calculating various materials/resources and in games.
- Opportunities for problem solving, such as measuring items e.g. sticks and firewood collection.
- Encourages descriptive and positional language.
- Particular activities could be introduced to link to PSRN

Physical Development (PD)

- Develops gross motor skills – running, climbing, lifting, rolling, using ropes/levers/pulleys.
- Develops fine motor skills – threading, tool use, craft activities, knot tying.
- Develops an awareness of personal space – e.g. stick waving.
- Supports managing hygiene – e.g. hand washing.
- Uses a variety of real equipment and tools for a real purpose.
- Develops understanding of safety measures.

How does 'Forest Schools' meet the Early Years Foundation Stage 6 Areas of Learning?

Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL)

- Develops conversational skills in a practical context.
- Develops talk about interests/activities.
- Encourages social talk such as negotiation and planning.
- Develops specific vocabulary to the natural world e.g. names of animals/tools etc.
- Learn new songs/stories.
- Potential for role play/story telling/re telling of known stories.
- Use of language to think through problems/activities.
- Using books to research minibeasts/trees etc.
- Potential for mark making/writing using sticks etc.
- Particular activities could be introduced to link to CLL.

Creative Development (CD)

- Children are free to create using different mediums and tools.
- Opportunities to explore colours and textures in nature.
- Opportunities to learn new songs/rhymes/chants.
- Opportunities to make musical instruments e.g. whistles, kazoos, shakers, xylophones.
- Potential for imaginative role play.
- Particular activities could be introduced to link to CD.

Knowledge and Understanding of the World (KUW)

- Encourages exploration using all senses.
- Encourages questioning and investigation.
- Opportunities to find out and identify features of living things.
- Encourages observations of similarities, differences, patterns and change.
- Opportunities for construction using real tools and equipment.
- Potential for use of ICT e.g. digital cameras, Dictaphone, video camera etc.
- Develops understanding of seasons and weather.
- Encourages children to plan activities through repetitive nature of sessions.
- Encourages observation, discussion and questioning about natural environment.

4. Forest School Training

“If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.” ~ Rachel Carson

Forest School is facilitated by qualified Level 3 Forest School Practitioners. There are many Forest School training providers across the UK. In Norfolk all our training is provided by The Forest School Training Company and accreditation is awarded by The Open College Network (OCN).

People from all sorts of backgrounds train in Forest School; teachers, learning support assistants, parents, rangers, artists, environmental educators, ecologists, social workers and more.

Forest School training combines theory of child development and learning, play, neural development with practical skills of tool use, shelter building, fire management, health and safety, woodland ecology and combines them to create powerful, safe and appropriate learning experiences.



There are 3 levels of Forest School training available; Level 3 is the required level of qualification to run a ‘Forest School’, please see descriptions below:

Forest School Practitioner Award – OCN Level 3

The Forest School Practitioners Award is aimed at professionals, independents and people already working with groups of children/young people, who wish to establish and facilitate ‘Forest School’. The Level 3 Practitioners award is equivalent to an A-Level and is a long-term course of study combining intensive training sessions, self-directed learning, tutorials and practical assessments.

Course Commitment: 180 hours

Entry Requirements:

- Students must be over 21 years of age.
- Hold a Level 2 or equivalent teaching and/or playwork qualification.
- **Or** put together a portfolio showing 2 years relevant experience in working with groups of children in the outdoors.
- Hold a current Enhanced CRB Disclosure.

Course Content:

The qualification comprises the following level 3 units:

- Learning and Development at Forest School
- Forest School Practical Skills and Woodland Management
- Establishment and Delivery of a Forest School Programme

Usual delivery:

The course is a balance of theory and practice. Students will need to complete a portfolio of work on a long-distance learning basis. In addition to this, students will need to plan, run and evaluate a series of 6 Forest School sessions with a small group of children/young people. The guided part of the training is as follows:

- 5 day intensive training course
- 2 day First Aid
- 3 day practical skills
- 1 day tutorial

Forest School Assistant Award – OCN Level 2

This training is aimed at people planning to assist at an existing Forest School. The Level 2 assistant's award is equivalent to an A-C grade GCSE and is a course of study combining intensive training sessions, self-directed learning, and practical assessments.

Course Commitment: 60 hours

Entry Requirements:

- Students must be 18 years or over.
- Have experience of working with children or young people.
- Hold a current Enhanced CRB Disclosure.

Course Content:

The qualification comprises of the following level 2 units:

- Supporting learning and development at Forest School
- Skills for the Forest School Assistant

Usual delivery:

The course is a balance of theory and practice. Students will need to complete a portfolio of work and a practical skills workbook on a long-distance learning basis. In addition to this, students are required to assist a level 3 practitioner in both planning and delivery of at least 3 Forest School sessions. The guided parts of the training are as follows:

- 5 day intensive training course
- 3 sessions assisting an existing level 3 practitioner (In Norfolk you will be linked to a Forest School Mentor)



Forest Skills Award – OCN Level 1

This training is an introduction to the concept of Forest School. It is appropriate for parents and/or volunteer helpers at an existing Forest School. The Level 1 forest skills award is equivalent to a D-G grade GCSE and is a combination of intensive training sessions and observing a Forest School session.

Course Commitment: 30 hours

Entry Requirements:

- Students must be 16 years or over.
- Have an interest in working with people in an outdoor environment.

Course Content:

The qualification comprises of the following Level 1 units:

- Introduction to learning and development at Forest School
- Basic Forest School practical skills

Usual delivery:

The course is a balance of theory and practice. Students need to complete 2 workbooks during the intensive training course and then visit an existing Forest School and observe a session

- 2 day intensive training course*
- 1 day visiting a Forest School session (In Norfolk you will be linked to a Forest School Mentor)

** Most other level 1 training courses are 3 days, however in Norfolk we have a Forest School Mentor Scheme meaning that the third day is carried out with the mentor at their Forest School site.*

Norfolk Based Training

In Norfolk approximately two Level 3 training courses and around ten level 1 courses run per annum. Historically level 2 has not been on offer, however this level will be started in 2010. To view forthcoming training courses please visit the Forest School Norfolk website.

There are also a number of other outdoor learning training courses available to practitioners in Norfolk, designed as Continued Professional Development for Forest School Practitioners. These cover a number of themes such as: storytelling, building with cob, emotional literacy, species identification, bushcraft and creativity. These are also advertised on the Norfolk Forest School website.

Links & Further Reading:

- Norfolk based training – www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/myportal/index.cfm?s=1&m=1654&p=1125,index
- The Forest School Training Network – www.forestschool-training.co.uk
- Archimedes Training – www.forestschools.com

5. Providing 'Forest School'

'Forest School' can only be run by qualified Level 3 Forest School Practitioners. Therefore to run a Forest School settings can either:

1. Contact a qualified level 3 Leader to work with your group.
2. Train a member of staff to become a level 3 leader.

Using External Providers as Forest School Leaders

A qualified level 3 Forest School Leader should provide the client group with the following when planning a Forest School programme:

1. Forest School Level 3 certificate
2. Evidence of First Aid qualification
3. Evidence of appropriate insurances
4. CRB disclosure
5. Forest School handbook – which should include:
 - Health and safety policy
 - Safeguarding children policy
 - Behaviour policy
 - Tool use policy and procedures
 - Fire use policy and procedures
 - Appropriate risk assessments
 - Emergency procedures
6. Appropriate planning and observation systems
7. Feedback on learners on a session by session basis
8. Training/guidance for supporting adults who regularly attend Forest School sessions
9. Opportunities to communicate (meetings/letters/presentations) the Forest School ethos to staff/governors/parents/children

Health and Safety

Any Outdoor Learning involves elements of risk. The benefits of appropriate risk are vital to children's development. Forest School develops learners understanding of risk, involves the learners in the risk management process and supports learners to take acceptable risks. Forest School leaders are trained in relevant Health and Safety issues. Every qualified Forest School level 3 leader will have a handbook containing all the appropriate policies, procedures, risk assessments and other relevant documentations. Every Leader will also be trained in emergency outdoor first aid. If your school is receiving Forest School sessions from an external provider you should be given a copy of the Leaders handbook and evidence of Level 3 Forest School leadership and First Aid qualifications.

“When children spend time in the great outdoors, getting muddy, getting wet, getting stung by nettles, they learn important lessons - what hurts, what is slippery, what you can trip over or fall from.”

~ Peter Cornall, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

Funding

Setting up a Forest School does have financial implications; however there are many funding sources out there that may be able to help you. Some ideas are listed below. There are other funding ideas listed within the Environmental and Outdoor Learning Team website.



- Forestry Commission 'Woodland Improvement Grant' – The Forestry commission in the East of England has created a 'Forest Schools Challenge Fund' to provide funds for the setting up of Forest Schools.
- National Lottery 'Awards for All' - Award grants of between £300 and £10,000 for people to take part in art, sport, heritage and community activities, and projects that promote education, the environment and health in the local community.
- Core funding could be allocated to Forest Schools if it is used to develop certain key areas, for example the learning outside the classroom manifesto, extended schools requirements, sustainable schools agenda, children centre core offer etc.
- Settings may be able to raise some money through charity/sponsored events. Parent organisations could be involved.
- Certain things, such as tools and equipment may be donated from certain businesses, in return for acknowledgements. Alternatively businesses and organisations may be encouraged to donate money to your setting. Getting the local press involved sometimes helps to raise the profile of projects.
- Site preparation and maintenance may be able to be added to your existing school grounds maintenance plan if on site, or the landowner may pay for this if using an offsite location.
- Some site management work may be able to be done by volunteers. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) can organise work parties to do certain jobs such as scrub clearance, coppicing, path and fence laying etc.
- The Woodland Trust run a 'tree for all' scheme and provides free tree packs to schools.

Links & Further Reading:

- Woodland Improvement grant – [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ewgs5-guide-ee-forest-school.pdf/\\$FILE/ewgs5-guide-ee-forest-school.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ewgs5-guide-ee-forest-school.pdf/$FILE/ewgs5-guide-ee-forest-school.pdf)
- Awards for All – www.awardsforall.org.uk
- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers - www2.btcv.org.uk
- The Woodland Trust – www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

A Forest School Site

Every Forest School site is unique; it is used and shaped to meet the needs of the group and to fit the environment you are working in, in negotiation with the land owner.

The most important aspect is safety, some sites may require preparation (such as tree surgery, removal of debris etc.) to make them safe and secure. The Forest School leader will regularly risk assess the site to ensure continued site safety.

The site may be within the setting's grounds or an offsite location, however even if when using an offsite location Leaders may use school grounds for some of the initial sessions to prepare the children. The site should be a natural area (not necessarily woodland) and materials can be imported if they are not available on site. The site can range in complexity from no fixed features to a fully constructed shelter and fire area with specially designed areas for hygiene, creative art, tool use, fast games, throwing games, flora monitoring amongst other ideas.

Within your settings grounds - If the Forest School site is within the setting's grounds the Leader will need to consider whether the children should be able to access the area outside the normal Forest School sessions, such as playtimes. If not, some sort of boundary will need to be created. This could be temporary such as cones, ropes or markers, or permanent such as fencing or hedging.

Many Schools have started developing more natural areas of their school grounds so that they will have a place to run a Forest School in. NCC's School grounds advisory team can assist this.

Offsite Locations - When using an offsite location, a woodland environment is ideal. The site is likely to be more established than school grounds with some mature trees.

The layout of the site and some activities will have to be negotiated with the landowner, especially if you want to establish semi-permanent structures such as a fire triangle, seating circle and shelters. If you are hoping to harvest materials, such as poles, and light a fire you will need to obtain permission from the landowner. You may also need to consider if other groups will be using the same area and for what purpose.

Please ensure you are adhering to the NCC 'Educational Visits and Journeys' document when making offsite visits.





Site Management - Any Forest School site will require a degree of management which will vary depending on the features of the site and how often it is used. The maintenance will need to be arranged with the landowner and it may be appropriate to create a management plan for the area. A management plan will outline what action needs to be taken and when to do it, to minimise disturbance to the wildlife.

Site Degradation - If a site is being used frequently the Forest School Leader will need to be aware of signs of degradation such as soil erosion, and over use of trees/plants. These signs are things that can be observed when the Forest School Leader undertakes their regular risk assessments. If a site is becoming degraded, a possible solution is to use different locations on a rotational basis.

Kit & Equipment - Much of Forest School can be done without expensive equipment; however some basic kit is useful.

An absolute necessity is outdoor clothing and footwear for all participants (children and adults), including full waterproofs. Without the proper clothing cold and wet weather can become a risk.

Ideas for simple kit:

- Ropes & string
- Tarpaulins
- Pegs and mallets
- Poles & logs of different sizes
- Baskets, bags & buckets
- Pulleys
- Bug pots & magnifiers
- Tools

Links & Further Reading:

- Muddyfaces – www.muddyfaces.co.uk
- Muddy Puddles – www.muddypuddles.com
- Waterproof World – www.waterproofworld.co.uk
- Field Studies Council – www.field-studies-council.org

6. Norfolk Network and Support

In Norfolk there is a growing network of support for Forest School practitioners.

E-Newsletters

An Electronic Newsletter is sent out to all interested practitioners; currently there are three issues a year. Back issues can be downloaded from the websites. The Newsletter aims to keep practitioners updated on local and national events, highlight forthcoming training courses and provide ideas for use at Forest School.

Forest School Leaders Meetings

All Level 3 Forest School Leaders are invited to join the network of Norfolk leaders who meet once a term for a 2 hour session. These meetings aim to keep practitioners informed, provide networking opportunities and time to share practice as well as allow leaders a voice on how Forest School is managed in Norfolk. There is also an hour of Continued Professional Development at each meeting on various themes.

Forest School Mentors

There are a number of Forest School Mentors across Norfolk who support candidates undertaking Forest School Training. These mentors have undertaken a formal induction process and provide an established Forest School programme which visitors can observe.

Borrow Boxes

The Forest School Mentors coordinate a borrow box scheme. Practitioners can borrow items for half a term. Kits include:

- Presentation toolkits
- Outdoor Clothing 'try before you buy'
- Den building
- Ropes and Pulleys
- Storm kettles

Local Groups

The Forest School Mentors also coordinate local cluster groups, per area of Norfolk. These groups meet on a regular basis to provide networking opportunities, skills enrichment and sharing of practice. Anyone with an interest in Forest School can attend these meetings.

To find out more about any of these please contact Louise using details on page 2.



7. Supporting Organisations

In Norfolk many organisations are involved with supporting Forest School.

Environmental & Outdoor Learning Team, Children's Services – Coordinate Forest School as well as many other Outdoor Learning and Sustainability projects. www.norfolk.gov.uk/outdoorlearning

Early Years, Childcare & Extended School Services, Children's Services – Fund and support various training and schemes in the Early Years. www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk

Norfolk Wildlife Trust – Education team can help schools with school grounds development and learning activities. www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk

Forestry Commission – Provides funding and research supporting Forest School www.forestry.gov.uk

Broads Authority – Whitlingham Country Park provides Forest School experiences for many different groups www.broads-authority.gov.uk

Birchwood Learning – An independent Forest School trainer & consultant www.birchwoodlearning.co.uk