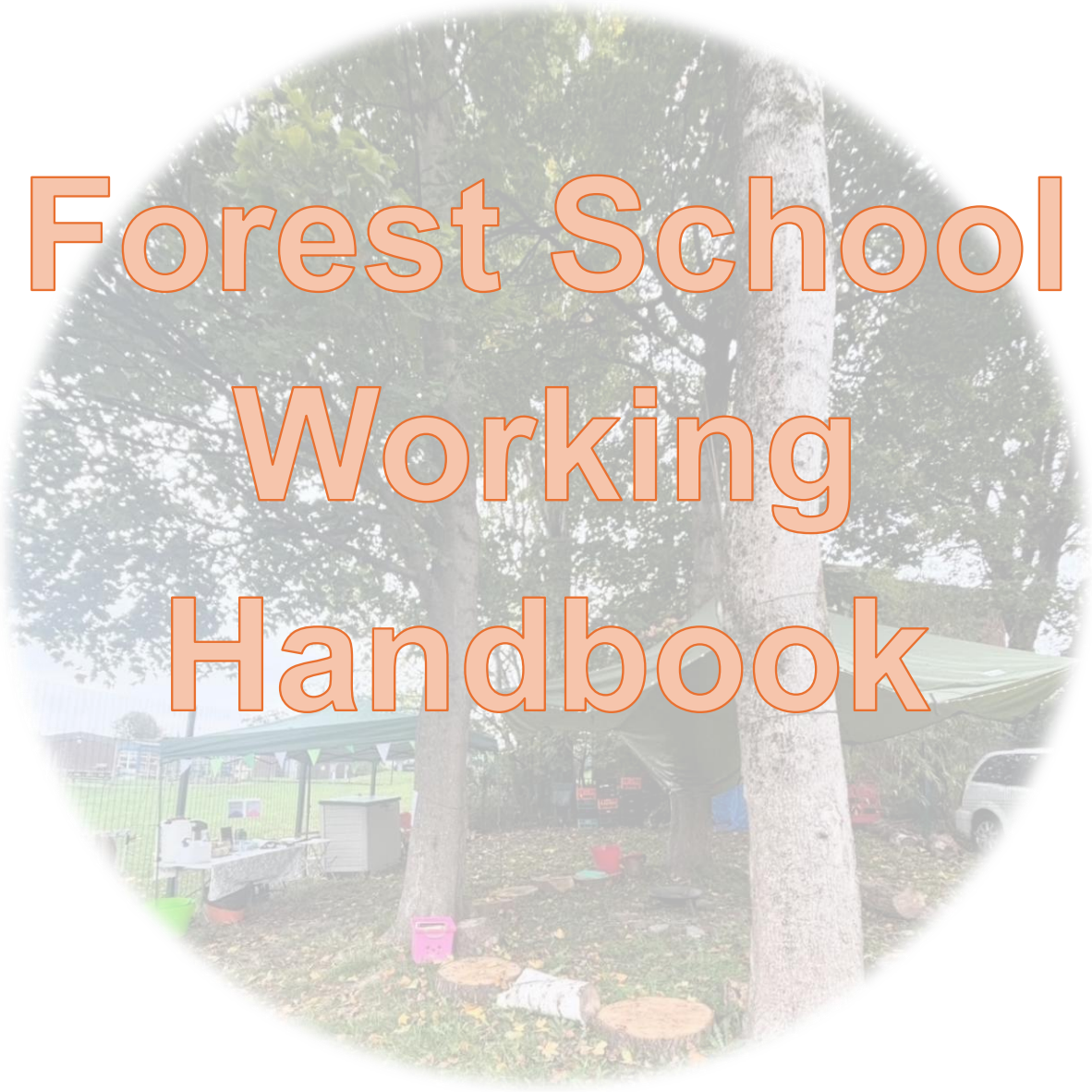


Forest School Working Handbook

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CAMS LANE FOREST SCHOOL WORKING HANDBOOK

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Cams Lane purpose and status of Forest School

The purpose of this handbook is to provide clear guidance for everyone who going to be involved in Cams Lane Forest School. It will explain the forest school principles, expectations, procedures and responsibilities needed to provide a safe, inclusive and positive learning environment. It also ensures that Forest School are continuous and foster children's cognitive growth, emotional health, resilience and appreciation for the natural world.

The status of the handbook is a working document that provides help and support for staff, volunteers and any other people involved in Cams Lane Forest school. This should be followed during all Forest School sessions and reviewed yearly to make sure it remains accurate and reflects policies, legislation, risk assessments and good practice. Any changes must be agreed with the Forst School Leader and school management.

Introduction to Forest School

Forest School is a child-centred approach to learning that takes place regularly in a natural woodland or outdoor environment. It provides children and young people with opportunities to learn through direct experiences, exploration, play and practical activities.

Forest School supports the holistic development of children, including their physical, social, emotional, cognitive and creative development. Through regular experiences outdoors, children can develop confidence, independence, resilience, communication, problem-solving skills and a positive relationship with the natural environment.

Forest School is different from a one-off outdoor learning experience because it is based on a long-term, regular programme. Children are given time to develop relationships with the environment, practitioners and one another, allowing learning and development to take place progressively.

The Forest School approach is upheld by six core principles:

Long-term

Forest School takes place over an extended period, with regular sessions that allow children to become familiar with the environment and develop a sense of belonging. Consistency provides opportunities for children to build relationships, revisit experiences, develop skills progressively and observe seasonal changes within the natural environment.

Regular attendance also allows practitioners to develop a deeper understanding of each child's interests, strengths, needs and development. Planning can therefore evolve in response to children's experiences and emerging interests.

A Natural Woodland or Outdoor Environment

Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment that provides a rich and varied setting for learning. The environment itself becomes an important resource, offering opportunities for exploration, investigation, imaginative play, physical challenge and observation.

Children can experience seasonal changes, weather, wildlife, plants, trees and natural materials. Developing familiarity with the environment can help children build a meaningful connection with nature and develop an understanding of their responsibility to care for it.

Learner-Centred Processes

Forest School is centred on the interests, choices and needs of the learner. Children are encouraged to take an active role in deciding what they would like to explore and how they would like to engage with the environment.

The Forest School Leader observes children's play and interests and uses these observations to inform future planning. Adults provide appropriate support, resources and boundaries while allowing children the freedom to investigate, experiment, make decisions and develop their own ideas.

This approach recognises that children learn in different ways and at different rates.

Holistic Development

Forest School supports the whole child, rather than focusing on one particular area of development. Experiences can contribute to physical, social, emotional, cognitive, language and creative development.

Activities such as climbing, balancing, building shelters, using tools, making natural artwork, exploring wildlife and engaging in imaginative play can provide opportunities to develop coordination, communication, cooperation, problem-solving, confidence and resilience.

Forest School also provides opportunities for children to develop emotional awareness and self-regulation by experiencing challenge, success, frustration, uncertainty and achievement within a supportive environment.

Supported Risk-Taking

An important aspect of Forest School is providing children with opportunities to experience appropriate and supported risk. Children are encouraged to assess situations, make decisions and understand the possible consequences of their actions.

Risk is managed through appropriate planning, risk-benefit assessment, supervision and dynamic risk assessment. The aim is not to remove all risk but to ensure that risks are understood and managed proportionately while retaining the developmental benefits of challenge. Through this approach, children can develop confidence, independence, resilience, judgement and problem-solving skills.

Qualified Practitioners

Forest School is led by a qualified Forest School practitioner who has the knowledge, skills and understanding required to provide safe and effective Forest School experiences.

The practitioner is responsible for planning and evaluating sessions, managing risk, maintaining safeguarding and health and safety procedures, supporting inclusion, monitoring the environment and facilitating child-led learning.

The Forest School Leader also has an important role as an observer and facilitator. Rather than directing every aspect of the session, the practitioner creates an environment in which children can explore, play, take appropriate risks and develop their own ideas.

Forest School Vision Statement

Our vision at Cams Lane is to provide a safe, inclusive and inspiring Forest School environment where every child can connect with nature, be themselves, develop confidence and build knowledge and understanding of the world.

Through regular experiences in the outdoors, children will be encouraged to investigate, explore, take appropriate risks and learn through those experiences. We will support children to develop their problem-solving skills, resilience, creativity, independence and build on their self-esteem at the child's own pace.

We will have a child-centred approach, recognising that every child is unique, with different needs, interests and abilities. There will be plenty of opportunities for children to work together to build positive relationships through practical activities, play and exploration.

Forest School will promote care and respect for the environment by encouraging children to understand biodiversity and protect habitats. We will follow the Forest School ethos and principles by making sessions regular, long-term and ensure that sessions are outside in the woodland.

Above all, our vision is to make children to feel confident, safe and valued, developing a sense of belonging whilst having the freedom to explore and learn in the natural environment.

Policies and procedures

Cams Lane Forest School behaviour policy

At Cams Lane Forest School, our behaviour policy differs to the school policy

We, as staff will take a non-judgemental approach to behaviour, understanding that children have different ways of communicating and the behaviour that children display is often a form of communication. By taking a non-judgemental approach to behaviour, it allows our staff to respond accordingly. We thrive to build positive, trusting relationships with our children, understanding their individual needs and helping to support their emotional regulation.

Our approach differs from that of the school behaviour policy, which is reward based. We encourage children to take care of themselves and develop a sense of responsibility by creating a supportive environment where children understand the reasons behind their actions and learn to make choices independently.

The aim for our children is to behave responsibly because they understand that their actions matter, rather than because they want praise or rewards. This is developed through positive role modelling from our staff, shared experiences, child-led learning, reflection and giving children the opportunity to take ownership.

The purpose of this behaviour policy is to create a respectful, safe, and inclusive environment where all children can thrive in Forest School. To encourage children to build confidence, independence and positive relationships with others and connect with nature.

All supporting staff will be expected to read the Forest School behaviour policy and comply with it. If staff are unsure, they should speak to one of the leaders for clarification.

Expected behaviour

- To adhere to the Forest school contract outlined in the first session.
- Use Forest school tools and equipment safely and responsibly.
- Use kind and respectful language towards others.
- To look after the environment and to leave no trace.

Managing behaviour

Forest School recognises that children may sometimes display challenging behaviour, we understand that this is a form of communication. Staff will respond in a calm, respectful and non-judgemental manner whilst maintaining clear boundaries and prioritising the safety of everyone attending the session.

As Forest School leaders, we fully support children with autonomy and choice, respecting children's freedom to make their own choices. If, for example, a child refuses to participate with the session, staff would be supportive and non-judgemental, we will ask what the child would like to do instead, allowing children to make their own choice, if their choice is safe for themselves and other participants. Knowing that if a child refuses to participate in an activity, this is not inappropriate behaviour- it is their choice. Or, if a child is becoming dysregulated or showing signs of anger or frustration, staff will allow the child to express their feelings whilst maintaining the safety of all participants. When managing behaviour, staff will respond in a respective manner and be active listeners to hear what/how the child is feeling. They will be supportive and offer ways to let their feelings out.

Cams Lane Forest School Equality and Inclusion Policy

Our Forest School is committed to providing a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment where everyone is treated fairly.

We recognise that children have different abilities, backgrounds, needs, cultures and beliefs. Our aim in to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to participate in Forest School activities.

This policy follows the principles of the Equality Act 2010.

Cams lane Forest School will:

- Promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- Treat all participants fairly and with respect
- Identify and reduce barriers for participants
- Support children with disabilities and additional needs
- Make reasonable adjustments where needed
- Respect different cultures, religions and beliefs
- Challenge discrimination, bullying and prejudice
- Consider individual needs when planning activities and completing risk assessments
- Adapt activities, equipment or the environment where reasonably possible

Ecological Impact Assessment Policy and Procedures

Cams Lane Forest School is committed to protecting and enhancing the natural environment. We recognise that regular use of the woodland can affect plants, animals, soil, water and habitats. Ecological impacts will therefore be considered when planning activities, managing the site and making changes to the Forest School environment.

The aim is to minimise the negative impacts while encouraging children to develop a positive relationship and responsibility for nature.

Before carrying out activities or making changes to the site, our Forest School Leaders will:

- Identify the habitats, plants and wildlife present
- Consider whether any species or habitats could be disturbed or damaged
- Identify areas that are particularly sensitive or important for wildlife
- Consider seasonal factors such as nesting birds, breeding animals and flowering plants
- Consider the potential impact of activities such as tree planting, hedge planting, fires and digging
- Check whether any protected species or habitats may be affected
- Identify suitable control measures to reduce ecological damage
- Record significant findings and actions where appropriate

To minimise the Environmental Impact, where possible, Cams Lane Forest School will:

- Use existing paths
- Avoid unnecessary damage to vegetation
- Leave wildlife habitats undisturbed
- Avoid disturbing wildlife, nests, dens and habitats
- Manage fires carefully and only in designated areas
- Encourage children to observe wildlife without disturbing it
- Protect trees and vegetation from unnecessary damage
- Remove waste and prevent pollution

Health and Safety

Accidents and Emergencies

The safety and wellbeing of children and staff is the priority during all Forest School sessions. Staff must be familiar with the setting's first aid, safeguarding, emergency and accident reporting procedures before attending Forest School.

A suitable first aid kit and emergency contact information will be available at the Forest School site. Both Forest school leaders are level 3 outdoor first aid trained and at least one member of staff with appropriate first aid training will be present during each session.

In the event of an accident or emergency, staff will:

- Remain calm and assess the situation.
- Make the area safe to prevent further injury.
- Provide appropriate first aid within their level of training.
- Ensure that the other children remain supervised and safe.
- Contact the emergency services on 999 where necessary.
- Contact parents/carers as soon as appropriate, in line with the school's procedures.
- As per our accident and emergency protocol at Cams Lane Primary School, accidents will be recorded via CPOMS
- Inform the Forest School Leader and relevant senior staff.

If a child needs to leave the Forest School site for medical treatment, the agreed emergency procedure will be followed. A member of staff will remain with the child until responsibility is transferred to an appropriate parent/carer or medical professional.

Cooking and Food Hygiene

Cooking is an important part of Forest School and provides children with opportunities to develop practical skills, independence and an understanding of food and safe fire use. All cooking activities will be risk assessed. Forest School leaders are level 2 hygiene trained.
Children will be taught basic food hygiene and safe cooking practices before taking part. Staff will ensure that:

- Hands are washed before handling food and after using the toilet or touching potentially contaminated surfaces
- Food preparation surfaces and cooking equipment are clean before use.
- Food is stored safely and kept covered where appropriate.
- Fresh ingredients are checked for use-by dates and signs of spoilage.
- Raw and cooked foods are kept separate to reduce the risk of cross-contamination.
- Children are encouraged not to share food, utensils or drinks where this could present a hygiene or allergy risk.
- Allergies, intolerances and dietary requirements are checked before any cooking activity.
- Ingredients are clearly identified and staff are aware of any individual medical or dietary needs.
- Food is cooked thoroughly and served at a safe temperature.
- Leftover food is disposed of safely and is not kept unless suitable storage is available.
- Cooking on a Fire

When cooking over a fire, the Forest School fire policy and risk assessment must be followed. Children will be supervised and follow the Forest school contract at the start of each session and when appropriate. A designated cooking area will be used, with appropriate equipment available.
Staff will ensure that food is handled safely and that children are positioned safely away from flames and hot surfaces. Hot food and drinks will be checked before being given to children to reduce the risk of burns.
Cooking equipment will be cleaned after use and the cooking area will be left clean and safe. Any accidents, burns or food-related incidents will be dealt with according to the Forest School accident and emergency procedures.

COSHH – Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

The Forest School setting will follow the school's COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) procedures to ensure that children, staff and visitors are protected from harmful substances.

Staff will:

- Identify fungi and any other wild berries that may be hazardous to health and corner them off.
- Store substances securely in suitable, clearly labelled containers.
- Never transfer hazardous substances into unlabeled containers or food/drink containers.
- Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) where required.
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling substances and before eating or preparing food.
- Report any spills, exposure or accidents immediately and follow the appropriate emergency procedure.

COSHH assessments and safety information will be reviewed regularly and whenever a new substance or activity is introduced.

Severe Weather and Environmental Emergencies

Forest School sessions may be postponed, shortened or cancelled where weather or environmental conditions create an unacceptable risk. This may include severe storms, high winds over 35 mph, flooding, extreme temperatures over 30 degrees as per school policy, poor visibility or other significant hazards.
During the daily site check, Forest School leaders will check weather conditions and monitor throughout the sessions. If conditions become unsafe, children and staff will return to school quickly and safely.

Fire Safety

Fire can be a valuable part of Forest School, providing opportunities for children to develop practical skills, confidence, and an understanding of fire safety and it also brings in the community. All fire activities must be carefully planned, risk assessed and supervised by Forest School Leaders.

Fire Safety Procedures

Before any fire is lit, staff will:

- Complete a fire risk assessment and check weather conditions, including wind speed and direction.
- Check that the designated fire area is safe and clear of dry vegetation and other combustible materials.
- Ensure suitable fire safety equipment is available, including a fire blanket, water, soil, gloves and a first aid kit.
- Remind children of the Forest School contract.
- Check that all staff understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Managing the Fire
- Only the Forest School leaders will light the fire.
- Children will be supervised at all times and must never be left alone near a fire.
- Children will approach the fire area only when instructed by a member of staff.
- The seating area will be around the fire 3 foot away from the fire.
- Extinguishing the fire with water, soil or the fire blanket.

At the end of each session, the Forest school leader will fully extinguish the fire using an appropriate method. The fire area will be checked carefully to

ensure there are no remaining flames, embers or hot materials. The site must not be left until the fire is confirmed to be completely extinguished and safe.

Fire Emergency Procedures

If a fire becomes uncontrolled, staff will immediately move children away from the danger area to the designated safe meeting point. The Forest School Leader will raise the alarm and call 999 if emergency assistance is required. Staff will maintain supervision of all children, carry out a headcount and follow the school's emergency procedures.

If a child or staff member suffers a burn, appropriate first aid will be provided immediately. Burns should be cooled under cool running water for 20 minutes where possible, and emergency medical assistance sought when necessary. Staff must never put themselves or others at risk by attempting to control an unsafe fire.
All fire-related incidents, injuries and near misses will be recorded and reported in accordance with the school's accident reporting procedures.

First Aid

The health and safety of children and staff is a priority during all Forest School sessions. Appropriate first aid arrangements will be in place and will follow the school's first aid and medical procedures.

Both Forest School Leaders are level 3 outdoor first aid trained.
Staff will know the location of the first aid kit, emergency medication, telephone and emergency access point before the session begins.

The Forest School first aid kit will be checked regularly and kept appropriately stocked. It will be easily accessible to staff but kept out of children's reach where appropriate.

First Aid Procedures

In the event of an injury or illness, staff will:

- Assess the situation and make the area safe.
- Provide appropriate first aid within the limits of their training.
- keep calm and reassure the child.
- Ensure the remaining children are supervised.
- Contact emergency services on 999 when necessary.
- Contact parents/carers in accordance with the school's procedures.
- Record the injury, treatment and any follow-up required in accordance with the school's accident and first aid procedures.

Attention will be given to common Forest School injuries, including cuts, grazes, splinters, burns, bites and stings, trips and falls, allergic reactions and minor head injuries.

First Aid Equipment

A suitable first aid kit will be taken to the Forest School site and will include appropriate supplies for treating minor injuries. Where children have individual healthcare plans or require prescribed emergency medication, this must be available during the session in accordance with the child's healthcare plan.

Staff will also have access to emergency contact information and any relevant medical information required to respond appropriately to an emergency.

Serious Injury or Emergency

For a serious injury or medical emergency, staff will call 999 and follow the emergency operator's instructions. A member of staff will remain with the injured child while another member of staff supervises the rest of the group and contacts the school and parent/carer as appropriate.

All accidents, injuries, first aid treatment and significant near misses will be recorded and reported in line with the school's procedures.

Manual Handling

Manual handling at Forest School includes lifting, carrying, moving, pushing or pulling equipment and materials.

Staff will:

- Assess manual handling tasks before carrying them out.
- Avoid lifting or carrying heavy or awkward items where possible.
- Use suitable equipment, such as wheelbarrows to move heavier materials.
- Ask for assistance when an item is too heavy or awkward to move safely.
- Use safe lifting techniques, keeping the load close to the body and avoiding twisting while lifting.
- Ensure pathways are clear before moving equipment or materials.
- Store Forest School equipment safely and at an appropriate height where possible.
- Consider children's individual needs, abilities and physical limitations when asking them to move or carry equipment.
- Ensure children are supervised when handling tools, equipment, logs, branches or other natural materials.

Children will be encouraged to develop independence by carrying suitable lightweight equipment, but they will not be expected to lift or move items that are beyond their capabilities.

Any manual handling injuries, accidents or near misses will be reported and recorded in accordance with the school's accident reporting procedures. Staff will always follow the school's manual handling policy and relevant risk assessments.

Tools

Tools are an important part of Forest School and provide children with opportunities to develop practical skills, coordination, confidence and independence. Forest School leaders will ensure that tools are checked regularly, maintained in good condition and stored safely when not in use. A risk assessment will be completed for each tool and activity, considering potential hazards and appropriate control measures. Children will be taught how to carry, use and pass tools safely, and Forest school leaders will provide close supervision where required. Any damaged or unsafe tools will be removed from use immediately.

Transport

Forest school is onsite it is a few minutes walk from the school building, Forest School leaders will do a headcount when the children arrive in Forest School and when they return to school.

Welfare

The welfare of children and staff is a priority throughout Forest School sessions. Children will have access to suitable toilet facilities and will be supported to maintain good personal hygiene, including handwashing before eating and after using the toilet. Appropriate PPE will be provided and used where required for activities, for example gloves when using tools and fire gloves Children should wear suitable clothing and footwear for the weather and outdoor environment, including waterproofs, warm layers, hats and sturdy footwear. Staff will check that children are appropriately dressed before leaving school and throughout the session. A letter will be sent out to parents to ensure children will have the right clothing. Children will have access to drinking water and will be encouraged to drink regularly, particularly during warmer weather. Food and snacks will be stored and prepared safely, with consideration given to allergies, dietary requirements and food hygiene. Staff will monitor children's wellbeing throughout the session and respond appropriately to signs of cold, heat, tiredness, illness or distress.

Safeguarding, Anti-bullying and Confidentiality

Cams Lane Forest School will follow the Cams Lane Primary School policies for Safeguarding, Anti-bullying and Confidentiality. See appendix 1 and 2.

Child and Adult Safeguarding Risks

Safeguarding is a priority at Forest School, and appropriate procedures will be followed to protect both children and adults. Staff will always maintain appropriate supervision and professional boundaries, ensuring that children are not left alone with an adult unless this is necessary and in line with school safeguarding procedures. Staff will follow the school's safeguarding and child protection policies, including procedures for reporting concerns, allegations or disclosures. Children will be taught how to stay safe and be encouraged to speak to a trusted adult if they feel worried or uncomfortable. Staff should also be aware of their own safety and wellbeing and report any concerns about inappropriate behaviour, unsafe working practices or safeguarding issues. All concerns will be recorded and reported promptly to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in accordance with school procedures.

For data protection and personal data handling, lost or missing child, disclosure, visitor protocol see Cams Lane Safeguarding Policy (appendix 1).

Social Media

Forest School will follow the Cams Lane Social Media policy (appendix 3).

DBS

As our Forest School Leaders work within the school, they currently hold an up-to-date DBS.

Staff, Ratios, Roles and Responsibilities

Forest School sessions are planned and delivered with the safety, wellbeing and needs of all children at the center of our practice. Staffing levels will be appropriate to the number and needs of the children attending.

Staffing and Ratios

Forest School sessions will operate at a staffing ratio of 1 adult to 5 children. This ratio allows staff to provide appropriate supervision while supporting children's independence and safe exploration of the Forest School environment. Where a child has SEND or additional needs that require individual support, they will be provided with 1:1 support for the child's individual needs, risk assessment or support plan. Staffing levels may be increased where required to ensure the safety, wellbeing and inclusion of all children.

Forest School Leader

The Forest School Leader has overall responsibility for the planning and delivery of Forest School sessions.

The Forest School Leader will:

- Complete and review site and activity risk assessments
- Check that the site and equipment are safe before each session
- Ensure the Forest school contract is communicated to children and adults at the start of the session and is reminded during the middle part or the session or when appropriate
- Ensure that appropriate first aid arrangements are in place
- Plan appropriate activities based on children's interests
- Ensure tools, fire equipment and other resources are used safely
- Allocate roles and responsibilities to supporting adults
- Maintain appropriate records, including accidents, incidents and safeguarding concerns
- Monitor weather and environmental conditions and adapt or cancel sessions where necessary
- Ensure that safeguarding procedures are followed
- Ensure that emergency procedures are understood by all staff and volunteers
- Supporting staff are responsible for actively supervising, supporting and playing with the children throughout the session

They will:

- Follow the instructions and guidance of the Forest School Leader
- Maintain appropriate supervision of children
- Support children to follow Forest School safety expectations
- Be aware of the needs of individual children
- Encourage independence while maintaining appropriate safety boundaries

- Report accidents, incidents, safeguarding concerns or changes in circumstances to the Forest School Leader

- Ensure that they know the location of first aid equipment, emergency contact information and agreed emergency procedures
- Supporting staff should not undertake activities or use tools, fire or other equipment unless they have been appropriately briefed and are competent to do so

Volunteers, students and other adults supporting Forest School will receive an appropriate induction before participating in sessions
They will:

- Follow the instructions of the Forest School Leader
- Remain within their agreed role and level of competence
- Maintain confidentiality and follow safeguarding procedures
- Never be left responsible for children beyond their agreed role or competence
- Report any concerns immediately to the Forest School Leader or designated member of staff

All adults attending Forest School are responsible for:

- Putting children's safety and wellbeing first
- Following safeguarding and health and safety procedures
- Maintaining professional boundaries
- Being aware of the Forest School site's hazards and agreed boundaries
- Modelling safe and respectful behaviour
- Remaining attentive and avoiding unnecessary distractions, including mobile phone use
- Communicating clearly with other adults
- Reporting concerns, accidents and incidents promptly
- Supervision
- Most importantly adults must be able to play!

Adults will position themselves to maintain effective supervision of the group while allowing children appropriate freedom to explore and develop independence.

Children will be reminded of the Forest school contract at the beginning of sessions and whenever circumstances change. Supervision levels will be adjusted where necessary according to the activity, environment, individual children's needs and identified risks. Particular attention will be given to activities involving tools, fire, water, climbing, uneven terrain and other identified hazards.

The Forest School Leader remains responsible for ensuring that supervision arrangements are appropriate throughout the session and will make changes where required.