

Branton Community First School  
and  
Breamish Valley Community Nursery



**Branton Forest School**

Forest School Handbook

## What is Forest School?

The philosophy and roots of the Forest Schools movement can be traced through a number of sources as far back as the 19th century. These include the ideas of progressive educationalists such as Pestalozzi, Rousseau and Froebel, the woodcraft movements, the Native Americans, and the Quakers. In the UK in 1928 a Forest school was formed in the New Forest. The two founding organisations, 'Woodcraft Movement' and 'Forest School Camps' still exist today.

In the 1950s it was developed in Sweden, building independence and self-esteem through hands on play in a woodland setting. The Swedish concept was then further developed by Scandinavia and other European countries and established in Denmark in the 1980s. It was then brought to the UK in the mid-1990s after a visit by Nursery Nurses from Somerset and Early Years professionals from other parts of the UK. Denmark has a similar climate to ours and this outdoor approach to learning had a huge impact on the development of children. A 13 month study of Swedish children found the FS children far happier to their urban cousins; more balanced with greater social capacity, fewer sick days, more able to concentrate and have better coordination, have higher self-esteem and self-confidence and be able to work as part of a team.

Through weekly visits to our Forest School, we will instil a love of the great outdoors. Inspirational, stimulating, hands on experiences will develop self-esteem, confidence and responsibility. The use of the woodland setting, the various real tools and the natural resources will bring learning to life, creating an understanding of the balance of nature and the finite resources around us. The children will be able to take informed, self-calculated risks and choices to ensure their own and their group's safety, developing sympathy and empathy towards the group around them. They will work as a team to solve problems, fostering communication and negotiation skills.

During Forest School children will learn to build a shelter, light a fire and use green woodworking skills to create and build objects from the woodland around them. They will use full size tools; learn the boundaries of behaviour, both physical and social, establish and grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation.

**Warning** - there is a high risk of your child getting muddy and enjoying it!

During every session, photos will be taken to remind the children of the activities they have taken part in and the achievements

they have made. The photos will make up observations to enable the Forest school team to plan the children's next steps. We will also put photos on to the Tapestry online journal so parents can share.

### **Where**

Branton Forest School, the forest school of Branton Community First School and Breamish Valley Nursery, nestles at the foot of the Cheviot Hills and the Breamish Valley. The Forest School is situated in the School's Wildlife Area adjoining the School field. The area was gifted to us by Cemex and the Carr-Ellison's when the Branton Lakes were created.

### **Who**

The Forest School Leaders are Rachel Plunkett, Teacher, and Elspeth Bone, Teaching Assistant. Both will be qualified as Leaders by Autumn 2016. Both are also Paediatric First Aiders and have Level 2 Food Hygiene. In addition, Elspeth Bone trained in Outdoor First Aid in January 2016.

The Forest School Leaders will be assisted in Forest School by the other members of School staff, all of whom are Paediatric First Aiders.

### **The responsibilities of the Forest School Leaders**

We will;

- Create an environment that is as safe as it can be and without undue risk to health.
- Use, maintain and store equipment safely.
- Ensure that all staff are competent in the work in which they are engaged.
- The identification, assessment and control of hazards within the Forest School is vital in reducing accidents and incidents to eliminate or control any such risk identified.
- The Forest School leader holds ultimate responsibility and liability for ensuring that the Forest School operates in a safe and minimally hazardous manner.

- The Forest School team will constantly monitor the Health and Safety policy and amend it as necessary; providing resources as required. All accidents/incidents will be recorded in the Accident or Incident book, informing HSE and Care Inspectorate if necessary. The accident/incident book will be reviewed after each terms sessions to ensure policies are effective.
- Ensure that all staff and students have appropriate and up to date DBS checks.

### **Policies and Procedures**

Branton and Breamish Valley Forest School will follow all our usual policies and procedures to fulfil our first priority of keeping your child safe. All policies and procedures that are specific to the Forest School are set out in this handbook. All others are in the Policy File in School.

Risk assessment will be used to determine the risks of various Forest School activities and how they can be managed. These risks will be balanced with the long term benefits of the children being able to assess their own risks and manage their own safety, and also with the benefits of developing higher self-esteem and physical, communication and teamwork skills.

### **Forest School Policy**

During Forest School children will:

- Learn respect for the environment;
- Learn outdoors and have the opportunity to explore and team-build;
- Enhance, develop and enrich their emotional intelligence;
- Raise their self-esteem and build their confidence in a positive outdoor environment;
- Improve their health and life skills, and their holistic development;
- Learn new and stimulating life skills and experiences.

Before each session the Forest School Leaders will:

- Check the site and weather and continue to check during each session;
- Check the first aid kits;
- Check tools and equipment;
- Set up the site for the session;
- Ensure staffing ratios;
- Check the children have appropriate clothing;
- Do a safety and rule talk.

The Forest School Leaders will clear the site at the end of each session, ensuring it is safe to leave.

If the site becomes unsafe for any reason the following actions will be taken:

- FSL to gather and count children;
- FSL to gather tools and equipment as safely as possible;
- FSL to exit the children via the safest route and return to School together;
- In the event of a fire the Emergency Services will be alerted.

### **Clothing Policy**

Both children and adults need to be dressed appropriately for the Forest School sessions, taking the weather into account.

A change of clothes is essential as clothing is likely to get muddy or wet.

- Woolly hat/sun hat
- Gloves (not mittens)
- Warm/waterproof coat

- Waterproof trousers
- Fleece/sweatshirt
- Spare socks
- Warm socks
- Wellies/muck boots/walking boots.

### **Use of tools**

We are committed to providing children with access to a wide range of equipment that stimulates enjoyment, learning and development, both indoors and outdoors. Using small hand tools is an important part of Forest School as it enables children to develop new, practical skills that help them develop self-confidence.

To ensure safety the following will be carried out:

- Tools will be maintained to good order and checked before each session by the FSL;
- Children and adults will be taught how to handle tools properly and to treat them with respect;
- Whilst using the tools the staff to child ratio is increased depending on the tool in use;
- Tools will be kept in the dedicated tool bag/box and will only be removed by the Forest School team;
- Adult and child sized gloves will be available and are only to be used for the bracing hand. It is not advisable to use any hand tools with gloves on as it detaches the user from the tool;
- Running with tools is prohibited;
- Pointing with tools is prohibited;

- Children will lose permission to use tools if the guidelines are not followed;
- Bow saws must have a blade guard on the when not in use;
- Wood being sawn must be supported on a saw horse or a natural sawing break;
- Hands must be kept away from the blade. Adults and children must be given instruction and demonstration on the appropriate and safe position with which to saw (tool talk).
- All tools must be counted out before use and then counted in at the end of the session.

## **Fire Policy**

The use of fires in the Forest School is important as it gives children experiences with fire in a controlled and educational environment. It develops respect, physical skills and scientific knowledge.

### Fire Safety

- Fire is always supervised by the Forest School Leader (FLS) and never left unattended when lit.
- Safe fire practice is always adhered to.
- There should always be a minimum of 5 litres of water and damp cloth next to the fire.
- Children, staff and volunteers will be taught and reminded of the 'Log Circle' rules:
  - Enter the circle through the door and move around the circle in either direction until everyone is standing behind a bench
  - Stand behind the bench/log
  - Step over and sit on the bench
  - Children are not allowed to move, cross or step into the circle

- Food and drinks should be passed to children and adults behind the benches
- On leaving everyone should step behind their bench and move around the outside of the circle until they reach the door
- Children are not allowed bring anything into the fire circle and should not throw anything onto the fire.
- Advice on appropriate way to deal with smoke will be given:
  - Turn your head to the side
  - Place your hand across your face
  - Close your eyes and count to 30
- If there is a clear wind direction, seating in the line of the fire should be avoided.
- If the wind direction is variable, the Forest School Leader (FLS) should rearrange the seating where possible.
- Appropriate training and instruction should be given to everyone (including children).
- Everyone (children, staff, and volunteers) should be involved in risk assessing, minimising hazards and evaluating safe practises.
- Any accident or near miss should be recorded and evaluated (Section Six).

### Types of Fire

Different types of fires are useful for different purposes and staff have been trained in the best type of fire to lay:

- Waffle fires are used to provide a large amount of heat and light and are fast burning.
- Long Log (star) fires are good for cooking as they are slow burning and require little fuel.



- Tepee Fires can be used for specific purposes like boiling water as they are small with a concentrated heat spot and can be carefully controlled.

### Fire Safety

- A fire blanket and a First Aid kit including a Burns First Aid kit are on always on site. Leaders are also Paediatric and Outdoor First Aid trained.
- Fires are lit using cotton wool, tinder and a fire stick.
- Sticks should be placed, not thrown, from the side of the fire. The hand should not go over the fire.
- Red fire gloves should be available and used at all times.

### Extinguishing

- All fires should be extinguished at the end of each session.
- Water should be poured onto the fire (using a cup) in a circular fashion, from the outside inwards.
- At the end of the session the fire should be doused with water and the top build-up of potash should be dug in. Water should be poured on until smoke and steam has ceased.

### Kelly Kettles

- Kelly Kettles to be placed on a flat, clear surface.
- Children should be seated at least 1.5m away.
- Kelly Kettles should have the spout facing away from the user and should never be boiled with the cork in.
- Fuel should burn itself out, but if it doesn't it must be extinguished with water (see above).

## **Health and Hygiene Policy**

### First Aid

A First Aid Kit is always on site in the Forest School. At least one Forest School Leader has an Outdoor First Aid qualification and others have Paediatric First Aid qualifications.

The First Aid Kit contains a tick removal tool which will be used in order to prevent Limes Disease. There will have to be parental consent in order to use the tick removal tool.

A Burns First Aid Kit is also on site at the fire pit area, along with the fire blanket and a bucket of water.

### Toileting

We ensure all children go to the toilet before we leave the School building. If a child needs to go to the toilet during a session, the FSL will radio the School to inform them that a child is coming up to the toilet. The child will be accompanied to the Forest School gate and then watched to ensure they get up to School safely. Nursery children will be accompanied by an older child. The younger children who are still in nappies or potty training will have access to a potty and a changing mat on site in a quiet area away from others. Any nappies and wipes will be disposed of in nappy sacks and then in a bin liner. The potty will be emptied into a soak away which will be out of the way of the children. The potty will then be wiped down ready for use.

### Washing hands

Children are told to wash their hands thoroughly after each session. If the children are cooking or dealing with food during the session there will be water, soap and towels available to wash hands. Children are encouraged to keep their hands away from their faces during Forest School to keep the need for hand washing to a minimum. If a child or adult needs to wash their hands during a session, other than for cooking or dealing with food, they can wash their hands in the stream whilst accompanied by an adult and then can use antibacterial gel.

### Food and drinks

Ideally children will have a fruit break halfway through the morning session, or a drink break halfway through the afternoon session. Before each break staff will ensure that all children thoroughly wash their hands thoroughly.

Children will learn to be 'danger detectives'. This trains children to be aware of dangers they might encounter. This includes not eating any berries, nuts, fungi or anything else from the Forest School site as they could be dangerous. They will learn that they are allowed to eat safe berries, such as brambles, once they have been washed thoroughly.

Any food that is cooked during a session will be done so appropriately and safely. The food will be eaten straight away or disposed of accordingly. Any equipment used for cooking will be taken away and washed thoroughly for use next time.

### Disposal of Waste

As mentioned above, any food that is taken into the Forest School will be disposed of accordingly, as well as any litter. It will be collected in a rubbish bag, taken out of the Forest School and then disposed of. Any waste water will be disposed of through a soak-away (a hole dug into the ground and then filled in again after).

Rachel Plunkett  
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