

Oakfield Community Primary School



Forest School Handbook



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Oakfield Community Primary School

Mission Statement

“To provide the opportunity for all pupils to achieve their full potential by experiencing success and recognition for their valued contribution in a safe, calm, friendly, nurturing environment.”

The Forest School Ethos

Forest School is a unique educational experience and process that offers children the opportunity to succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or other natural environment.

The Forest School concept originated in Scandinavia and was originally aimed at pre-school children. It was found that children who had attended forest school seemed to benefit in many ways. They arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, had the ability to work in groups effectively, displayed high self-esteem and generally showed confidence in their own abilities.

Since being adopted in the United Kingdom the approach has been used to deliver learning programmes to groups from pre-school age to young adults and across all abilities. Research has shown that the benefits identified in the original forest schools appear to benefit learners at all levels.

Forest School at Oakfield provides opportunities for and encourages children to:

- develop their personal and social skills
- develop their language and communication skills
- improve physical motor skills
- work through practical problems and challenges
- develop practical skills
- use tools to create, build or manage
- pursue knowledge that interests them
- build confidence in decision making
- evaluate risk
- explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- reflect on learning and experiences
- regularly experience achievement and success
- learn how to manage failures
- discover how they learn best

- improve their concentration skills
- become more motivated
- understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle

The ethos of Forest Schools and the opportunities it provides fit well with the aims of Oakfield as outlined in the school prospectus, which is available online at <http://www.oakfield-widnes.co.uk/welcome/> . They are stated as follows –

At Oakfield Community Primary School we aim to:

- encourage excellence
- value every individual's contribution
- develop confident, independent learners
- place high emphasis on literacy and numeracy
- encourage aesthetic, spiritual, moral and social development
- develop self-discipline
- teach the children to value and respect self and others
- make learning fun!

Forest School at Oakfield

At Oakfield, Forest School sessions generally take place within the school grounds. The area is fully fenced and includes a small area of woodland, hedgerows, recently planted orchard, new woodland planting, grassland and a willow dome.

Forest School sessions are currently run by Mr Carson who in addition to having completed the Level 3 Forest School Practitioner course worked for many years in countryside services, before becoming a teacher.

What do the children do?

Children taking part in Forest School sessions are given an opportunity to participate in activities in a natural setting on a regular basis. The setting provides a safe environment for them to learn and explore. Activities take place throughout the year and in generally in all weathers.

Whilst the sessions may provide opportunities to learn and understand more about the natural world, they also provide opportunities to develop their interpersonal skills.

There are opportunities to learn practical skills that there is often little opportunity to learn in formal school settings or even in the home these days. For tasks such as tree climbing, tool use, fire lighting or cooking there might be an element of managed risk. However by giving children these opportunities they ultimately become better equipped to manage risk and as a result have the opportunity to grow their self confidence.

Opportunities for reflection and to share experiences are provided and these help with the social and emotional development of participants. Group size plays an important role in this area, smaller groups allowing, eventually, more in depth reflection to take place and greater social interaction.

The Forest School leader should be seen as a facilitator. Although activities are well planned, they should essentially be child led. There should be flexibility in the planning to allow children to pursue their interests, planning being used to scaffold their interests. In order for this to happen, leaders need to have a good understanding of practical skills and an ability to match or adapt activities to learner's interests. Most importantly they need to have a good understanding of the site where the sessions take place and the opportunities it can present.

Activities for Forest Schools are diverse and numerous but it should be reminded that we are trying to create independent learners who are inspired to try out their own ideas, explore their own interests and to attempt new ideas.

The following will give some indication of the type of activities that might be undertaken:

- Den and shelter building
- Fire lighting
- Tool use
- Wildlife studies
- Habitat development
- Playing team and group games
- Sensory activities
- Tracking games
- Cooking on an open fire
- Rope and string work
- Art and sculpture work
- Woodland and traditional crafts
- Story telling
- Drama
- Imaginary characters
- Physical movement activities

As can be seen the approach is cross curricular.

Forest School Delivery

Forest school sessions at Oakfield generally follow a common pattern.

- At the start of each session there will be a short input during which children are reminded of the expectations that are in place for forest school and, any new safety information is relayed. The theme or focus for the week's activities is then introduced.
- A short starter activity usually then takes place.
- The main activity follows. Activities are commonly offered that link into the interests of the children wherever possible. Where tools are being used there is a high emphasis on safety. If the activity requires a high ratio of supervision the group may be split.
- 'Free time'. A key element of the Forest School approach is the opportunity for children to explore a natural environment and pursue their own direction of learning. Therefore in each session an opportunity for children to pursue their own interests is included. Quite often children will continue with the activity they have started or will continue with something that has sparked their interest in a previous session. Although it is 'free time' there are guidelines in place to ensure the safety of all, which participants soon become familiar with.
- Finally the group is brought together for a period of reflection. This may involve a review of whatever guided activities have taken place or their independent activities. Whilst this is very much a child led activity it may be guided by the Forest School leader when necessary.



Risk Management

Forest School aims to develop children's self-esteem, independence and motivation to learn in a safe environment. The Forest School Leader will therefore be responsible for conducting appropriate site and activity risk assessments prior to each session. A five step approach is adopted whereby the following steps are taken:

- Identify hazards and risks.
- Decide who may be harmed and how.
- Evaluate the risks and decide if existing controls are adequate or whether more should be done.
- Record findings, including daily amendments to standing risk assessments based on site visits and observations.
- Review assessments on a regular basis.

Participants, including staff and volunteers, will be informed of potential hazards and methods of working in order to minimise their risk further. When possible all participants will be involved in the risk assessment process as part of their learning.

Particularly in relation to the use of hand tools and management of fire, participants will be taught appropriate and adequate skills in order to keep themselves safe.

Clothing

As children are potentially outside in all weathers they need suitable clothing. Outdoor PE kit of tracksuit bottoms, t-shirt, sweatshirt and trainers with an added waterproof jacket meets the basic needs. Wellingtons or walking boots and waterproof over trousers offer greater protection in wet weather conditions. Hat, gloves and scarves are useful throughout the winter months. During the summer period sun hats and sun cream, as outlined in the schools School Sun Safety Policy should be provided.

First Aid

The Forest School leader, Mr Carson, has been trained in Forest School First Aid. This course is focused on the delivery of appropriate first aid in an outdoor setting.

A first aid kit is available on site during each session. When there are fires on site, a fire first aid kit will also be available.

Emergency Procedure

Prior to any Forest School session participants are briefed what they will be expected to do in the event of an emergency situation. The site is fully fenced and enclosed but there is direct access to 4 KS1 class room from the Forest School area. The procedure is as follows:

In the event of an emergency on the Forest School site the following steps will be taken.

- Immediate safety of other group members and self assessed.
- Attend to casualty and make as comfortable as possible.
- Make sure the group is safe sending them to the picnic bench area close to the school. At same time send child with red emergency tab to a KS1 classroom, adjacent to the picnic benches, for assistance.
- Administer First Aid
- If necessary contact emergency services.



Policies

The school is like all educational establishments has a wide range of policies in place. These can be accessed via the school web site at <http://www.oakfield-widnes.co.uk/school-policies/>

Health and Safety

A key document for Forest School is Oakfield's Health and Safety Policy (January, 2016) that relates to the following legislation:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Employers' Health and Safety Policy Statements (Exception) Regulations 1975
- Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977
- Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996
- Education (school Premises) Regulations 1999
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- School Premises (England) Regulations 2012

The policy states:

'We recognise our responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. We will take all reasonably practicable steps to provide and maintain safe and healthy working conditions, equipment and systems of work for all our pupils, school personnel and visitors to the school.'

For Forest School two additional policies and procedures documents have been prepared. These are the '**Safe use of Hand Tools Policy**' and the '**Managed Fire Safety Policy**'. Copies of these can be found at the end of this document.

Behaviour

The Forest School setting requires and expects high standards of behaviour. Children are allowed a certain amount of autonomy, but in an environment which allows children to encounter a level of managed risk good behaviour is paramount.

The school behaviour policy can be downloaded as with other policies via the school website <http://www.oakfield-widnes.co.uk/school-policies/>

The schools philosophy as outlined in the document provides an appropriate summary of the schools approach. It is outlined below:

'It is a primary aim of our school that every member of the school community feels valued and respected, and that each person is treated fairly and well. We are a caring community, whose values are built on mutual trust and respect for all. The school's behaviour policy is therefore designed to support the way in which all members of the school can live and work together in a supportive way. It aims to promote an environment in which everyone feels happy, safe and secure.

The school has a number of rules, but our behaviour policy is not primarily concerned with rule enforcement. It is a means of promoting good relationships, so that people can work together with the common purpose of helping everyone to learn. This policy supports the school community in aiming to allow everyone to work together in an effective and considerate way.'

Again, this is something which fits well with the Forest School approach.



Safe Use of Hand Tools Policy

The use of hand tools is an integral part of the Forest School experience

Before using tools with participants the tools will be introduced, their use explained and then children will receive instruction as to how to use them safely. A tool script is used when introducing new tools and as an aide memoire when participants use them. The form of script is easily adapted if other tools are introduced.

The following tools are amongst those most likely to be used with children as part of our Forest School sessions.

- Bow saw
- Loppers
- Stick peeler
- Sheath knife

- Bill Hook
- Mallet

Tools are used under close supervision. With KS2 children this is with a minimum of 1:4 ratio. When tools are initially introduced or children are younger the ratio will generally be closer to 1:2 until participants have shown a reasonable level of confidence or even 1:1.

The Forest School leader will be responsible for overseeing safe use and maintenance of all tools. When not in use the tools are stored in a secure setting. A full list of all tools is kept with the tools and a separate list carried when tools are taken out on site. This allows the tools to be counted out and in.

When using any items it is essential that appropriate personal protection equipment is used. These may include gloves, hard hats, safety boots and high visibility jackets dependent on the task. The Forest School leader is able to advise further.

Basic risk assessments have been completed for each tool. However, as with any risk assessment it is advisable to review and modify as appropriate dependent upon the individuals involved and specific conditions.



Managed Fire Safety Policy and Procedure for Forest Schools

Campfires are an important part of Forest School and are used in many sessions. The Forest School leader will aim to ensure that all children and adults participating in Forest School sessions with fires will do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible.

Location

There will be an established fire area which will be the only area where fire will be permitted. The Forest School leader will establish the area.

The site will be chosen so as to avoid tree roots, peaty soil, deep leaf mould and uneven ground etc.

The fire pit will be central to the area and surrounded by logs or bricks to help prevent the spread of fire.

Seating Arrangements

Children will be seated approximately 1.5 metres from the fire pit this area being demarcated by seating logs. Exit points will be created at regular intervals around the fire circle and logs.

When the campfire is in use, participants are not permitted to access the area immediately surrounding the fire without permission.

All participants will be taught how to change seats by standing, stepping back over the log and then walking around the outside of the seating area. They must never cross the inner area.

Participants will be advised how to deal with fire smoke in an appropriate way. Where there is an obvious wind direction seating in the line of smoke will not be used. Wherever possible, asthma sufferers will be seated in positions well away from the line of smoke.

Safety

When a fire is being used there will be a fire first aid kit available in addition to the standard first aid kit.

A fire bucket containing water will be available on site and its position indicated at the start of the session.

Either a fire blanket or a wet towel will also be made available and its position indicated.

A container of fresh clean water will be available to immerse for immersing a burn should it be required.

Before a fire is lit participants must demonstrate that they are able to follow instructions.

Weather conditions should also be considered. High winds or very dry conditions would mean that fire lighting does not continue.

Participants working with the fire should ensure that long hair is tied back and loose clothing is fastened or secured.

Only adults are permitted to light fires, unless children are under the direct supervision of the Forest School leader.

No more than participants to be invited into the fire area at any time.

Fires may be lit in a variety of ways but flammable liquids are not permitted.

When children are invited to add fuel to the fire this will only be undertaken with adult supervision.

Sticks/wood must be placed, not thrown, from the side of the fire. The hand should never go over the fire. A fire glove should be used.

Plastics are not to be burnt.

Fires should never be left unattended.

Extinguishing Fires.

All fires must be extinguished at the end of the session.

Whenever possible, fires should be allowed to burn out naturally. With careful management this is easily achievable.

If larger logs have been used these should be separated out from other ashes.

The fire must be doused down with water. It is advisable that ashes are stirred once doused in case there are any hot spots remaining. A good indication that the fire is fully extinguished is when all smoke and steam has ceased.

It is advisable to remove a build up of ashes from the site.

Managed Fire Risk Assessment

A risk assessment has been prepared for fires bases around this method of management. However, as with any risk assessment it is advisable to review and modify as appropriate dependent upon the individuals involved and specific conditions.

