

Broad Oak Primary school

Forest School Handbook



Forest school Leader: Debbie Rofe

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Ethos and Principles

“Forest school is an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem, through hands on learning experiences in a local woodland or natural environment with trees. Forest School is a specialised approach that sits within and complements the wider context of outdoor and woodland learning”. (Forest school association)

Forest school is unique in ethos, delivery and outcomes for all children. In offering this provision as part of our education at Broad Oak, we aim to add another dimension to the learning and development children can achieve during their primary education.

Children, and indeed all human beings, react instinctively to the outdoors and for some, simply offering a woodland space is enough to awaken their exploratory senses. For others, the freedom to explore nature needs encouragement, skilled adults to nurture and support the child to open themselves to the possibilities of a wilder environment.

At Broad Oak, we provide open-ended play opportunities for children to develop through motivational activities, games and skills, sometimes adult directed, sometimes adult supported, but intrinsically child-led, as the child gains in self-confidence and belief. We also offer opportunities to learn bush-craft skills, use tools with safety and confidence and to experience the spirituality of a community brought together by a group fire, sharing stories, music and nourishment. Forest school encourages calculated risk taking to enable children to develop resilience, strength and the reconnection with our physical selves to test our own capabilities and to reconnect with nature. Forest school necessitates children to work together to achieve goals, to communicate and build relationships in new and surprising ways. It champions all children, including and especially those who have yet to find their voice in the classroom setting.

Forest school originates in Denmark where it has been shown that young children developing these vital strengths of self- confidence, social and communication skills, are then better prepared to move on in their development in other areas, including academic learning.

Environmental Considerations

Please refer to Broad Oak Community Primary School's Environment Policy for added considerations.

In the use of our Forest School site, Broad Oak School recognises and acknowledges the privilege of using the space for our own enjoyment.

With this comes a responsibility to do so within an ethos which encourages respect for the natural world and all that it offers us. We aim to improve the condition of the site for the benefit of all, humans, animals and plant life, in order that we can encourage the children's responsibility to our environment.

We will endeavour to ensure that all involved in our Forest school, children, staff, volunteers and parents are part of a caretaking role in caring for our site and promoting its continued vitality and sustainability.

We will work within a context which minimises our impact on the land, optimises recycling opportunities and removes all waste. Where on-site activities eg have an impact on the wildlife in the area, this will be minimised and all negative residues removed.

Please consult our 3 year management plan for greater detail.

Health and safety

Please refer to Broad Oak School Health/safety policy.

Within Forest School sessions there may be activities and experiences which carry a higher than usual level of risk than may be present in other areas of school life.

At Broad Oak, we follow the Forest School ethos of considering both the risk benefit and hazard of an activity.

Within planning, the Forest School Leader is responsible for assessing any potential risks and ensuring adequate precautions are in place to minimise these.

The Forest school Leader holds a relevant outdoor First Aid qualification. All staff are professionals with relevant qualifications and experience for their role.

We aim to ensure all staff and volunteers are confident in following the policies and procedures provided in this handbook.

Insurance:

Broad Oak School Forest School is currently insured to run sessions under the schools existing insurance. Please seek further information from the school office.

Risk Assessment:

Within Learning and Development, the ability to assess and manage personal risk is an invaluable life skill. Forest School supports young people to develop this through manageable challenge. This is risk benefit.

Simultaneously it is our responsibility to ensure that these risks are encountered within a reasonable level of safety appropriate to the children's age and development.

For this reason, thorough risk assessments are prepared before Forest school sessions, for specific activities, generic experiences and for the site and conditions on a daily basis. These are recorded and evaluated systematically each session.

Emergency/Serious Incident Procedure:

At Broad Oak Forest School we have procedures in place for the management of a serious incident or emergency. In this scenario, the Forest School Leader would be responsible for delegating responsibilities to other staff/volunteers present.

1. Secure the safety of the whole group by removing them from imminent danger and leaving the site if possible. If necessary other staff would lead group back to School site. The Forest school leader should remain with any casualty to administer First Aid.
2. Forest school Leader to manage any casualties in the first instance, making decisions as to whether further support (ie Emergency Services) is required. If so,
3. Ensure Emergency Services are contacted.
4. Follow Policy of Broad Oak School for further management of the incident including informing next of kin, Headteacher and informing other agencies.
5. All incidents are recorded (and evaluated) within the Forest school accident book.

Reporting: incidents and accidents

Any accidents that involve injury will be recorded into a first aid book. Major injuries that constitute 'reportable injuries' will be reported appropriately via School Policy. Parents will be notified of injuries in keeping with the 'Emergency and Major Incidents' policy.

'Incidents', which include major behavioural incidents and any major negative occurrence that is not an accident, will also be recorded by the Forest School leader in an Incident Report.

Broad Oak School, Forest School Incident Report Form:

This form should be completed for incidents leading to injury, ill-health or serious near miss.

Date of incident:

Time of incident:

Person subject to incident:

Relationship to Forest School: (pupil/staff/volunteer)

Was the incident:

A near miss?

Ill-health/disease?

An accident leading to injury?

An aggressive incident?

Description of incident:

Was anyone else involved?

Any damage?

What action was taken to prevent recurrence?

Name of person completing the form:

Role:

Daily Risk assessment:

A site risk assessment is already in place, written by the Forest school Leader and reviewed regularly. A daily site risk assessment is taken before each session (sample included) and includes assessment of organic growth, wind and weather variables and an overview of the activities planned. Where specific risk assessments are needed, such as tools, other risk assessments may be written or signposted, eg fire. During the session, dynamic risk assessments may be made as the nature of the children's play takes unplanned directions. The Leader assumes responsibilities for this and makes decisions as she deems appropriate eg to follow or redirect play.

General Guidance on Usage of Tools, Fires and Activities

Usage of Tools Procedure

Using a range of tools will be necessary in many site based activities and is an important part of Forest School as it motivates children to develop skills with real tools that help develop self-confidence and esteem as well as fine motor skills. We aim to ensure that all children participating in sessions with tools do so safely with as little risk to their health as possible. These activities would be supervised with a high ratio of qualified staff to children. Tools that may be used include potato peelers, bow saws, pruning saws, loppers, palm drills and when supported by an adult, knives. The following guidelines are to be followed when using tools:

- The Forest School Leader will check all tools are fit for continued use before the session.
- Only tools that are in safe working order will be supplied for use.
- Correct and safe use of sharp tools will be demonstrated to all staff and children.
- Tools should be counted when handed out and counted back in again when finished. Discretion is used by the Forest School Leader to decide when individuals are ready to use tools safely and as to what level of supervision is needed.
- All children are to be supervised closely by competent adults until deemed competent to work with less supervision.
- Tools will be kept in a designated safe area when not in use - none should be left unattended outside this area.
- All knives will be closed/ sheaved immediately after use.
- Saw guards will be replaced immediately after use.
- Walking around with open/ unmasked tools will not be allowed.

- Safe working distances and suitable ratios must be maintained at all times. All children will wear suitable boots/shoes and outdoor clothing for the activity they take part in.

- The Forest School Leader will determine if any behaviour deemed unsafe necessitates a child being removed from a session.

Guidance on peeler/ palm drill/ knife Use (1:1 only)

Designate a specific zone.

Always carry knife with sheath firmly on.

Always pass knife with sheath firmly on and in demonstrated manner.

Always keep knife in sheath when not in use.

Leader to count tools out & back in.

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

Tool work is always supervised by a responsible adult.

Each person to sit well out of reach of others (blood bubble).

Fire Procedure

Fires and the use of kelly kettles are an important part of Forest School.

Forest School aims to ensure that all children participating in sessions with fires will do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible.

The children will be seated on stumps around the fire circle when the fire is lit and taught to only enter the circle when asked to by adult. Specific distance of 1.5m between stumps and fire to be maintained.

The Leader will explain to children the importance of using only dead wood for fires and also the importance of dead wood as a habitat.

Smoke inhalation will be reduced by burning dead wood. Those in smoky areas will be encouraged to move to less smoky areas.

Fires will only be lit in a suitable defined space.

Children will only be allowed to help light fires under direct supervision of the trained Leader (Debbie Rofe) using suitable materials and equipment.

All children will be given clear guidelines about how to behave and move around the area when the fire or kettle is lit.

A lit fire will be supervised by an adult at all times, as will all cooking activities.

Related safety equipment, including heat-proof gloves, a fire blanket, a First Aid kit and water will be kept within close range of fire circle.

All fires should be fully extinguished at the end of a session.

Hazardous Plants & Fungi

Part of the daily risk assessment will be to identify any particularly hazardous plants and either remove them before the session or point them out to the children so that they can become aware of the dangers within a safely managed context.

The sap or hairs from some plants can cause rashes and blistering when in contact with skin, or after the skin is then exposed to sunlight. Most rashes are caused by stinging nettles which are easily distinguishable.

The Leader(Debbie Rofe) will be aware of the risks involved in foraging activities and this will be explained to the children before such an activity begins so that children learn about safe foraging. Adults will support this process under the guidance of the Leader.

Biting & Stinging Insects

Insect bites and stings can be common, particularly in spring and summer, and usually cause only minor irritation. In rare cases, people can have a serious allergic reaction to a bite or sting that requires immediate medical treatment - if this is the case then the Leader will refer directly to the Emergency & Serious Incident Procedure. All incidents will be recorded in the Forest school accident book and signed by parents/carers.

If there is prior knowledge to suggest that a participant will have an allergic reaction if bitten, then the Forest School Leader will be aware beforehand via the school records.

We have not yet had children suffer from ticks however parents should be aware that they can be present in woodland areas and can transmit Lyme's disease. Staff will be aware of the need to check exposed areas of skin after sessions. It is wise to thoroughly check children at home after a Forest school session as ticks can attach through clothing. Where a tick is found at school, a plaster should be placed over it and parents/carers informed at the end of the session so that they can remove it safely. If concerned parents/carers should seek medical support. Please approach Forest School leader for more information. Information on safe removal of ticks can be found at

www.tickbitepreventionweek.org/tick-removal

Safe Lifting

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

Tips:

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

Travelling to sessions

When travelling to Forest School ratios will be observed once leaving the gate. The following procedures will be followed:

- Children will be counted before leaving the school site and a register carried.
- The Forest school Leader will always have means of contacting the school quickly either via walkie talkie or by phone.
- Staff will support the children in crossing the road safely behind an adult.

Administering medicines

Please refer to Broad Oak School's specific policy

A specific Forest School permission form will be signed by all parents/carers when a child joins the school. Details of allergies/relevant illnesses and medicines supplied will be where necessary (such as an epi-pen or asthma inhaler) will be managed as in the school, with relevant medicines travelling to the site with the group, held by the Leader. Where a carer does not give any permissions, their wishes will be adhered to by the Forest School Staff.

Reporting: incidents and accidents

Any accidents that involve injury will be recorded into a first aid book and communicated to families in line with school policy. Major injuries that constitute 'reportable injuries' will be reported to the Health and Safety Executive via RIDDOR. Parents will be notified of injuries in keeping with the 'Emergency and Major Incidents' policy.

'Incidents', which include major behavioural incidents and any major negative occurrence that is not an accident, will also be recorded by the Forest School leader in an Incident Report.

Safeguarding

Please refer to Broad Oak School Safeguarding Policy for detail.

Broad Oak Pre-school is committed to ensuring the safety of the children in our care in every way. This is reflected in our comprehensive safeguarding policy and these procedures are followed in the same way within the Forest School site.

Staff/ Volunteers:

All staff are professional and qualified for their role. All are DBS checked. All volunteers and/or students are DBS checked for suitability and do not assist in any toileting or personal care of children. All staff/volunteers are bound by our confidentiality policy (*see full policy*) Any sensitive issue should be referred straight to a member of staff for management.

Public access:

Our site has an established hedgerow boundary, fenced in most areas and is gated for access to the road. There is no public access. There is a bridleway on farmland running adjacent to the site which is used by dog walkers. We are mindful of this when using the site.

Toileting

Our site does not have toileting facilities but is close to the school. If necessary, children can be brought back to school to use the toilets, usually if a motion is needed or the child needs privacy. In the spirit of Forest School we encourage the children to develop skills of wild toileting to urinate where possible. The following procedures work effectively and comply with current child protection recommendations.

- Encourage everyone to use the toilet before coming on site.
- All adults present must be CRB checked.
- A suitable location away from the main work area is identified which is not visible by public access.
- A tarp is erected in a corner to provide privacy and a toileting bag placed at this location for used toilet tissue.
- Handwashing facilities are provided on exiting.
- The children are encouraged to use the area as independently as possible, any queries or uncertainties to be dealt with sensitively.
- Any faeces should be cleared completely, by an adult afterwards if the child is not able.
- If the child needs/prefers to return to the school for toileting this is facilitated.

Lost Child Procedure:

Please refer to Pre-school full policy

In the same way, a “Lost child” incident would follow the policy of Broad Oak School, with the same code word being used and the children being gathered in a line at the gate, whilst procedures are followed.

Photographs/media:

Any images of children taken must only be taken on the School’s equipment and in accordance with the policy (*please refer to full policy*). This is only possible where parents/guardians have given consent for a specific purpose.

Disclosures, reporting and recording:

Please see full policy and refer any incident to Leader (Debbie Rofe) or Jackie Hewess (Head of School) as appropriate.

Equality and Diversity:

Please refer to School full policy of equality and diversity. Please also refer to our SEND policy.

Broad Oak Forest School is committed to equal opportunity for all and we wish to provide an environment in which all children feel equally valued and have equal opportunities to explore, learn, play and develop. Our policies help to ensure that we promote the individuality of all, irrespective of ethnicity, attainment, age, disability, gender or background.

We endeavour to adapt provision to ensure that everyone can participate in some way and adjust ratios to support individuals as appropriate to the need.

Achieving Positive Behaviour:

Please refer to full policy

Forest School should be fun for everyone and it is the responsibility of the Leader to keep everyone feeling safe and happy during the sessions. There is always an ethos of positive expectation around behaviour during the sessions which helps to build the skills of self-confidence, self-worth and social communication which we seek.

However, when challenging behaviour arises, the Leader and staff will manage this firmly but sensitively to ensure the development and flow of the session can continue appropriately for all.

Behaviour management is only the responsibility of staff and not volunteers/other adults present.

The leader will establish ground rules for Forest school sessions over the regular visits to the woodland so the children are aware of the expectations of behaviour.

Praise is always the best way to achieve positive behaviour, with good role modelling from adults, avoiding unnecessary rigidity, pre-emptive negativity and encouraging safe freedom and exploration from individuals.

Where an activity carries added risk, eg fire or tool work, additional expectations are established through discussion with the children.

Any challenging behaviour will be managed as in the school. Where the behaviour is in any way dangerous to anyone present (including the child) he/she will be removed from the area until ready to rejoin the group appropriately.

Learning and Development

The contemporary forest school movement was brought to the UK from Scandinavia in the 1990s but it is predated by many British traditions, such as the Woodcraft Folk, Scouting and Guiding. It draws inspiration from these traditions, along with various educational philosophies, including Rousseau, Froebel, Steiner and Montessori.

Our Thoughts:

Broad Oak School would like our Forest School programme to foster self-esteem, independence, emotional resilience, co-operation, personal responsibility, autonomy and motivation, as well as a deeply personal knowledge, respect and care for our environment.

The approach of Broad Oak School is learner-led, play-centred, holistic and experiential. When taking part in our Forest School sessions the child is engaging with nature in an exploratory, sensory and physical way.

We believe it's important to create, where possible, a long-term relationship between a location and a cohort of children - giving all children a chance to build a relationship with that woodland get a feel for how an environment changes over time and the seasons.

Children will be encouraged to take constructive risks in order to develop skills, good judgment and to learn and develop about themselves physically and emotionally, through managing their own risks. In planning activities we consider not only the risks but also the potential benefits for the learner.

Roles & Responsibilities

Debbie Rofe is the named leader of Broad Oak School Forest School.

We are educating all staff members and volunteers involved in the forest school programmes to be conscious that it is an exploratory experience for all. They allow the children to play and learn as independently as possible, often without demonstrating or suggesting. If invited to provide support then they do, but otherwise merely observe and scaffold, allowing the experience to be learner-directed.

It is the role of the Forest School Leader to plan, deliver and evaluate the Forest School programme. She takes primary responsibility in ensuring that policies and procedures, rules and guidelines are adhered to.

Evaluation

Evaluation forms will be completed after each session and reflected upon regularly.

Communication Strategy

- This communication strategy explains how all those involved with the
- Forest School are kept informed with the programme. This includes children, parents/guardians, staff, volunteers and students.
- Children will be asked via verbal feedback and drawing what they have enjoyed and would like to explore further at Forest school and this will input into planning. These will be opportunities for them to express how they feel the programme is going and to engage with the process of developing the future sessions.
- Broad Oak School will endeavour to ensure all parents/guardians, new and existing, are made aware of this handbook and that they are able to look at it whenever they would like to and definitely before any physical involvement in the sessions commences.
- All new families will be given an information leaflet on joining the school with an overview of the Forest School provision, together with a consent form to sign.
- Staff/volunteers will be encouraged to read the planning/evaluation file and be aware of the intentions of the Leader in offering experiences to the children.
- Before each session, the leader will brief support staff and other adults as to the planned session and specific roles and responsibilities will be allocated. Any evaluations from staff will be added to the evaluation compiled by the leader.

Forest School Planning

At Broad Oak Forest School, the Leader is responsible for planning, delivering and evaluating a stimulating programme of sessions that will enable a rich experience for the children of the school.

As described in our ethos, the sessions should be pre-dominantly child-led, with the children's interests, schemas and developmental needs governing the planning.

The Leader will loosely plan a short series of sessions each term, building on the children's previous experiences but it must be noted that these may evolve and change dynamically as the children progress.

Similarly, adult led activities will be planned and offered, but not all children may wish to participate, preferring to follow their own learning plan.

After each session, short evaluations are made and these are reflected upon as the programme develops. Before planning further, the children's needs are reassessed.

Ratios

When working in Forest School, Broad Oak School continues to manage our children with the highest ratio's of adults to children we can facilitate to ensure the highest quality provision. This is particularly important when an activity is planned which in the Leader's opinion, requires a higher level of support due to added risk, eg tool work or fire.

Example Session Overview

Equipment

First Aid Kit

Daily risk assessment and register, inc allergies/medical needs

First Aid book Incident log Emergency Procedure

Mobile phone/walkie-talkie's.

Tools & firelighting kit if needed

Handwashing kit

Fresh water/water carrier

Spare clothing/ Toileting kit

Setting Up

1. Carry out a session risk assessment of site and advise/act accordingly. Check phone signal.
2. Collect necessary equipment (inc snacks) and restock first aid where necessary
3. Check phone signal
4. Collect cohort, dress appropriately.
5. Assemble at gate, with support staff, depart for site in orderly fashion.

Session Opening

1. Gather in circle
2. Opening song
3. Make the group aware of new hazards or medical considerations
4. Engage children in the development of rules and guidelines for the day
5. Describe the day's activities

During the Session

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

Closing the Session

1. Extinguish any fires properly
2. Count any tools used into their bag
3. Remove structures
4. Check for litter etc.
5. Collect the equipment
6. Form a closing circle
7. Conduct some type of evaluation with the group (questions, talking stick or drawing)

8. Walk the group back to school.
9. Thoroughly check equipment
10. Complete the appropriate evaluation forms

Observations:

During the sessions, staff may take observations around the children's learning and development that will enable us to understand their interests and needs when supporting their play. These may be fed back into teacher assessment. A clipboard and specific observation formats are available for this purpose.

Food and Drink:

On occasions the children may have their regular break/snack time in the Forest school site. Where this occurs, food will be transported hygienically from the school to the woodland in sealed containers. It will be prepared on a chopping board. The children will enjoy drinking water poured from a specific sealed jug. All children and staff will wash hands with antibacterial soap before proceeding.

On occasions there may be a cooking activity in Forest school. When this occurs hygienic conditions will be used to prepare any food and any waste cleared systematically afterwards to leave no trace.

First Aid

The Leader (Debbie Rofe) holds a current Outdoor First Aid qualification which is updated regularly. Other staff may hold Paediatric First Aid qualifications. A full outdoor First Aid Kit is available at all times during a Forest School session and includes a welfare kit, fire safety equipment eg fire blanket and sufficient resources to deal with an emergency. It is the Outdoor First Aider's responsibility to regularly check and restock the kit.

First Aid Kit Contents List :

Rucksack contains :

- Accident notebook
- Survival bag
- Fire blanket
- Spare gloves/hat
- Medium unmedicated wound dressings
- 2 large unmedicated wound dressings
- 2 eye pads
- Disposable non latex gloves
- Rollmat
- Foil blanket
- Glucose/sugary food
- Clingfilm
- Wipes
- Tissues
- Nappy bags
- Scissors
- Eye solutions
- Ice packs
- 4 triangular bandages
- Saline water
- 20 individually wrapped adhesive dressings
- Face shields, PPE

Clothing and Adverse Weather

“There is no such thing as bad weather, just unsuitable clothing.”

This is almost true; strong winds are probably the one real exception. We aim to go out in all seasons so the children can begin to understand nature in every way, so for each we need children to be dressed appropriately. Our sessions are relatively active, but in winter spending time outside can mean getting very cold if a child isn't wearing several layers, warm socks, a hat, gloves, scarf, etc. It's also advisable always to wear long trousers and sturdy boots or wellies in all weathers in the woods.

In summer sunhats are needed and we actually find the woodland a cool place to be on a hot day.

Broad Oak Forest School is rightly a very messy place and we make no excuses for clothing that comes home mucky! Play should, after all be mucky when you are in the wild!

Please see full policy for further details

Feedback and Concerns

We encourage all children and parents/carers to give us regular feedback about their experience and also to talk to us about anything that is causing consternation. Feedback and concerns can be expressed in any way, to the Leader, Debbie Rofe, or to the Headteacher, Jackie Hewess. We will always endeavour to be as open, honest and as straightforward as possible with carers/parents with regard to any issue; maintaining a two way flow of information can lead to resolutions before problems arise or escalate. All communications regarding formal feedback or concerns will be logged and records kept.

In the event of a concern being about our practice, *please refer to our Complaints policy.*

Cancellation and contingency

In the case of extreme weather, the Leader may need to cancel sessions at short notice. Wherever possible, these will be rescheduled. The Leader reserves the right to make decisions in the children's best interests should the weather be excessively cold, wet or dangerous in terms of storms and high winds. A wind scale is included. Where possible dynamic risk assessment will allow sessions to adapt and proceed ie using large tarps for shelter and a fire for added warmth/hot drinks etc

In the case of the Leader's ill-health sessions will be rescheduled for alternative days.