

FOREST SCHOOL POLICY

Last review: Spring 2023
Next review: Spring 2024

Our Forest School Vision

At Abbey Gates Primary School we drive our Vision for Excellence. We work to **equip** the children with the basic skills they need, **embed** these through Quality First Teaching and **extend** this from individuals' starting points and **enrich** their experiences throughout. Our Forest School provision equips the children with a progressively mapped set of skills and knowledge.

It creates opportunities to:

- Connect with the natural world
- Deliver first hand experiences of life and growth
- Explore endless opportunities for creativity and imagination
- Improve physical, social and emotional development.

Research and experience show that outdoor learning improves children's emotional health, developing relaxation and calmness and a heightened sense of well-being. It provides opportunities for independent learning, building confidence, resilience and self-esteem. We ensure that through tailored Forest School activities, there is designed progression through mapped skills over time.

Abbey Gates is working to continuously develop the following:

- the development of our Outdoor Forest School Area
- links with outside agencies to provide learning opportunities and training
- acquisition of equipment
- raising the profile and provision of Outdoor Learning for pupils
- staff training (including a Level 3 Forest School Practitioner qualification and Outdoor First Aid)

At Abbey Gates Primary School we aim to use the natural outdoor woodland area to offer children an insight into the Forest School ethos. This approach to outdoor learning encourages children to become more independent, use their imagination, take appropriate risks within boundaries and initiate learning for themselves. Forest School is a holistic approach to learning, incorporating children's individuality and develops their skills for lifelong learning. It covers aspects of the EYFS and National Curriculum, including the emotional and spiritual learning through which self-esteem and self-confidence grow and positive relationships with peers are formed. Forest School explores the outdoors and the natural environment with practical, useful activities all year round. It develops peer learning with the adults providing support and enabling activities to take place. The children's interest is at the heart of any activity.

Our long-term provision is guided by the 'WILD Passport' curriculum which is a useful framework for monitoring skill progression. The WILD Passport programme helps us to strengthen and support the ease with which teachers can evidence the knowledge and practical skill gains made by learners during their outdoor learning experiences.

Why is Forest School important?

There are many reasons why spending time outdoors is beneficial including:

- Physical Health Benefits – Increased oxygen levels outside increase brain function. Increased gross motor movement reduces chance of obesity and increases bone density (reducing chances of osteoporosis). Sunlight increases vitamin D production. Increased resilience to illness.
- Mental Health Benefits – Spending time in green spaces reduces cortisol (a stress chemical) levels in the brain, therefore has a calming influence. The reduction in cortisol also increases receptivity for building neural pathways (learning) in the brain.
- Social Benefits – Research suggests that in natural play areas the leaders tend to be the most intelligent and imaginative, compared to hard-top play areas where the dominant children are those who are the physically strongest. When playing outside communication, teambuilding and language skills are developed.
- Risk Awareness – Playing outside allows children to learn about risk assessment and taking. Children that are exposed to acceptable levels of risk at a young age are less likely to make bad judgements in the future.
- Behaviour – Due to the calming effect on the brain and the increase in physical space outside, improved behaviour is often noticed.

When does Forest Schools take place?

Forest School takes place weekly in half-term blocks for different year groups so that every year group class has access to at least a 5-week block of provision.

In addition to this universal provision, we provide Nurture Group sessions through which identified children with additional SEMH needs (social, emotional and mental health) access the Forest School provision to support their personal development.

How is Forest Schools taught?

All sessions start in a log seating area. Here we explain to the children the Health and Safety risks linked to activities that will be accessed. We outline expectations including:

- Coming back to the main circle when the whistle blows/called in.
- Looking after all equipment.
- Looking after each other.
- Packing away after equipment is used. The Forest must be tidy after each session ready for the next session – this is non-negotiable.
- Seeking an adult for first aid.
- Not leaving the forest school area unless permission is granted.

During the sessions, staff input for higher risk activities is with a small group particularly when the activity has a higher risk level. The remaining children will have had their input and are expected to facilitate their own learning meeting the expectations outlined above. Additional adults circulate the forest area to support safe implementation of Wild Passport curriculum learning.

At the end of each session, participants gather in the log seating area to discuss the learning. Whilst staff lead this part of the session, other adults check the forest and ensure that all the areas are clear and safe. Children are given opportunities to share their learning and things they have created.

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

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

How is Forest Schools provision monitored?

The Forest School Co-ordinator and Forest School Lead are responsible for monitoring and reviewing the subject. This is reflected in a yearly action plan and is achieved through:

- Staff questionnaires.
- Pupil interviews.
- Photos or videos of sessions.
- Spending time with classes in the Forest.
- Health & Safety quality assurance monitoring.
- Staff Development Reviews.
- Learning walks.

Following this review process, the Co-ordinator and Lead will deliver any training or support required to staff. Through the above methods, the Co-ordinator and Lead will be able to judge whether the quality of experiences are in line with the rationale and aims of Forest Schools Offer.

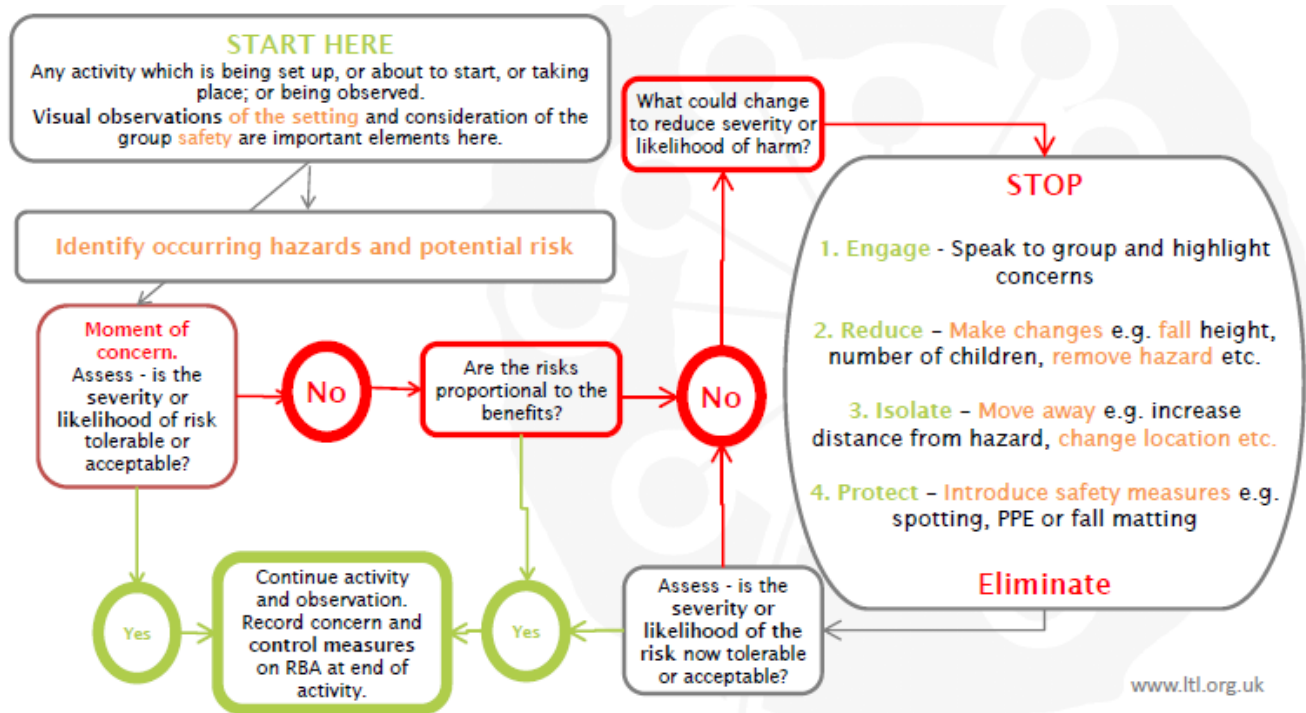
How is health and safety managed?

- The Forest School Lead will inspect the woodland area once per week for any signs of damage or disrepair to equipment. Staff also inspect prior to use and report if they identify any risks so that unsafe equipment can be repaired or moved away from accessible areas.
- A Risk Assessment is completed and shared with staff.
- All equipment with sharp edges e.g. saws, drills, knives, peelers and hammer, is kept in with the Forest School shed when not in session use.
- Pupils are reminded before each session of the rules and expectations.

During a Forest School session (alongside our risk assessments) we follow the 'Learning Through Landscapes' Dynamic Risk Benefit Assessment Procedure as not every risk can be pre-judged. The process for these dynamic judgements is below.

Questions to ask:

- Hazard: is this something which could harm you?
- Likelihood: how likely is it that the hazard going to harm you?
- Severity: how severe would it be, if that hazard were to harm you?
- Risk: what is the combination of the likelihood and severity?
- Control Measures: what steps can be taken to reduce risk?



This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Play Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Risk Assessments
- First Aid
- Kindness Policy
- Curriculum Design Statement