



## Forest School Policy

Langley School

Deb Smith  
June 2024

## Site Issues

Forest School sessions will take place within the Langley/Coppice grounds.

- **Security:** Langley/Coppice grounds are secure; children are not able to leave the site without passing through the school building, but consideration must be made that a gate could have been left open. Children will be always monitored. Gates are padlocked.
- **Clearly marked boundaries:** The children need to be made aware of how far they may explore and the area used for Forest Schools needs to be clearly marked and shown to the group at the beginning of their term of lessons. Boundary 'hedges' have been built using logs/branches/foliage, but these need monitoring for damage on a very regular basis-before a session-to ensure that no gaps have been made by other children entering the site between sessions.
- **Open Water:** None on Langley/Coppice Forest School site. Small pond established within Butter-Bee Gardens. The whole garden area is gated and padlocked so no children have access unless with an adult. Staff have been provided with a Pond Risk Assessment and this is also available on the school pdrive. Children are made aware of the pond rules-4 maximum around the pond at a time, no hands in the water, always kneel next to the pond. Signs are clearly displayed using symbols as well as text.
- **Dead wood and low branches can be a hazard:** The area should be checked for hanging dead wood and low branches. A check of the woods will be carried out on a regular basis to ensure that there are no branches which may cause injury. Extra checks will be needed following high winds, heavy snow falls and summer drought.
- **Poisonous Plants:** Children should be made aware that plants, fungi and berries should not be picked and not eaten. For the purpose of Forest School, it may be assumed that all berries are poisonous.
- **Bees, wasps and biting insects:** Be aware and instruct children appropriately. They do not need to panic or wave their arms about!
- **Woodland floor (1):** It may be boggy during and after wet weather. During springtime, the floor of the woodland may have wildflowers. Use appropriate footwear, try not to disturb wildflowers.
- **Woodland floor (2):** Stumbling hazards; site should be checked for raised tree roots and rabbit holes. The group should be informed of the hazard and encouraged how to behave sensibly in a natural environment.
- **Sustainability:** Overuse of an area is unsustainable. Whenever possible it is advisable to change the area of use so that the site can regenerate.
- **Natural shelter:** The canopy over most of the site is fairly dense, so the area naturally protects groups from wind and rain.
- **Trees to be checked regularly to ensure they are safe for shelters to be attached**
- **Ropes to be checked regularly to ensure they are not damaging trees**

## Basic Rules for Forest School:

Forest School is based around child-centred learning. However, it is important to set basic rules with the group and all children using the environment will use and reflect on the 3 rules 'Look after yourself' 'Look after each other' and 'Look after nature'. When appropriate, children can be encouraged to devise their own rules.

Rules should include:

- **Boundaries:** How far are they allowed to go?
- **Fire safety rules:** This should have a slow introduction. The rules surrounding the fire area should always be carried out, even when there is no fire. These are:
  - Walk around the outside.
  - Step into the circle by your seat.

- Never cross the circle.
- Only approach the fire if requested by an adult.
- Use a safe kneeling position when near to the fire
- Or a safe standing position with an adult if using the fire bowl.
- Safety/emergency calls: Where appropriate, children will be taught to respond to the call 'Sticky Elbows. When they hear this, they must all immediately stop what they are doing and go to the adult who called it. They will link elbows in a circle and we will count to check all children are present. This call will be used in an emergency, for example if an injury has occurred and action needs to be taken, to inform the group of an issue, for example if glass has been found on the ground and if necessary, to gather together groups who are spread across a large area.

For Roots and possibly Branches pathways, key adults will be allocated designated children. In the case of an emergency, they will be responsible for gathering these children and taking them to the appropriate space as indicated by the leader.

The following can be discussed with the group and are more guidance than rules. Encourage the children to think of appropriate actions/behaviour. For example:

- Sticks are better dragged than carried.
- Do not pick up rubbish with your hands-always inform an adult who will use a litter picker or gloves and a sharps box/rubbish bag. Litter pickers are available for children to use as a self-chosen activity.
- Not putting fingers in mouths.
- Children need to know when they must ask an adult, e.g., toilet and use of tools. As experience grows it is important that the group is aware of acceptable behaviour that will help everyone to enjoy time in the woods.
- Be aware of yourself and others at all times.
- Use tools in a way you have been shown and in no other way.
- Tools are to be returned to the box or bag when not in use.
- Look above, below and around for hazards.
- Check that no one is in the way before starting a task.
- If a leader asks you to stop, you must do so immediately.
- Remain within the area that you have been told to stay in – do not wander off (adults need to be aware of children at risk of wandering and take appropriate measures).
- Wash your hands before eating food that you have brought with you.
- All rubbish removed before leaving.
- Respect all living things in the woodland. Handle mini-beasts gently and with a flat hand, rather than between two fingers. Do not pick flowers or break branches.
- Only ever eat something we find in the woods, if a Forest School leader is leading a forage-based activity-eg. picking elderflowers to make elderflower cordial, so has therefore specifically allowed the picking and eating of edible products.

### **Risk Assessments:**

- The Forest School site must be made safe and be easily accessible. A full risk assessment of the site to identify hazards and action needed to reduce risk to a safe level must take place before any sessions (see Risk Assessments).
- A health and safety check will be undertaken each half term, and risks/hazards reported to the SLT.

- A safety sweep of the area must be made before each Forest School session. Look for windblown trees/branches, hanging deadwood, nettles and brambles, and litter.
- Certain hazards are impossible to avoid-particularly protruding roots along the path at the fire-circle end of the site. However, children and staff are regularly reminded of this and are encouraged to walk slowly, carefully and to look where they are going on this part of the path.
- Consult Risk Assessments appropriate to the planned session.
- An Emergency Plan will be kept in the school office and on the forest school leader during sessions. This includes location of the site, grid reference, school phone number, a colour-coded area-map and information regarding what to do in different emergencies. All adults should have access to this information, as it could be the leader that is injured.
- A walkie talkie will be taken out in case of emergencies.

## Tool Use:

When using some tools, for example the bow saw, we will use a designated area marked for tool use. This should ensure that children not using tools do not go in this area. However, some tools, e.g. loppers or secateurs will be used throughout the forest, and some e.g. hammers and drills will be used at one of the workstations. Using tools with children should be carried out on a 1:1 or 1:2 basis. Tool safety will be taught throughout sessions, before tools are used and each child will be judged individually on their ability to use tools safely before working with them. Tool talk cards are available for every tool, alongside symbol-based tool talks, written using 'Communicate-in-print'. Tools should be made safe and returned to the secure box or bag immediately after use.

- Rakes are freely available for children to use as they wish
- Storage: Tools will be kept in a secure box or tool bag.
- Cleaning: No tool should be put away dirty: Billhooks, knives and saws should be wiped with an oily rag.
- Covers: Billhooks and Saws should have their covers replaced, and knives re-sheathed.
- After use: All tools should be returned to the box or bag when not in use. Tools should not be left unattended.
- Sharpening: All tools should be sharp. A blunt tool is dangerous. Blades should be re-oiled after sharpening. Blades on saws should be checked regularly and replaced when wear is evident.
- Wood: Green wood is easier to cut and work with. Wood left cut will season and harden, as it dries.

## Fires:

Fires are a part of Forest School delivery, and the qualified leader will work with a group to make sure that they are safe enough before lighting fires with them. It is important that the following is observed:

- Fire area: We use a vegetation free zone, with a circle of tree stumps placed at a safe distance from the fire pit. There are no low overhanging trees.
- Water: A bucket or bowl of water and extra bottles of water will be kept close by to extinguish the fire and in case of burns.
- First Aid: A full first aid kit and a burns kit will be out and readily available whenever a fire is lit. The Forest School Leader holds an Outdoor First Aid Certificate.
- Fire size: The area of the fire will be kept to a minimum. We will mainly use a fire pit so that the fire is contained but may also use the ground when necessary.
- Extinguishing and clearing of area: The leader will be responsible for the fire and ensure that it is out and safe to leave at the end of the session. Fire area cleared unless it is to be re-used on the same day.

## Shelter Building:

What is the shelter to be used for?

Is it long or short term?

Is the shelter for the whole group? Or small groups?

If the shelter is for long-term use to protect the group from the elements the following criteria should be followed:

- Wood should be strong, not rotting, (Can it hold your weight?)
- Strong rope or cord should be used.
- Secure knots should be used.
- The shelter should be checked regularly for wear and tear.
- Tarpaulin sheets can be used but must be kept secure so that they are not lost in high winds. No cord or rope should be left hanging for children to get caught up in. A 45° angle will help water to run off.

Children can be shown how to make small structures for dens. The structure needs to be strong and children should be instructed how to make secure knots where necessary.

## Forest Areas

The forest area has been set up with defined areas, to help children to become more independent in their learning and use of the environment and to protect and sustain the woodland on a long-term basis. The forest will be approached from the gated entrance outside Hollies. Marked areas include:

- Fire circle
- Seating/group circle area
- Tool area
- Obstacle course
- Digging pit
- Balancing log
- Cable reel climbing/balancing area
- Seesaw
- Swings
- Low ropes
- Mud kitchen
- Den building logs
- Habitat piles
- Mini-beast hotel/bug-flaps/logs
- Bird feeding area
- Forest School Stage
- Play house
- Reading area
- Ladder
- Climbing tree

- Music area
- Hammocks

Plus a garden area- 'Butter-Bee Gardens' incorporating...

- Willow arch
- Small pond
- Mini-beast mansions
- Sensory path
- Wildflower area
- Herb garden
- Variety of planting areas to attract wildlife.

Rules:

- Do not enter tool area unless with an adult and instructed to do so.
- Swings- one at a time on the swing ( 2 if appropriate on round swing)
- Stand back away from the swing when waiting for a turn.
- Digging pit mud stays in the pit.
- Mud kitchen soil to be taken and returned to the mud kitchen soil pile.
- Habitat piles must not be disturbed.
- When tree climbing, an adult must be monitoring and children must use at least 3 points (2 hands/1 foot, 1 foot/2 hands) to hold on. Use the designated climbing tree. (Other trees to be used at the discretion of the leader and in accordance with the child's physical ability.)
- Den building logs to be taken from designated piles (and returned there once dens are dismantled)
- A maximum of 2 (3 smaller) children at a time to use low ropes.

### Equipment and resources:

The Forest School leader/accompanying staff will carry the following items:

- Forms: medical forms, care plans and dietary information
- Emergency action plan
- Mobile phone
- First aid kit: full kit, including safety blanket to warm up a child if necessary
- Bin bag
- Sharps box
- Litter pickers
- Hand gel/moist wipes for cleaning of hands and face
- Water: Necessary for washing hands and for fire safety
- Snacks/drinks

- Clothing: Although children will be dressed for the planned activity (almost always in Wellington boots and over-trousers; and waterproof jackets, fleeces, hats and gloves according to weather etc) spare socks/pants/trousers will be available

And when appropriate:

- Tools: According to age and experience of group (see section 4 and individual risk assessments)

### Toilet facilities:

All groups will start out their session changing in or outside Hollies, where toilets will be used before setting out. Anyone needing to use the facilities during a session can return to Hollies with a member of staff, after informing the forest school leader.

### Clothing:

Outdoor learning is very beneficial to a child's development, but they need to feel comfortable and happy being outside. All participants will be dressed appropriately for the seasons. At Langley, we will provide participants with wear waterproof trousers and coats, fleeces and footwear. Hats, and gloves will also be made available when cold.

### Weather:

Forest School is all about play in all weathers. We wear suitable clothing and use shelters to protect us from the rain or cold. However sessions will be cancelled in high winds due to the risk of falling objects and/or reduced in extreme weather events

*All the schemes of work at Langley are underpinned by the human rights of everyone under 18 years of age as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The relevant articles from the Convention will be referred to as appropriate within specific planning.*

Within Forest School, we are particularly mindful of the following articles:

Article 29 (Goals of education): Children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. It should encourage children to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures. It should also help them learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.

Article 31 (Leisure, play and culture): Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.

### Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed by the Forest School Lead annually. At every review, it will be approved by the headteacher.

### Reviewed

Deb Smith – June 2024

Deb Smith      February 2018

Reviewed September 2019

Updated 2023

Updated July 2024

Review Date: June 2025