Downlands Community School

Forest School Handbook

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Forest School Ethos Statement

At Downlands School we believe that Forest School is a fundamental aspect of our curriculum which aims to promote the holistic development of all learners through building resilience, confidence, independence and creativity.

There are strong links between emotional intelligence, self-esteem, positive behaviour and motivated learning. We believe these qualities and behaviours support the well-being of individuals that may become inspired to fulfil their potential and be better placed to realise the difference their actions, skills and knowledge can have. This in turn nurtures a sense of belonging, self-worth and a love for learning which they may take forward into all areas of their lives.

'The best classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky' Margaret McMillan.

'In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks' John Muir.

'Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better' Albert Einstein.

'Imagination does not become great until human beings, given the courage and the strength, use it to create' Maria Montessori.

What is Forest School?

'Forest School is a child-centred inspirational learning process that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. It is a long-term program that supports play, exploration and supported risk taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting' (Forest School Association).

Through careful observation and positive encouragement, Forest School builds on the skills shown by the children. The Forest school leader matches activities with preferred styles of learning which sets children up to succeed. This accelerates learning, develops self-confidence and promotes self-esteem.

Aims of Forest School

• To support the social and emotional development of children through the guise of play in a natural outdoor environment.

• To support the physical and mental development of children through active games, tasks and problem-solving activities.

• To build self-confidence and self-esteem in children and young people.

• To give children and young people the skills and tools to succeed and be happy.

Environmental impact

Downlands Forest School adheres to the 'no trace' ethos of Forest School, which means we try our best to leave the woods as we find it. Activities carried out in the outdoors can have an impact on the immediate environment. Downlands Forest School aims to keep this impact to a minimum. This is done by regularly assessing the impact

activities are having and then developing a three-year sustainable woodland management plan to help take the necessary steps to amend and regulate these activities.

Example of types of activities that may take place at Forest School

Under close adult supervision*

- Den/ shelter building
- Campfire building and lighting*
- Making hot food and drinks on the campfire*
- Bush craft – Working with Forest School tools*
- Other Bush craft activities
- Nature and wildlife discovery, observation and appreciation
- Nature and wildlife identification
- Learning about code of conduct and respect for the countryside
- Problem solving activities
- Physical challenges (e.g. obstacle courses)
- Teambuilding activities
- Child initiated play
- Nature Art and Craft work

All activities aim to support the children's social and emotional development which in turn can help raise their confidence and self-esteem.

Forest School Rules

1. Walk 

2. Stay within the boundaries
We don't go over it, we don't go under  it.

3. Listen – stop when you hear the call. 

4. No pick or lick.
Keep your hands away from your face.  

5. Climbing is ok but no higher than the adult head height. 

Role of the Forest School leader

The Forest School leader is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the group and to risk assess the site, daily conditions and all activities before and during the session.

Role of adult helpers

- To support the Forest School leader with tasks such as head counting and ensuring children stay within the designated area.
- It is important adults alert the Forest School leader immediately if a child is missing, seriously hurt or misbehaving in a way that could lead to others getting hurt.
- We ask all adults to praise good behaviour and allow children the freedom to explore and play without adult interruption whenever safely possible.

- Before leaving school, help check that children are wearing clothing and footwear appropriate for the weather and time of year.
- To assist keeping the children healthy and safe by helping them to recognise and avoid hazards such as harmful plants, germs, trip hazards etc.
- To support children's learning and development as modelled by the Forest School leader.
- To support the children's learning and development through answering and asking questions and responding to activity cues without 'over influencing' the activity.

Procedures and Policies

Toileting

Children will be able to use the toilets in school (backing on to school field opposite Forest School site).

Behaviour

It is our responsibility to ensure all children feel safe, respected and valued. Praising and drawing attention to good behaviour will be used as the primary behavioural management strategy. Rules and expectations will be made clear at the beginning of the first Forest School session and main points recapped thereafter. As a preventative measure and as a core value of Forest School, all adults shall be made aware of any specific social and emotional needs of the children in the group. Other adults should refer any challenging behaviour to the Forest School leader. If a child's behaviour puts themselves or other children at risk, we will ask them to stop, if the behaviour does not stop, we will intervene. If the poor behaviour choices continues we may have to end our Forest School session. We expect the children to

follow the Forest School rules and behave accordingly. We expect children to respect the plants and animals and help us to look after the wildlife and our special site. Forest School will not tolerate bullying of any kind.

Safeguarding children

Forest School takes safeguarding of children and young people very seriously. Leaders are first aid trained and qualified to lead. Dorset

Council operates a safer recruitment policy and all staff and volunteers are aware of the child protection policy
including procedures in place to respond to disclosures or allegations. Any incidents are recorded on My Concern by the Forest School leader and discussed with the designated child protection officer as soon as possible.

All adults helping with Forest School will undergo a DBS check.

The Forest School leader has a duty of care to promote the wellbeing and security of the group.

Lost/missing child

If a child is discovered missing, the Forest School Leader will radio the school for assistance and all other children will be escorted back to school.

Food hygiene

When handling food, hands must be washed and/ or cleaned using antibacterial wipes or hand gel or soapy water. Food should be stored at the appropriate temperature before the session and transported to Forest School in a

hygienic container. Children's hands should be cleaned with water, wipes and/or hand gel before handling and eating. Food containers should be taken back to be cleaned/disposed of appropriately and no litter should be left as we always aim to leave the site as we find it.

First aid and emergency

The Forest School leader is a trained first aider and will carry the first aid kit and be primarily responsible for administering first aid. The Forest School leader also carries a walkie talkie linked to the school site. In the event of a serious accident an ambulance will be called, the Forest School leader will remain with the casualty and the other adults will escort the remainder of the group back to the main school.

In the case of a serious accident involving the Forest School leader, other adult leaders will inform the school via the radio and all emergency procedures will be followed.

Equal Opportunities

Forest School, as part of the education department, strives to maintain equal opportunities for all children and young people. The Forest School leader will aim to make the sessions as inclusive as possible if given notice of any disabilities or difficulties prior to the start of Forest School.

Tool use policy

The Forest School ethos is to build on skills in small steps. Once the children and leaders have developed a trust and the children have shown they are ready, the leader will introduce more advanced skills such as tool use and fire with close supervision.

Tools available for use are:

Bowsaw, Loppers and Sheath Knife

- All tools are cleaned, maintained and stored securely by the Forest School leader.
- Prior to use, the Forest School leader will check the tools for any damage or instability and check for sharpness.
- Tools are kept at Forest School in a secure locked shed.
- Only tools belonging to the Forest School leader or the school can be used at Forest School.
- How to use all tools will be demonstrated on a group basis and then assessed on a 1:1 basis.
- Only the Forest School leader will decide if the age group/ individual child is ready for a particular tool by assessing for competence on a 1:1 basis
- As part of the process for assessing competence children must be able to learn the 'tool- talks' before being considered capable of using any particular tool.

Fire Safety

Fire Square Rules

• We do not run around the Fire Square.

• We walk around the **outside** of the Fire Square to get to the other side.

• We only enter the inner Fire Square when instructed by the Forest School Leader.

• No loose clothing or loose hair in the Fire Square.

Fire Safety Procedures

During the Forest School process, a careful regard and respect of fire is reinforced with the children through a step by step process. Strict fire square rules are enforced at all times and behaviour is controlled b y the Forest School leader and other adults present to ensure safety. Only
when trust has been developed between the leaders and children, a fire in the fire pit may be constructed for Forest School activities and campfire cooking.

Before fires are built, provision for putting out the fire is made with water bottles at hand. The Forest School leader will assess the site for overhanging vegetation and clear forest floor debris to avoid fire spread. Fire is never left unattended and the Forest School leader will ensure it is out completely using plenty of water before leaving the area.

In very hot, ‘tinder dry’ conditions careful consideration needs to be given to the possibility of wind blowing embers and igniting other areas of the woodland. This needs to be assessed as part of the daily operating procedure as fires may not be possible in these circumstances.

Cancellation

Forest School will continue in most types of weather with the exception of high winds, thunder or severe cold. The Forest School Leader will visit the site directly before the visit to have up to date information of weather conditions at the time.

Essential equipment

First Aid Kit containing:

- disposable gloves
- wound dressing
- disposable ice packs
- triangular bandage
- hypoallergenic plasters
- hand gel
- antibacterial wipes
- an eye pad
- eye wash
- scissors
- adhesive medical tape
- tweezers
- face shield

Other essential equipment:

- Any necessary individual medication (inhalers etc)
- burns kit
- water
- a charged walkie talkie with direct access to main school

Risk assessment

Risk assessments are continually reviewed and the Forest School Leader will carry out a daily risk assessment at the site before allowing the children onto the site.

This will include a site sweep, checking for fallen branches, debris, litter and dead animals. The weather conditions will be considered and the changes these make to the site will be noted. If tools are to be used these will be safety checked and replaced in a secure container.

If there are any changes to any risks, the appropriate controls will be put into place and the risk assessment reviewed and amended.

The Forest School Leader will lead the session, ensure the group is safe and observe interests and learning styles. The Forest School Leader will reflect and evaluate each session to aid planning for the next session.

After each session the Forest School Leader will carry out cleaning and maintenance of tools and store them safely. They will also conduct a site sweep to ensure the Forest is left as it was found.