

A decorative border of green pine trees surrounds the text. The trees are arranged in a rectangular frame, with a single row of trees along the top and bottom edges, and vertical columns of trees along the left and right edges. The trees are stylized and green.

## Introduction to Forest School

### The origins of Forest School:

It is widely recognised that an outdoor environment can have great benefits for children's education, wellbeing and physical/emotional development. Forest Schools have their origins in Scandinavia, where traditions of a sense of connection to nature inspired a system of outdoor education settings. During the 1950s in Denmark, there emerged a form of what we could now refer to as "Forest Schools": childcare/educational settings located in woodland which enabled child-led activities, encouraged physical exploration within the environment and the independent use of tools and natural materials.

Forest Schools were introduced to the UK following a trip to Denmark by the early years department of Bridgwater College in 1993. The import/translation of the Danish-style approach to learning through child-led activities within a woodland environment is what we now know as "Forest School". In 2012, the Forest School Association was launched and this is now *"the professional body and UK wide voice for Forest School, promoting and supporting best practice, cohesion and quality Forest School for all"*. ([www.forestschoolassociation.org](http://www.forestschoolassociation.org)).

### What happens at Forest School?

Forest School is a process of regular, repeated visits of a sustained period of time (usually around 1.5-2 hours) to the same natural environment (usually a woodland). Group sizes depend on the adult/child ratios and the availability of space/natural resources. Forest School sessions involve practical activities to develop participants' confidence, skills and abilities as they progress through the weeks.

Sessions are predominantly child-led and adult-supported. Adults will be positive role models who support the development of familiar routines, safe conduct and session structures. Adults will also provide appropriate supervision and teach new skills or tool use. Familiar routines, flexible planning and thorough risk-benefit assessments will underpin all sessions. The flexible planning will enable children to follow their interests and preferences, with observations, feedback and reflection guiding future planning. As learners grow in confidence and skills through the sessions, they will become increasingly able to steer, influence and direct their own learning. The Forest School Leader will be responsive to this and will endeavour to put the ideas and interests of the children at the forefront of the planning process.

Natural resources will be central to all Forest School activities. They will be used in a wide variety of ways, usually led by the interests and play preferences of the individuals involved. Investigation, exploration and creativity can all be inspired by using the natural materials within a natural setting.



Some examples of potential Forest School activities:

- Bug spotting
- Natural art – e.g. leaf printing/bark rubbings/mud paintings
- Balancing
- Climbing
- Shelter building
- Creating mini-structures
- Collecting, identifying and sorting natural materials
- Plant and tree identification
- Fire lighting
- Knots and lashings
- Team games
- Making and playing musical instruments
- Creating decorative items or jewellery

#### **Curriculum-linked opportunities:**

We will take a positive, collaborative approach with the Jordans teaching team to ensure that we maximise any potential curriculum-linked opportunities through our Forest School resourcing and provision. This will support our children as they seek to explore, expand and deepen their understanding and learning beyond the classroom, during their Forest School experiences. Children may explore elements from subjects including Maths, English, DT, Science, Art, Drama and Music.

#### **Benefits of Forest School:**

Forest Schools support holistic development and present a wide range of potential benefits for participants - not only the positive impact on physical health which comes from being active outdoors but also considerable benefits for mental health and emotional wellbeing:

Children in  
regular, long-  
term Forest  
School sessions

which provide  
significant periods  
of child-led/ child-  
initiated time

and involves  
them engaging in  
small, achievable  
tasks

will be developing  
holistically – benefitting  
their development  
physically, socially,  
emotionally and  
practically.

Have a  
go

purposeful

cooperation  
& teamwork

calm

active

caring

Practical  
skills &  
tool use

mindful

resilience

communication

reflective

independence

learn  
about  
natural  
world

initiative

decision  
making

Physical  
skills

respectful

grow in  
self-  
esteem

Grow in  
confidence

resourceful

Children will be enabled  
to step out of their  
comfort zone and to take  
appropriate, well-  
managed risks, learning  
and developing skills  
along the way.

They will take  
their own,  
individual path  
through all the  
green trees above

and will develop  
their skills in  
different ways

and at their  
own pace.

A Forest School  
journey has great  
potential benefits  
for development –  
and it should also  
be a lot of FUN!