

GREAT CHART PRIMARY SCHOOL

FOREST SCHOOL POLICY

SEPTEMBER 2023



A Great Place to Discover and Learn

Vision Statement

A respectful community where we thrive and achieve our full potential as confident life long learners

Mission Statement

Preparing for life in our ever changing world, by providing opportunities to develop core values and a love of learning

Our core value is Respect

Our termly values: Team work, Ambition, Responsibility, Resilience, Kindness & Independence

Introduction

Forest School is a unique method of Outdoor Education that allows children to develop confidence, independence, self-esteem and awareness and knowledge of the natural environment. This fully supports our Mission Statement: "A great place to discover and learn." This is achieved by setting small achievable tasks. The child is never put in a position where he/she will fail so success is attained. It is a child centred and child led programme that provides the opportunity for the children to use their personal learning style to complete their chosen tasks.

Intent

The main aims of Forest School at Great Chart Primary School

- To provide children with experiences that encourage an appreciation, awareness and knowledge of the natural environment.
- To learn to respect and care for their own local environment.
- To abide by the rules and set standards of behaviour, to work cooperatively in groups and to respect each other.
- Develop children's self-esteem and self-confidence through the setting of small achievable tasks.

The ethos of Forest School believes in a child's right to play; the right to access the outdoors (and in particular a woodland environment); the right to experience risk in a controlled way in the natural world along with the right to develop their emotional intelligence through social interaction, building resilience to enable creative engagement with their peers and their potential.

Children who struggle learning indoors are often enabled to develop new ways of learning and coping with the world. The woodland environment is central in supporting this approach to learning: the changing of the seasons, to the contemplation of an ancient tree; the dynamic nature of an outdoor environment - an infinite source of smells, textures, sounds and tastes and a range of visual stimuli all contribute to the Forest School learning experience.

Our Forest School encourages children to:

- Develop personal and social skills
- Work through practical problems and challenges
- Use tools to create, build or manage
- Learn how to manage failures
- Build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk
- Develop practical skills
- Understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- Explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- Regularly experience achievement and success
- Reflect on learning and experiences
- Develop their language and communication skills
- Improve both fine and gross motor skills

Implementation

Forest School practice embraces collaborative unplanned, unexpected and ultimately unlimited learning. Children are encouraged to direct their own learning - this is often inspired by the Forest School leader either through stimulating play in the outdoors or through 'scaffolding' a child's learning, but mostly through simply observing how children are in the outdoors. The most important thing is to encourage the natural curiosity present in children and to enable them to open their eyes and experience the wonders of the world around them.

Activities for Forest Schools are diverse, progressive and numerous, we are trying to create independent learners who are inspired to try out their own ideas, explore their own interests and to attempt new ideas.

Some activities might include:

- Shelter building
- Fire lighting and cooking on an open fire
- Using a Kelly Kettle
- Tool use
- Studying wildlife
- Playing team and group games
- Sensory activities
- Rope and string work, tying knots
- Art and sculpture work
- Woodland and traditional craft
- Woodland management
- Developing stories and drama, and meeting imaginary characters

Clothing

No person will be permitted to go to Forest School without appropriate clothing that will protect them from extremes of heat or cold, keep them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes, that fits appropriately for comfort, and that meets any religious requirements.

Children and parents are encouraged to think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities, and to be aware they are likely to take some of our mud home with them after a session. In the woodland it can often be cooler than expected under the shade of the trees.

Clothing list (dependent on weather):

- Waterproof trousers
- Waterproof coat, with a hood.
- Long sleeved top
- Full length trousers
- Warm, waterproof boots (wellies can be very cold during the winter)
- Warm socks, and a spare pair
- Gloves and woolly hat – cold weather
- Sun hat and sun cream: that fits well to ensure good visibility– sunny weather

Before each session the forest school leader (Lorna Wyril – Onodrim) must carry out a risk assessment of the forest school site. The forest school leader must identify and remove/reduce and risks that are found during the risk assessment.

Special Educational Needs Disability (SEND) / Pupil Premium / Higher Attainers

All children will have Quality First Teaching. Any children with identified SEND or in receipt of pupil premium funding may have work additional to and different from their peers in order to access the curriculum dependent upon their needs. As well as this, our school offers a demanding and varied curriculum, providing children with a range of opportunities in order for them to reach their full potential and consistently achieve highly from their starting points.

Impact

Forest school lessons should make learning more relevant to their lives in the community and wider world. We encourage children to be responsible for and respect the local community and environment, giving them a sense of belonging and ownership of the place in which they live. We explore the uses of the local area, integrating subjects so that meaningful activities can be planned and delivered effectively and regularly.

We measure the impact of our curriculum through the following methods:

- Images and videos of the children's practical learning.
- Interviewing the pupils about their learning (pupil voice).

Great Chart School Policies and Forest School

Staff attending Forest School sessions should be familiar with the following school policies:

- Health and Safety Policy
- First Aid policy
- Risk Assessment Policy and Risk Assessments particular to Forest School.
- Asthma Policy (if asthmatics are attending sessions)
- Safeguarding Policy
- Equality & Inclusion Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Dog policy

Particular attention is paid to the following areas:

Health and Safety

The Forest School curriculum supports children to develop responsibility for themselves and others. It will encourage early risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others.

A site risk assessment has been carried out and a copy is held by Mrs Wyril (FS Leader).

The Forest School area is on site, therefore any children with injuries can receive first aid at the school office. In the case of an accident requiring further assistance, an emergency contact form is kept in the Office and a mobile phone is carried. The school will contact the parents.

Fires are a valuable part of the Forest School experience but will only be lit according to the procedures below.

Safeguarding

Forest School sessions are led by a trained Forest School Leader (Mr and Mrs Wyril - Level 3 Forest School Practitioners) and supported by members of staff. Everyone involved in Forest School is fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities. Staff members are made aware of the relevant school policies and procedures and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them.

All Great Chart staff and regular volunteers have current DBS checks.

Any concerns about a child's physical or mental well-being will be shared with our named Safeguarding Officers and a Cause for Concern sheet will be filled in as soon as possible, so that our school's Safeguarding Policy can then be followed. Confidentiality should be maintained at all times. Any concerns should only be shared with those who need to know such as the class teacher who can then ensure the correct channels are then informed.

Equality and Inclusion

During Forest School all persons are treated equally. We aim to provide a secure environment in which children can flourish and in which all contributions are valued. Provisions are put in place for children with specific educational needs, for example 1 to 1 provision, or activities tailored specifically to them.

Behaviour

At Forest School we operate within the Behaviour Policy of Great Chart. We praise and reward good behaviour using the established school systems. When a child's behaviour threatens the well-being of themselves or others, and they do not respond to a verbal warning, they may be returned to school.

Medical and Emergency Contact Details

All Medical Care Plans and Emergency contact details are held in the School Office.

Risk Assessments and Risk Management

Risk assessments are in place to cover the following:

- Forest School sessions: including Sensory Activities, Minibeasts and Shelter building
- Tool use
- Campfire Activities

Safety Sweep and checklists

The Forest School leader (Mr and Mrs Wyril from Onodrim) will carry out a thorough sweep of the site for hazards and risks before the group enter the site and appropriate measures will be put in place, e.g. the removal of an object, or warning the group of specific dangers related to the site.

Policy and Procedures for Use of Tools and Equipment at Forest School

Tools and safe use of tools are an important part of Forest School. Their use will be carefully managed by the Forest School Leader with an area of the site set aside for tool use.

- Introduction to each tool will be by an official 'Tool talk'.
- Good practice will be demonstrated by the Forest School Leaders, and members of Great Chart staff, at all times.
- Tools will be introduced to the children only when the Forest School Leader feels the children are ready.
- All tools will be used on a 1:1 adult to child ratio when using them.
- Risk assessments of tool use are carried out in addition to other Forest School activities and reviewed on a regular basis.
- It is not expected for any other adult attending Forest School to use tools with children, only the Forest School Leader.
- All tools will be returned to the tool bag and locked away at the end of each session. This is the Forest School Leaders responsibility.
- All resources and equipment are checked regularly.
- Any unsafe, worn out, dirty or damaged equipment is repaired and cleaned, or replaced.

Policy and Procedures for Lighting Fires at Forest School

Before lighting a fire at Forest School, the following should be in place:

Children must have a secure knowledge of log circle safety:

- Stand behind the log
- Step over and sit down on log
- Stand up, turn around and step over log
- Children are not allowed to cross the circle or step into the circle

In addition to the other resources, water will be available in the Forest School area.

When lighting a fire:

- Only a trained Forest School Practitioner (Lorna Wyril) will take responsibility for the fire. This will be their sole responsibility for the session. They shall be responsible for lighting it, manning it while it is burning and putting it out at the end of the session.
- The fire shall be contained within the area marked out within the centre of the log circle. The ground around shall be cleared of flammable material.
- Check for low overhanging trees.
- Have a container of water beside the fire to put it out and deal with burns.
- The flames of the fire should never reach higher than the knee.
- While the fire is being lit, the children will be engaged in activities elsewhere.
- The fire will be extinguished before the session ends.
- NO fires will be lit during peak fire risk periods.

Cooking

All adults are aware of the following when cooking and eating at Forest School:

- A letter is sent home with all children before a cooking and eating session to make staff aware of specific allergies.
- Everyone should wipe their hands before handling food and drink.
- All foods are stored in airtight containers.
- Only clean equipment is used.
- Everyone is aware of any special dietary needs of the children who have food allergies and any medication.
- Food will be cooked correctly.
- All equipment and waste is cleared away.

The role of the Forest School Leaders

- The Forest School Leaders (Mr and Mrs Wyril) are trained Level 3 Forest School Practitioners. They are responsible for running the sessions.
- The Forest School leader -Mrs Thomas is responsible for organising the planning and running all Forest School sessions.
- The leader has the safety of the children utmost at all times. The leader will carry out a detailed safety check before each session and comply with health and safety risk assessments.
- The leader will ensure that all documentation is relevant and up to date.
- The leader is responsible for all equipment and will ensure that it is checked before use and returned to the resource area after use.

Designated Person Responsibility for each Forest School session

Overall responsibility for the session– Mrs Thomas (Leader) and Mr and Mrs Wyril (Leader) (Risk assessments, safety sweep, and essential equipment, rucksack, planning, observations and next steps for learning).

Some EYFS and KS1 sessions will be taken by the class teacher after training, but they will follow planning from sessions previously run by Mrs Wyril and will not be allowed any tool use or Campfires.

Communication

Forest School usually takes place on a Thursday but on occasion due to timetabling clashes the forest school session may need to change - Mrs Wyril will liaise with staff and choose an appropriate date.

Times are agreed with class teachers. Information is sent home to parents before the start of a series of sessions.

Forest School Rules

- Keep your hands away from your mouth
- Leave things to grow
- Keep within the set boundaries

Routines and Procedures for Forest School

Preparation - The Forest School Leader (Mr and Mrs Wyril) will do a sweep of the site prior to the weekly sessions. The tool bag, water containers and other equipment will be taken as appropriate. Waterproofs will be taken to the classroom prior to session. Spare wellingtons are kept in the EYFS storage area.

Prior to the session children will be toileted, put on their waterproofs. FS safety rules will be shared with the group. Children will put boots on outside the classroom door and walk in pairs to the site.

During the session the children participate in a variety of activities which are totally inclusive, thus catering for all ability levels. They are taught a variety of woodland skills through practical hands on activities. They also learn how to light fires safely. The children learn the care and safe use of a wide range of tools. This is a tightly supervised activity on a 1:1 ratio of adult to children. It is introduced gradually in small steps. Children are encouraged to listen attentively to instructions and to take responsibility for their actions. This is achieved by games that also encourage respect for the environment.

Back at school children will remove wellington boots outdoors or standing on sheeting (if very wet), before entering the classroom.

After the session Equipment will be washed and stored as appropriate. Waterproofs will be dried and hung on rails. Flasks and water containers will be emptied and cleaned out. Tools (if taken) will be cleaned and locked away by Mrs Wyril.

Cancelling Forest School

Forest School may need to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions, e.g. storms, high winds, or blizzards. Adapted classroom activities will take place instead.

The session may also be cancelled if the Forest School Leader (Mrs Wyril) is unable to attend. Campfires cannot take place without a Qualified Forest School Leader – Mrs Wyril: Level 3 Forest School Practitioner.

Clothing Requirements for Forest School

The following clothing requirements are for everyone attending a Forest School session (even adult volunteers).

- Woolly hat/sunhat
- Gloves
- Jacket/waterproof coat
- Fleece/sweatshirt
- Waterproof trousers
- Spare socks
- Wellington Boots/Outdoor Boots

Toileting considerations

All children will visit the toilet before leaving the Classroom. Any children needing the toilet during the session will use the nearest school toilets. KS2 children are able to go unattended, KS1 and EYFS must be accompanied by an adult.

This Forest School Policy has been written in agreement with the Head Teacher, Staff and Governors of Great Chart Primary School. It will be reviewed annually.

