



Hillside Specialist School & College

Providing exceptional education for all students

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Forest Schools Policy



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Introduction

Forest Schools has been defined as ...

“An inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment”

Forest School Ethos

At Hillside we are committed to the ethos of Forest Schools and aim to:

- Fulfil every child's potential
- Develop a love of learning that creates independent and confident learners
- Promote a secure, exciting and fascinating learning environment

- Support a positive relationship with home and the wider community
- Promote children's self-esteem
- Encourage independence
- Promote positive behaviour to ensure the safe running of Forest School sessions
- Provide appropriate adult:child ratios
- Plan sessions that contribute towards a safe environment

This fully supports our Mission Statement:

For all pupils to learn to their full potential in a fun and safe environment.

Purpose/Aims forest Schools

- To provide children with experiences that encourages an appreciation, awareness and knowledge of the natural environment.
- To learn to respect and care for their own local environment.
- To abide by 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.

Environmental Considerations and Conservation

One of the principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. The children are taught about respect and responsibility for the world around them. Both the children and adults are encouraged to respect their environment and to be aware of conservation issues of the wild area around them.

The aim is to promote respect for wildlife, which will be achieved through detailed session plans, evaluation and careful reference to our Woodland Management Plan and Ecological Impact Assessment. If appropriate, reclaimed, recycled and sustainable resources will be used to maintain and develop our forest school site.

Encouraging children to care for the environment is an essential part of Forest schools. In order to encourage the children to look after the site we will always leave it tidy and take care not damage anything growing in it. The FS Leader will monitor the site so that it does not become overused and an alternative area will be found and risk assessed if necessary.

Legislation and Forest School

Legislation of importance to Forest Schools includes the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This act makes it a statutory that an employer has a duty to ensure the Health, Safety and Welfare at work of their employees (in the case of schools adults and children) and any equipment used by them, and that employees are responsible for the Health and Safety of themselves and others they may be affected by their acts. The risk assessments carried out for Forest Schools are written with the Health and Safety of all participants in mind; children, volunteers and members of staff.

The Children's Act 1989, makes it important to consider adult ratios for all activities. Equal opportunities and access for all, clear communication with parents and DSB checks for staff and regular volunteers. Routines and procedures at FS are developed with reference to this act and safeguarding practices.

Hillside School Policies and Forest Schools

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

- Health and Safety Policy
- Risk Assessment Policy and Risk Assessments particular to FS
- Child protection/Safeguarding Policy
- Photographic images of children policy
- Single Equality & Inclusion Policy
- Behaviour Policy behaviour policy particular to FS
- Absconding Policy particular to Forest schools
- Emergency accident/incident policy

Paper copies are included in the Forest Schools Coordinator's File and available electronically on the T.drive under polices.

Particular attention is paid to the following areas:

Health and Safety

As a general rule FS activities will take place within Hillside school grounds. Senior Leadership Team (SLT) or the response team will be radioed to assist in an emergency and we will follow the policies and procedures of Hillside's emergency accident/incident, absconding and behaviour.

If FS activities are taking place off Hillside School grounds an EVOLVE visit plan will be submitted for approval by our Educational Visit Coordinator (EVC) prior to visits taking place. The EVOLVE will include risk assessment, risk reduction strategies and emergency procedures particular to the site, pupils and staff attending.

The FS 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 in the FS Coordinator's File in school.

The FS Leader has an up-to-date certificate in Outdoor First Aid and is in charge of first aid arrangement. Additional first aiders will be present in the group. A first aid kit is taken on all sessions.

In the case of an accident requiring further assistance, SLT will be called on the radio to attend and emergency services called as required, we will then follow Hillside Schools policy for accidents and emergencies. The school will contact the parents.

Safeguarding

Forest schools sessions are led by a trained FS Leader, supported by FS trained support staff, members of Hillside staff and parent volunteers.

Hillside FS practitioners are: Julie Greenall & Sarah Keast (Level 3 leaders)

Sue Nutter & Any Duckworth (Level 2 support assistants)

Everyone involved in FS session is fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities. Staff and volunteers are made aware of the relevant school policies and procedures and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them.

All Hillside 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 only.

Adults or pupils are not allowed to use personal mobiles, I pods or cameras. Photo/video evidence will only be taken using Hillside School's equipment.

Parental permission must be sought from parents before photos/videos can be taken. All parents complete a Hillside School Additional Information/permissions Form.

This form includes information regarding use of photos and videos particular to each pupil in school. The forms are held in the central office. It is the responsibility of FS leader to obtain this information and share it with staff involved in FS activities.

Equality and Inclusion

During Forest schools all persons are treated equally. We aim to provide a secure environment in which children can flourish and in which all contributions are valued, regardless of age gender, ability, or race in line with the schools Single Equality Policy.

Behaviour

At Hillside we are committed to the ethos of Forest School and aim to promote positive behaviour and respect for one another, tools and equipment and the environment.

All adults at FS model appropriate behaviour and safe practices, whilst interacting with children and each other, boundaries are shared, promoting positive reinforcement, choices and consequences are discussed. They will

- Promote the safety and well-being of the children at all times.
- Carry out risk assessments.
- Create a positive learning environment, based on each child's needs.
- Encourage good relationships, based on respect for each other.

- Promote honesty, politeness and kindness through example.
- Ensure fair treatment and equality for all attending and differentiation of activities as appropriate.

Forest Schools Rules and behaviour support

At FS we operate within the Behaviour Policy of Hillside and pupils individual Positive Behaviour Support Plans (PBSP). We praise and reward good behaviour using the established Forest Schools rules and pupils PBSP.

- Staff are aware of pupils PBSP
- A familiar member of staff will accompany pupils during FS sessions
- Any behaviour incidents will be logged and processed according to Hillside behaviour and incident policies and procedures
- A traffic light system will be used by staff during sessions to support pupils and act as a reminder of behaviour expectations.
- A general **Rules of Forest schools** will be used with symbol support
 1. Respect each other
 2. Leave things to grow
 3. Keep with the boundaries
 4. Keep hand away from your mouth
 5. Listen to adult instructions
- Any pupils behaving in a manner that is considered dangerous or unacceptable will be given an opportunity to take time away from the group to calm, reflect on their behaviour and modify behaviour appropriately. If behaviour is not modified to a safe and acceptable manner the pupil will have to be withdrawn from the group. This is the decision of the FS leader and afterwards appropriate follow up behaviour support will be explored to hopefully enable the pupil to join the next group session.

Medical and Emergency Contact Details

All Medical Care Plans and Emergency contact details are held in the School Office and are shared with class teachers.

If FS activities are taking place off site an EVOLVE visit plan will be submitted for approval by our Educational Visit Coordinator (EVC) prior to visits taking place, this will include risk assessments, risk management strategies and emergency procedures specific to the site, pupils staff and volunteers involved. The visit leader will carry all necessary documents and emergency contact details of pupils

Emergency Action Plan

This EAP (Emergency Action Plan) is kept in the top of the FS back pack at all times.

This will include specific instructions for staff to follow.

As a general rule FS activities will take place within Hillside school grounds and SLT will be radioed to assist in an emergency and we will follow Hillside medical emergency and incident procedures.

If the activities are off Hillside school grounds a site/ activity specific Emergency Action Plan will be included in the EVOLVE visit plan and carried with the visit leader.

Risk Assessments and Risk Management

On site Risk assessments are in place to covering the following:

- Hillside school grounds
- FS schools classroom
- Tool use
- Camp fires
- Den/shelter building
- Sensory and exploring activities

These Risk Assessments can be found in the FS Coordinator's File. Additional group risk assessment are also completed that are specific to group or children involved in activities in the case of any incidents measures will be taken to reduce to risks. The Risk assessments are approved by SLT and regularly reviewed.

Safety Sweep and checklists

The Forest School leader 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. The safety sweep will be recorded on a safety sweep form and kept in the FS planning file.

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

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

- Introduction to each tool will be by an official 'Tool Talk'. (These can be found in the FS coordinators file). We may also use Social Stories and visual communication to promote safe tool use with some pupils who would struggle to understand a tools talk.
- Good practice will be demonstrated by the Forest Schools Leaders at all times.
- Tools will be introduced to the children only when the Forest Schools Leader feels the children are ready.
- All tools will be used on a 1:1 adult to child ratio
- Risk assessments of tool use are carried out in addition to other FS activities and reviewed on a regular basis.

- It is not expected for any other adult attending FS to use tools with children, only the FS Leader and trained FS support staff.
- All tools will be returned to the tool box and locked away at the end of each session. This is the Forest Schools 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 schools

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

- Children must have a secure knowledge of fire circle rules and its importance regarding safety, this will be communicated to the children through, rules with visual support and social stories as appropriate to the specific children involved.

When entering the fire circle

- Stand behind the log
- Step over and sit down on log

When exiting the fire circle

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

- Some children will be assigned 1-1 support as necessary
- Always 1-1 support from a FS leader or assistant for cooking on the fire.

In addition to the other resources, we will take:

- A large container full of water.
- A first aid kit and a burns kit
- Fire resistant gloves for staff and pupils for use when cooking or tending to the fire.

Lighting a fire:

Only a trained Forest School Practitioner will take responsibility for the fire. This will be their sole responsibility for the session. They shall be responsible for:

- Lighting the fire, 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 fire 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.

Food Hygiene

Staff have knowledge of food hygiene -(regular training provided at Hillside)

- A food hygiene policy is in place and staff and volunteers made aware of this
- Staff have knowledge of food hygiene (regular training provided at Hillside)

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

- Everyone should wash their hands before handling food and drink, facilities for this will be provided.
- All foods are stored in air tight containers.
- Only clean equipment is used.
- Everyone is aware of any special dietary needs of the children who have food allergies or religious considerations.
- Any medication and copies of Care Plans will be in school office or if the session is off site carried in the FS rucksack along with Evolve Visit Plan and any other necessary paper work.
- Food will be cooked correctly.
- All equipment and waste is cleared away.

The role of the Forest School Leader

- The Forest Schools leader is a trained Level 3 Forest School Practitioner and holds an up to date ITC Outdoor First Aid certificate. They are responsible for organising the planning and running all Forest School sessions.
- The Forest School leader has the safety of the children uppermost 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 will carry an emergency pack at all times.
- The leader is responsible for all equipment and will ensure that it is checked before use and returned to the resource area after use.
- The Forest School leader will keep an accident book and keep parents fully informed of any incidents that may occur during a session, eg, trips, falls, stings, etc.
- Hillside School policies for recording and reporting accidents will be followed by designated Person Responsibility for each Forest Schools session (Julie Greenall or Sarah Keast - FS level 3)
- Risk assessments, safety sweep, and essential equipment, rucksack, planning, observations and next steps for learning are the responsibility of the designated person responsible for the session.

Routines and Procedures for Forest Schools

Preparation - The Forest schools Leader (Julie Greenall or Sarah Keast) will do a sweep of the site prior to the weekly sessions.

Julie Greenall & Sarah Keast will check the FS ruck sack contains all essential items. The Emergency Action Plan is kept in the top of the FS rucksack and all supporting adults are aware of this. First Aid kit is also carried in the rucksack.

As a general rule activities will take place on school grounds and the need for suitable clothing for the weather. e.g. waterproofs, wellies, sun cream can be addressed prior to sessions in the FS classroom. Spares are available for children who do not have them. When off school premises consideration need to be included in the EVOLVE visit plan.

Prior to sessions children will be given the opportunity to go to the toilet, if activities off school premises considerations for toileting will be included in the EVOLVE visit plan.

Considerations will also be taken for refreshments, hot/cold drinks and snacks and hand washing facilities and included in EVOLVE.

During the session children participate in a variety of activities which are totally inclusive, thus catering for all ability levels. The children will be encouraged to explore, coming together as a group and regular head counts will be part of the routine. Staff and children will be aware of all site boundaries and staff will monitor the boundaries/exits during free exploration times.

After the session equipment will be washed and stored as appropriate in the FS classroom. 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 in the FS classroom. The essential equipment FS ruck sack will be put away and any items used replaced.

Cancelling Forest Schools

FS may need to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions, e.g. high winds, blizzards, torrential rain.

Adapted classroom activities will take place instead.

FS may not be able to go ahead if there are not enough adults to accompany us. If no replacement adult can be found then the session will be cancelled. The session may also be cancelled if the FS Leader or Assistant is unable to attend. Campfires cannot take place without a Qualified Forest School leader.

Leaders - Julie Greenall & Sarah Keast : Level 3 Forest School Practitioner.

Assistants - Amy Duckworth & Sue Nutter level 2 Forest School Practitioners

Essential equipment needed at Forest School sessions

A rucksack -- containing the following essential items will always accompany the group:

- EAP (Emergency Action Plan) or EVOLVE visit plan

- Mobile phone if off school site see EVOLVE visit plan
- On school site staff radio walkie talkies
- Medical Care Plans if off school site see EVOLVE visit plan
- Wet wipes
- Protective gloves
- First Aid Kit
- Carry bag for dirty / wet items
- Clothing and refreshment requirements for Forest schools in accordance with weather conditions.
- Activity planning and Risk assessments

Insurance requirements

Forest Schools is covered by the County Councils Public Liability Insurance.

Evidence of the County Council's Public Liability Insurance can be found on the Insurance pages of the Schools' Portal:

https://schoolsportal.lancsngfl.ac.uk/view_sp.asp?siteid=6370&pageid=40638&e=e

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