



Forest School (OWL) Policy

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2 Statement of intent

At Oakfield, we appreciate the value of a holistic approach to education.

Through our Forest School, we aim to imbue within our pupils an appreciation and respect for the natural environment through hands-on experiences and exploration, to develop their confidence, social and communication skills, and to encourage teamwork by engaging in outdoor activities.

This policy is designed to ensure that the Forest School is a beneficial experience for pupils by making staff aware of their duties and expectations, and ensuring that the wellbeing of pupils is considered at all times and appropriate safeguarding measures are in place for all Forest School activities.

3 Legal Framework

3.1 This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Equality Act 2010
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013
- DfE (2022) 'Keeping children safe in education'
- DfE (2022) 'Health and safety: responsibilities and duties for schools'
- DfE (2020) 'SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years'

3.2 This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Forest School Activities Risk Assessment
- Equality Information and Objectives Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

4 Roles and responsibilities

4.1 Headteacher

- 4.1.1 Ensuring staff adhere to the relevant policies and that pupils are aware of their responsibilities.
- 4.1.2 Contacting a play inspector to certify that the chosen location is safe to use, where necessary.
- 4.1.3 Liaising with the location's landowner or the site manager to ensure that staff and pupils are aware of any potential hazards.
- 4.1.4 Ensuring that a separate Forest School Activities Risk Assessment is conducted to identify, evaluate, and manage the specific risks associated with the Forest School, its location and the activities planned.
- 4.1.5 Ensuring that there are arrangements in place for monitoring and reporting incidents associated with the Forest School.
- 4.1.6 Ensuring that parents are informed with sufficient notice about planned Forest School activities and any requirements, e.g. clothing and equipment needs.
- 4.1.7 Liaising with the SENCO, where necessary, to ensure the Forest School is inclusive for pupils with SEND and reasonable adjustments are made to ensure additional needs are accommodated.
- 4.1.8 Appointing a Outdoor Education Leader with the relevant experience and qualifications, e.g. a Level 3 Certificate from the Forest School Association.
- 4.1.9 Reviewing the effectiveness of this policy on an annual basis and communicating any changes to staff, parents, and pupils.

4.2 Outdoor Education Leader

- 4.2.1 Conducting a detailed health and safety check before Forest School activities.
- 4.2.2 Adhering at all times to the Forest School Activities Risk Assessment.
- 4.2.3 Carrying a fully stocked first-aid kit during all Forest School sessions.
- 4.2.4 Holding an up-to-date Outdoors First Aid certificate and leading first aid arrangements.
- 4.2.5 Inspecting equipment and tools before use to ensure they are safe for use, and that damaged or defective items are not used.
- 4.2.6 Keeping and maintaining an incident log to record any incidents that occur during Forest School activities.
- 4.2.7 Planning and delivering Forest School sessions, in collaboration with the link teacher, that are engaging, informative and develop pupils' skills and appreciation of the environment.
- 4.2.8 Adhering to this policy at all times during Forest School activities.
- 4.2.9 Ensuring that pupils are always accounted for and supervised.
- 4.2.10 Reporting any concerns and incidents to the responsible teacher and asking for guidance as appropriate.
- 4.2.11 Reporting any safeguarding incidents to the DSL and asking for guidance as appropriate.
- 4.2.12 Reporting concerns regarding the provision for pupils with SEND to the SENCO.
- 4.2.13 Ensuring that pupils are always respectful to each other, staff and the natural environment.
- 4.2.14 Managing pupils in line with the Behaviour Policy when necessary.

4.3 SENCO

- 4.3.1 Assessing additional individual needs of pupils with SEND prior to Forest School activities and promoting measures to ensure pupils with SEND can participate safely.
- 4.3.2 Ensuring the SEND Policy is adhered to at all times during Forest School activities.
- 4.3.3 Liaising with the headteacher to ensure additional provision is available for pupils with SEND as required.
- 4.3.4 Ensuring that the provision put in place for pupils with SEND is monitored for effectiveness throughout the duration of the Forest School activities.

4.4 DSL

- 4.4.1 Ensuring the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is adhered to at all times during Forest School activities.
- 4.4.2 Consulting the headteacher and Outdoor Education Leader on measures necessary to ensure pupils are safeguarded adequately during activities.

5 Safeguarding

- 5.1 Volunteers for the Forest School will only be allowed to supervise pupils alone if they have an enhanced DBS check with barred list information.

Volunteers without an enhanced DBS check will be supervised by a member of staff at all times.

- 5.2 Measures will be implemented to ensure that pupils' exposure to members of the public during Forest School activities is minimised as much as possible.
- 5.3 Pupils will be instructed and reminded frequently to remain within the boundary areas marked by the flags, and to avoid leaving the sight of staff and interacting with members of the public.
- 5.4 All members of staff will report any safeguarding concerns to the DSL immediately.
- 5.5 The DSL will deal with safeguarding concerns in a timely and appropriate manner in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- 5.6 Pupils will be able to use 'bubble time' as a way of signalling they wish to talk to, disclose or be approached about something on their mind. This will mirror the indoor processes but may need to be more reflective of an outdoor environment.

6 Supervision

6.1 1:30 - Minimum for safety

This is the minimum ratio required for children to be outdoors in the forest school area, with this ratio children will be in direct line of sight at all times and learning will be whole-class based.

6.2 1:15 - Minimum for safety and a focussed learning activity

This ratio will enable the Outdoor Education Leader to run a focus activity with pupils and where appropriate, the other adult(s) will supervise and watch children within the boundary areas marked by the blue flags to ensure they are safe. At all times the forest school lead will maintain full responsibility for the children.

6.3 1:8 - Ideal for safety and learning

This ratio will enable the Outdoor Education Leader to run a focus activity with pupils and where appropriate, the other adult(s) will supervise and watch children within the boundary areas marked by the blue flags to ensure they are safe. At all times the forest school lead will maintain full responsibility for the children.

7 Tools

- 7.1 Pupils will be taught how to use tools and equipment independently and safely during activities.
- 7.2 Staff will demonstrate the safe use of all tools before pupils are allowed to use them.
- 7.3 The Outdoor Education Leader assesses the risks posed by particular tools and consequently implements suitable staff: pupil ratios to supervise pupils using these tools.
- 7.4 All activities planned, including those using tools, will be risk assessed by the Outdoor Education Leader.
- 7.5 All tools will be kept clean and fit for use; tools which are damaged or defective will not be used.
- 7.6 An inventory of all tools is kept to ensure they can be accounted for and any lost or misplaced items identified.
- 7.7 If a member of staff, volunteer or pupil suffers an injury during the use of a tool, the activity will be suspended, and the injury will be handled in line with the First Aid Policy.

8 Materials

- 8.1 Pupils will be encouraged to interact with the environment, which includes touching and moving materials, e.g. rocks and sticks safely and are warned about not ingesting poisonous plants and berries.
- 8.2 Pupils will be allowed to carry sticks, provided they are appropriate in length, width and weight and they maintain a suitable distance from others when carrying the stick to avoid injury.
- 8.3 Staff will supervise and encourage pupils to work together to move larger materials, e.g. branches.

- 8.4 Pupils will be asked to return any materials to the environment before leaving the Forest School.
- 8.5 Staff will supervise interactions with the natural world, e.g. climbing, and intervene where there is a substantial risk posed by the pupil to themselves or others.
- 8.6 Pupils will be taught about the importance of not damaging or defacing living nature, e.g. trees and plants, when interacting with the environment and its materials.
- 8.7 The Outdoor Education Leader will provide materials during sessions, e.g. rope, and encourage pupils to use them to interact with their environment.

9 Wildlife

- 9.1 The Outdoor Education Leader will plan sessions in order to allow pupils to engage with wildlife as much as possible while considering safety at all times.
- 9.2 Pupils will be encouraged to discover and learn about the variety of wildlife that lives within the Forest School.
- 9.3 Pupils will be taught the importance of not disturbing natural habitats and respecting wildlife.
- 9.4 Staff, volunteers and pupils will be instructed by the Outdoor Education Leader about potential risks from local wildlife and the necessary precautions to take, e.g. how to spot and avoid stinging nettles and poisonous plants.
- 9.5 Pupils will only be allowed to get close to, touch, move or pick up plants or wildlife where it is safe to do so.
- 9.6 Instances of deliberate harm or damage to wildlife will be managed in line with the school's Behaviour Policy.
- 9.7 Pupils will be instructed that they are not to consume any food they find, e.g. berries.

10 Fire

Fires will only be lit in designated areas surrounded by a safe zone and under the direction of the Outdoor Education Leader. A suitably trained member of staff who is equipped to manage fire safety is on site at all times when fire is being taught about or is present.

10.1 Lighting fires

- 10.1.1 The fire will only be lit once it is confirmed that all safety equipment, e.g. a sand bucket, is in place. The fire will be supervised by an adult at all times.
- 10.1.2 The fire will be created using safe fire-lighting equipment with no accelerants used. Safe means of extinguishing the fire, e.g. a sand bucket, will be located nearby in the event of an emergency.

10.2 Cooking at a campfire

- 10.2.1 The Outdoor Education Leader will consider what food can be cooked and eaten by pupils using the fire, with any allergies of staff and pupils considered in addition to other dietary requirements. The Outdoor Education Leader will ensure that food is transported and stored safely.
- 10.2.2 Food that is to be eaten by pupils will be inspected by a member of staff to ensure it is fit for consumption.

10.3 Extinguishing fires

- 10.3.1 Safe means of extinguishing the fire, e.g. a sand bucket, will be located nearby in the event of an emergency.
- 10.3.2 The Outdoor Education Leader will ensure the fire is extinguished safely before the session ends. The fire will be doused down with water and stirred until all smoke and steam has ceased. Whenever possible, all fuels will be burnt off to ash.

11 Fire safety

- 11.1 Fire areas will be surrounded by logs at least 1.5 metres from the fire pit. The logs represent the campfire boundary. Seating will be organised around the outside of the fire boundary. Once seated around the campfire, staff will ensure that pupils remain seated until directed to move.
- 11.2 When the campfire is in use, pupils will not be permitted to access the area without permission. Activities taking place near to the fire involving pupils, e.g. cooking, are supervised at a ratio of 1:2.
- 11.3 If there is a clear wind direction, seating in the line of smoke will be avoided. If wind direction is variable, staff will rearrange seating where possible. Pupils will be advised on how to handle fire smoke in an appropriate way, e.g. by turning their head to one side, covering their face and closing their eyes. Asthma sufferers will be seated in positions well away from the line of smoke.
- 11.4 The Outdoor Education Leader should ensure that any large remains of wood, especially when using a long log fire, are separated from one another.

- 11.5 Participants working with the fire will ensure that long hair is tied back and loose clothing is fastened and secured.
- 11.6 Appropriate arrangements will be made for pupils with SEND on how to approach and deal with campfires.

12 Clothing

- 12.1.1 Clothing requirements are subject to change and weather dependent but will include the following:
- Long sleeved t-shirt
 - Trousers
 - Waterproof trousers or dungarees and jacket
 - Wellington boots
 - Trainers
 - Sunhat
 - Winter gear, e.g. fleece jacket, leggings, gloves.
- 12.1.2 Pupils will bring their clothes into school. In order to make Forest School accessible to all pupils, the school will ensure spare clothing in multiple sizes is available to be lent to disadvantaged pupils where necessary in an emergency.
- 12.1.3 Clothing and footwear appropriate to the Forest School environment, activity and weather will be worn at all times. Pupils will not take part in Forest School activities if they do not have the appropriate clothing and the school is unable to provide its own; alternative arrangements will be put in place for the pupil and this may be classed as 'not ready' in the behaviour policy subject to professional discretion and context.
- 12.1.4 Clothing will be worn to suit the weather; in cases of severe weather, the Outdoor Education Leader will decide if it is safe for the session to begin or continue.

13 Toilet and hygiene

- 13.1 Pupils will be encouraged to use the toilet at school before the Forest School session begins.
- 13.2 The Outdoor Education Leader will make staff aware of the toilet facilities available for use during sessions. Pupils will be able to return to the school building to use the toilets and adults will let use the radios to seek assistance or support.
- 13.3 Anti-bacterial wipes or hand sanitiser will be available to allow pupils to clean their hands when necessary outdoors.
- 13.4 Clean drinking water will be supplied.

14 Behaviour

- 14.1 Pupils will be informed of their behaviour expectations and that poor behaviour may result in them being unable to participate in the Forest School. The Outdoor Education Leader will establish set rules which are repeated during each session in order to promote pupils' ability to explore independently while keeping safe and behaving appropriately. These rules will be displayed and match the school rules.
- 14.2 Positive behaviour, e.g. teamwork and consideration for others, will be promoted through planned activities. All staff will model good behaviour, e.g. co-operation and caring for the environment, during Forest School activities. Pupils will be made aware that positive behaviour, e.g. displaying respect for the environment, means they will be trusted to explore and lead sessions with greater independence.
- 14.3 Challenging behaviour is managed in line with the Behaviour Policy. Challenging behaviour will initially be dealt with by one-to-one adult support, where possible, to identify its cause. Pupils persistently displaying challenging behaviour, or acting in a manner that places themselves or others at risk of harm, will not be allowed to participate in the rest of the Forest School session; they will be escorted away and supervised away from other pupils.

15 Inclusivity

- 15.1 Forest School activities will be planned in line with the school's SEND Policy to ensure that pupils with SEND can participate as much as possible.

- 15.2 The Outdoor Education Leader will liaise with the school office and the parents of pupils with medical conditions or allergies to identify and assess any additional individual needs for consideration prior to Forest School activities.
- 15.3 Pupils with SEND will be provided with supervision during Forest School activities where required; supervision support can be provided by the responsible teacher and SENDCO.
- 15.4 Sensitivity to the religious and cultural beliefs of pupils will be displayed at all times, e.g. in regard to their clothing or foods they may not wish to eat.
- 15.5 All pupils will be encouraged to participate and will be made to feel that their experiences and contributions are valued in order to build their confidence and self-esteem.

16 Incidents and emergencies

- 16.1 At least one trained first-aider will be present during all Forest School activities.
- 16.2 The Outdoor Education Leader will create and explain to staff and pupils the procedures to be followed in the event of an incident, e.g. the area where all pupils are to gather in order to be easily supervised.
- 16.3 The Outdoor Education Leader will carry a fully stocked first-aid kit at all times during Forest School sessions. All incidents, injuries and illnesses will be managed in line with the First Aid Policy.
- 16.4 Staff will be aware of any allergies pupils may have and carry suitable medication, e.g. an adrenaline auto-injector (AAI) as part of the first aid kit.
- 16.5 Staff will carry radios to be able to contact each other.
- 16.6 In the event of an injury, staff will provide immediate assistance and a trained first aider will remain with the injured person until the situation is resolved.
- 16.7 The Outdoor Education Leader will assess injuries and decide if further medical attention is needed; the emergency services will be contacted immediately where necessary or help sought from inside the school building.