Forest Schools Procedure 2026 - 28

Headteacher: Mrs P Lyall

Chair of Governors: Mrs Clare Godfrey

Review: June 2028

Hodnet Primary School Forest Schools/Outdoor learning Policy

Rationale:

At Hodnet School we believe that it is an important part of a child's development to experience outdoor play and learning in an outdoor environment. Here we are lucky enough to have a school setting which is surrounded by a rich and varied natural environment, the school grounds themselves are extensive and have developed in such a way that respects the natural environment. This is something that both staff, children and parents at Hodnet Primary School value and respect.

It is our aim to improve children's experiences, appreciation, knowledge and understanding of the natural environment through following the Forest Schools initiative. This will not only be limited to their understanding of the potential of trees but also to their understanding of the biodiversity that woodlands can offer. Forest School at Hodnet School offers a learner centred approach, where participants can learn through a combination of self-directed play and adult initiated exploration given the opportunity to develop their curiosity, confidence, self-esteem, creativity, empathy, communication skills, knowledge of the natural environment and ability to assess risk.

Guidelines:

- Forest Schools will be developed on the school site and designated for Forest Schools and outdoor/ woodland learning sessions.
- The site will also be used for outdoor learning/ woodland sessions. These are teacher led activities to develop respect and care for the local environment. Not all outdoor learning/ woodland sessions are run by Forest School trained practitioners on these occasions they will not include tool work or fires. Only Forest School trained practitioners will light fires.
- Children will have regular experiences in the Forest Schools area, in Reception this is usually weekly.
- The Forest Schools area design has been given careful consideration.
- Children should be able to change, control and manage their Forest Schools Area.
- The aim is to promote respect for wildlife, which will be achieved through detailed session plans, evaluation and continuous assessments of the environmental impact on the site.

Aims of Hodnet Forest Schools:

- To give children and adults a shared understanding of the ethos of Forest Schools.
- To allow children learn and experience other curriculum areas in an outdoor setting.
- To enable children to be confident, self motivated and independent, this will transfer into other areas of learning and development.
- To facilitate children in developing self esteem and self confidence, which will be transferable into all other areas of their school and personal development.
- To provide opportunities for children to measure their own risk taking and as a result gain in confidence.
- To promote curiosity and exploration of the world.
- To support children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual

development.

Safeguarding statement of intent

Safeguarding all our children is of paramount importance to us therefore, all necessary risk assessments are carried out prior to any activity and full DBS checks are carried out when recruiting new staff or welcoming volunteers and visitors. We are a “Safer School” and staff and governors who are involved in the recruitment process have attended “Safer Recruitment Training.” New staff are made aware of all the related Safeguarding documents including the Child Protection policy as part of the induction process and all staff receive Child Protection Awareness training regularly.

Learning opportunities:

We will endeavour to create a range of learning opportunities which will be linked with the wider curriculum and promote child development in line with the Forest Schools ethos. These will reflect the needs and requirements of the children built upon reflection from previous Forest Schools sessions. Learning opportunities during Forest Schools sessions will also incorporate a proportion of Child lead learning; where children will be able to choose their own activities and develop these in a way they wish to. In order to allow children to do this a well stocked and varied “treasure box” will be provided for the children to access. Children will the have the opportunity to use tools and resources which they would be unable to in the indoor classroom. Essentially the Forest Schools area should be regarded as a classroom outdoors.

Hodnet School Policies and Forest School sessions

Forest School leaders should be familiar with the following school policies:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Risk Assessments
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Asthma Policy if asthmatics are attending sessions
- Healthy Eating and Drinking Policy
- Allergens policy
- Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Policy
- Relational Behaviour Policy,

Particular attention is paid to the following areas:

Health and Safety considerations:

The Forest Schools ethos allows children to take responsibility for themselves and begin to measure the risks that they take, however sufficient adult responsibility will be taken during the Forest Schools sessions, there will always be a ratio of 1 adult to every 8 children in an outdoor Forest Schools session. All Forest School activities will be carried out in line with the School Health and Safety Policy.

An overall Risk Assessment has been produced for the Forest Schools area and will be updated annually. Pre session Risk assessments will always be carried out before session, when the site will

be checked for any changed and weather conditions will be taken into consideration. Before any specific activities, such as fire lighting, specific risk assessments will be carried out.

The Forest Schools leader carries an emergency first Aid Kit and all inhalers with them at all times to the forest Schools area. Clean water from an un-opened bottle is always available with the group.

Medical and Emergency Contact Details

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

Legislation and Forest School

Legislation of importance to Forest School 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 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, clear communication with parents and DSB checks for staff and regular volunteers. Routines and procedures at Wild at Heart are developed with reference to this act and safeguarding practices.

Equality and inclusion at Forest Schools:

In Forest Schools all children and adults are treated equally and provision will be made to ensure that all children can participate fully. This is in line with the Schools policy on equality and inclusion and SEND.

Cancellation of Forest Schools sessions:

This will be done at the professional judgement of the Forest Schools leader on the day of the Forest Schools session, the group will be informed as soon as possible and their session will be rescheduled if needed to. Forest Schools sessions will be run unless there is a real need for cancellation, these include:

- Member of staff illness which compromises the adult to child ratio.
- Severe weather conditions – eg High winds which compromise safety of participants.
- Any situation identified in the pre session risk assessment which poses a Health and Safety problem.

Behaviour

At Hodnet School we operate within the Relational Behavioural policy of the school. We praise and reward good behaviour using the established school systems. When a child's behaviour threatens the well-being of him/herself or others, and he/she does not respond to a verbal warning, he/she may be returned to school.

Clothing: (Personal Protective Equipment)

Children will have suitable clothing for Forest Schools at all times, they will be advised on this and also expected to make their own judgments about their needs. A collection of waterproof Personal protective equipment will be provided by the school for those who need it.

Lost Child at Forest School Procedure

In the event of a child leaving the Forest School site unnoticed, we will carry out the procedures below in order to establish the whereabouts of the child as soon as possible. We will ensure that a search is made for the child straight away and the relevant persons are notified at the appropriate time.

Guidelines for the procedure

- Immediately the leader will gather the rest of the group together at the firepit area and keep them there together with the supporting adult (usually the TA that is with the class).
- The leader will ask the remaining children where they last saw the missing child calmly. This hopefully will establish where the child was last seen.
- The lead teacher will use the walkie talkie to inform the Headteacher (or Deputy if the head if offsite) of the situation and to request support ie) 1 or 2 additional adults to join the search.
- The Forest School leader with the Head (or Deputy) and an additional adult will search the site using 1,2,3 Where Are You. Children are familiar with this and will be able to hear wherever they are.
- Adults will first diligently search the perimeter, behind the container, sheds and in the garden area, then move to search inside the building.
- If the child is not found quickly, the Forest School leader will take the rest of the class back into the school setting and ensure the child has not returned to the school. The additional adults will continue to search outdoors.
- If, after searching the entire site (inside and outside), there is still no sign of the child the Head teacher will call the parents and the police.

After the incident (if the child was hiding and found relatively quickly)

- Parents should be informed sensitively and the events surrounding this should be discussed.

- The child should be comforted and the incident should be discussed sensitively with them while re-iterating the importance of following instructions and the school rules for keeping everyone safe. The Head will document the incident in the Behaviour Log.