



Outdoor Learning at WFS Policy

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Signature:			

Introduction

Outdoor Learning is a broad term that includes; discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the natural world, engaging in environmental and adventure activities.

At WFS this includes:

- Forest School
- John Muir Award
- Gardening

Forest School

Forest School is an approach to learning that takes children into the great outdoors, whatever the weather, to explore the natural environment. Being child-led, trained practitioners monitor the children but also encourage exploration and discovery and support them to take risks.

Forest School offers the opportunity to access experiences such as shelter building, mud play, climbing, craft using natural materials, planting, mini beast hunts and so much more. This allows pupils to explore, take risks and learn in their own way. In addition, pupils can access experiences that are survival skills based, such as fire lighting, campfire cooking, sawing and whittling.

Time at Forest School is often called a Forest School session rather than a lesson, to help determine the difference between this and classroom activities. It is not a series of activities, but rather a plethora of possible experiences.

Forest School is run by trained Forest School Leaders who use the Forest School pedagogy to provide sessions that develop risk taking, curiosity, resilience, perseverance and creativity. They can also teach the survival skills such as fires and tools. The use of fires and tools can only take place when a Forest School Leader is present and the *Procedures for Having Fires at Forest School* (Appendix 1) are followed.

The use of sticks and ropes can take place without the Forest School Leader being present, however their use will need to be included within a risk assessment, that will have been signed off before the session.

All staff running Forest School sessions will watch the Forest School Association clip (<https://www.forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school/>) to remind them of its purpose and ethos. All staff leading sessions will read the Forest School Risk Assessments provided by Richard Liggitt before taking pupils outside. This is particularly important when using sticks or rope.

Aims of Forest School

1. To provide children with experiences that encourage an appreciation, awareness and knowledge of the natural environment.
2. To provide new experiences and challenges for pupils in a safe risk-taking environment.
3. To support the development of the pupils' emotional and mental being.

The Role of the Forest School Leaders:

We have two accredited Forest School Leaders at WFS (Richard Liggitt and Julie Grainger). They do not need to be present at every Forest School session, unless pupils are using tools or fires will be set.

The Forest School Leaders:

- hold an up-to-date Forest School accreditation.
- hold an up to date First Aid Certificate and Food Hygiene Certificate.
- will ensure staff are sent a blank risk assessment at the start of the year, or the start of a new block of Forest School sessions. This will be completed by the member of staff leading the session.
- will ensure a detailed safety check happens before each session either by themselves or a member of staff using the area (part of Risk Assessment).
- will ensure that the area is well maintained and safe for use by pupils i.e., regular checks for new plants, tree safety, weather conditions, etc.
- will ensure staff using the area complete relevant risk assessments.
- will ensure that first aid kit/emergency packs are available for use in the area for each session.
- will ensure staff understand about storing equipment safely and correctly.

John Muir Award

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme focussed on wild places. It encourages awareness and responsibility for the natural environment in a spirit of fun and adventure.

Aims of the John Muir Award

The John Muir Award aims to encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to discover, enjoy and care for the planet's wild places.

In order to achieve a John Muir Award, pupils have to complete a range of activities that involve the following four challenges:

- Discover a wild place
- Explore it
- Conserve it
- Share your experiences

This award is a hands-on, experiential award where the pupils will learn about nature in the school grounds and outside in the wider community. They will be involved in

conservation work and survival skills to enable them to develop an understanding of, and love for, the outdoor environment. This could include planting trees, bulbs, wildflowers and vegetables. It can be weeding, and digging and raking. It can be camp fire lighting and cooking. It maybe sawing wood to make bird boxes, mini beast homes or a compost bin. The experiences depend on the project itself which is chosen by the pupils. Survival skills will only be taught by a Forest School Leader.

WFS will provide an opportunity to explore wild habitats in local places that allow pupils to really explore nature. There is an element of map work and navigation that gives our pupils an insight into how to trek into wild places and keep safe. Where John Muir activities take place away from WFS, Educational Visits protocols will be followed (see *Educational Visits Policy*).

Gardening

Gardening provides a great introduction to the environment around them. Pupils will learn about many different flowers, fruits and vegetables, they will physically feel them in their own hands and smell them. This sensory introduction is concrete and solid and will leave them feeling good. It will allow the pupils a real time experience of the world outside and will develop a feeling of ownership and responsibility. All staff are encouraged to run gardening sessions.

Gardens are found in a variety of areas around school. Staff running gardening lessons will need to complete the Risk Assessments provided regarding clothing, tools and cleanliness.

Health and Safety

Outdoor Learning will support WFS pupils 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.

Environmental Impact

Outdoor learning has environmental awareness at the heart of its ethos. Wherever possible, environmentally friendly products and recycled materials are used. Good practice is modelled by adults showing children that the world in which we live in should be cared for.

Behaviour

At Forest School, we operate within the WFS Behaviour Policy. 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.

Appendix 1 – Procedures for Having Fires at Forest School

Fires can only be set and managed by the Forest School Leaders (who will hold a valid first aid certificate and food hygiene certificate).

Fire Pit Area

The fire pit area is a marked off area where a fire is usually surrounded with seating positioned safely circling this area or an area specifically chosen by the Forest School Leader when using a fire bowl. Seating may be specialist seating or logs. The seating must be secure and a safe distance away (1.5m is recommended apart from inside the tipi where appropriate staffing will compensate for this) from the fire area. Leaders will check this area before the start of each session.

The fire pit area will be away from plants or tree roots to limit the damage to wildlife.

Children and adults (except the Forest School Leader) never walk into the fire pit area. Everyone must walk around fire pit area; this will be demonstrated before and regularly during forest school sessions.

Before Lighting a Fire

A risk assessment will have been completed and approved.

Check the weather conditions are appropriate; do not light fires in windy or tinder dry conditions.

Ensure the group is ready and prepared for a fire in terms of behaviour and safety.

Ensure the following:

- You have an appropriate risk assessment.
- You have water and a watering can to extinguish the fire safely.
- You have a plunge pool for the immediate treatment of burns.
- You have a fire blanket.
- You have a first aider present.
- You have first aid supplies to treat burns.
- You have matches, a lighter or another safe way to light the fire (do not use fire lighters or chemicals to light a fire).
- You have a safe area with no overhanging trees or ground, vegetation or boundaries which may catch fire.
- You have the appropriately sized wood to start and maintain a fire.
- You have enough wood close to the fire to use as needed.
- You have explained to everyone what will happen and reminded them of the health and safety procedures around fires.
- Ensure you are wearing appropriate clothing (no loose clothing).
- Ensure long hair should be tied back.
- Ensure fuel for the fire is stored at a safe location, approximately 1.5m from the flame.

After Lighting a Fire

Whilst a fire is lit you must ensure that there is an appropriate person with the fire at all times.

You must ensure that the fire is kept under control and not built too big for the area.

All wood should be placed carefully on the fire and not thrown.

Only natural wood should be used; no treated timber or any other materials should be burnt.

If, for whatever reason, a fire becomes too risky an activity it must be extinguished immediately.

Putting Out the Fire

The fire should be allowed to burn down as much as possible. Time should be factored in to ensure the fire is safely extinguished. Using a watering can filled with water, gently pour the water over the fire. Ensure that you do this slowly and carefully as the steam and ash can burn; you need to wear thick fire-retardant gloves, Forest School Leaders only to do this.

Check that there is no heat left in the fire by using the back of your hand; use more water if necessary, until no heat can be felt.

Only leave the fire pit area when you are certain the fire is completely out.