



The Forest School Ethos

Forest School is 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 with trees.



The development of Forest School began in Britain in the mid-1990s; it is based on a Scandinavian idea developed in the 50's focusing on teaching children about the natural world. Forest School is a specialised learning approach that sits within and complements the wider context of outdoor and woodland education.

The Forest School approach is applied at all Portland Nurseries' settings with Oakwood House being our accredited Forest School. The wonderful outdoor space at Oakwood House provides the ideal opportunity for Forest School activities with the woodland and extensive gardens providing all the natural resources children need and exciting opportunities to achieve and develop confidence.



Activities take place in all weathers and we have qualified Forest School practitioners who support the nursery team. Protected trees provide the canopy and a mixture of bushes give plenty of lower level cover ideal for hide & seek. Wood piles and wild flowers attract insects and small mammals and the children are encouraged to investigate & explore and respect all living things. The nursery team support children's learning-responding to a child's sense of awe and wonder of the natural world.

You will find areas at all of our nurseries for children to construct dens and build using logs and other found objects; a digging area in sand or mud and sheltered places to listen to stories and share their own tales. Oakwood House offers open glades and trees to climb; hills to conquer; outdoor compostable toilets; muddy pools to jump in and a perfect slope for tobogganing.





Forest school activities:

- Provide the flexibility and freedom for child-initiated, experimental learning which increases motivation and concentration.
- Encourage the acquisition of physical skills; co-ordination; manipulation and strength while developing an understanding of risk and building self-confidence.
- Increase health and well-being.
- Develop strong social skills & improve communication and co-operation with the ability to work in groups.
- Develop a sense of trust and achievement, self-esteem and confidence
- Encourage problem solving and creative skills.

The Forest School Ethos has 6 principles agreed by the UK Forest School community in 2011.

Principle 1

Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.

- Forest School takes place regularly, ideally at least every other week, with the same group of learners, over an extended period of time, if practicable encompassing the seasons.
- The programme has a structure which is based on the observations and collaborative work between learners and practitioners - clearly demonstrating progression of learning.
- The initial sessions of any programme establish physical and behavioural boundaries as well as making initial observations on which to base future programme development.

Principle 2

Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

- Whilst woodland is the ideal environment for Forest School, many other sites, some with only a few trees, are able to support good Forest School practice.
- The woodland is ideally suited to match the needs of the programme and the learners, providing them with the space and environment in which to explore and discover.
- A Forest School programme constantly monitors its ecological impact and works within a sustainable site management plan agreed between the landowner/ manager, the forest school practitioner and the learners.
- Forest School aims to foster a relationship with nature through regular personal experiences in order to develop long-term, environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices in staff, learners and the wider community.
- It uses natural resources for inspiration, to enable ideas and encourage intrinsic motivation.

Principle 3

Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners

- Where appropriate, the Forest School leader will aim to link experiences at Forest School to home, work and /or school education

- Forest School programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of the learner.

Principle 4

Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

- Forest School opportunities are designed to build on an individual's innate motivation, positive attitudes and/or interests.
- Forest School uses tools and fires only where deemed appropriate to the learners and dependent on completion of a baseline risk assessment.
- Any Forest School experience follows a Risk-Benefit process managed jointly by the practitioner and learner that is tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.

Principle 5

Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

- Forest School is led by qualified Forest School practitioners, who are required to hold a minimum of an accredited Level 3 Forest School qualification. Find more information on Forest School qualifications [here](#).
- There is a high ratio of practitioner/adults to learners.
- Practitioners are subject to relevant checks into their suitability to have prolonged contact with children, young people and vulnerable people.
- Practitioners need to hold an up-to-date first aid qualification, which includes paediatric (if appropriate) and outdoor elements.
- Forest School is backed by relevant working documents, which contain all the policies and procedures required for running Forest School and which establish the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers.
- The Forest School leader is a reflective practitioner and sees themselves as a learner too.

Principle 6

Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning

- A learner-centred pedagogical approach is employed by Forest School that is responsive to the needs and interests of learners.
- The Practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote during their programmes through careful planning, appropriate dialogue and relationship building.
- Play and choice are an integral part of the Forest School learning process, and play is recognised as vital to learning and development at Forest School.
- Forest School provides a stimulus for all learning preferences and dispositions.
- Reflective practice is a feature of each session to ensure learners and practitioners can understand their achievements, develop emotional intelligence and plan for the future.
- Practitioner observation is an important element of Forest School pedagogy. Observations feed into 'scaffolding' and tailoring experiences to learning and development.

