Wheldrake with Thorganby CE Primary School

Forest School Policy

Intent

At Wheldrake with Thorganby CE Primary School, we aim to provide children with opportunities to experience Forest School within a natural woodland setting and/or the school's outdoor grounds. Our approach to outdoor learning encourages children to develop independence, use their imagination, take appropriate risks within agreed boundaries and take ownership of their own learning.

Forest School provides a holistic approach to learning, recognising and valuing each child's individuality while developing skills that will support them throughout life. It contributes to many areas of children's development, including their emotional, social and spiritual well-being. Through Forest School, children are given opportunities to build self-esteem, develop confidence and establish positive relationships with their peers.

Learning is encouraged through exploration, discovery and working together, with adults offering guidance and support to enable activities and experiences to take place. Forest School allows children to engage with the outdoors and natural environment through practical and meaningful activities throughout the year.

At Wheldrake with Thorganby Primary School, we aim to provide experiences that develop children's appreciation, understanding and respect for the natural world. We encourage them to become aware of their environment and understand the importance of looking after and caring for their local surroundings.

Objectives

Our Forest School programme aims to achieve the following objectives:

- **Nature Connection:** To develop a meaningful connection between children and the natural world, encouraging curiosity, wonder, respect and appreciation for the environment.
- **Holistic Development:** To support children's overall development by providing opportunities for physical, emotional, social and cognitive growth through outdoor and nature-based learning.
- **Life Skills:** To develop important life skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, communication and resilience within a supportive outdoor environment.
- **Environmental Awareness:** To help children understand the importance of sustainability, conservation and their responsibilities towards protecting the natural environment.
- **Play-Based Learning:** To provide opportunities for child-led and play-based learning, allowing children to explore, investigate, experiment and create within a natural setting.

Guiding Principles

Our Forest School provision is underpinned by the six recognised Forest School principles:

1. **Long-term and regular experiences:** Forest School is a long-term commitment involving frequent and regular sessions within a woodland or natural environment, rather than being a one-off experience. Planning, adapting activities, observing children and reviewing progress are all important parts of the process.
2. **A natural environment:** Forest School takes place in a woodland or naturally wooded environment, providing opportunities for children to develop a meaningful relationship with the natural world.
3. **Holistic development:** Forest School supports the development of everyone involved, encouraging children to become confident, resilient, independent and creative learners.
4. **Supported risk-taking:** Children are given opportunities to experience and manage appropriate risks, with support and guidance to ensure activities are suitable for both the environment and individual needs.
5. **Qualified practitioners:** Forest School sessions are delivered by appropriately qualified Forest School practitioners who regularly update their knowledge, skills and professional practice.

6. **Learner-centred approach:** Forest School uses a variety of child-centred approaches to create a supportive community where individuals can develop, learn and work together.

Implementation

- **Sessions:** Forest School sessions will take place fortnightly, providing all children with regular opportunities to participate in outdoor learning.
- **Curriculum Integration:** Activities and experiences will be planned to complement the school curriculum and provide opportunities to extend learning across different subject areas.
- **Safety Measures:** Appropriate safety procedures will be followed to protect the welfare of all children. These will include suitable adult-to-child ratios, access to first aid and regular site and activity risk assessments.
- **Site Selection:** Forest School activities will take place in outdoor environments that have been assessed as safe and appropriate for the children and activities planned.
- **Assessment and Reflection:** Staff will regularly observe, assess and reflect on Forest School sessions to identify the impact on children's learning and development and make improvements where necessary.

Accessing the Forest School Area

The Forest School area is accessed through the designated gate situated at the back right-hand corner of the school grounds.

Throughout Forest School sessions, all children must remain under the constant supervision of adults. Children will be observed and monitored at all times to ensure their safety and well-being. Adults must maintain appropriate supervision and be aware of children's whereabouts and activities within the Forest School area.

EYFS and KS1 children must not leave the Forest School area independently. If a child needs to leave the area for any reason, they must be accompanied by an adult.

Health and Safety Considerations

Forest School encourages children to develop their own understanding of risk and to become increasingly responsible for their own safety and the safety of others.

Children will be supported in recognising potential dangers and understanding the importance of following agreed safety rules. Where behaviour or play becomes unsafe, adults will intervene, provide reminders and reinforce appropriate expectations.

Risk assessments will be completed before each visit and for the use of all tools and equipment. The Forest School Leader will regularly monitor weather conditions and will ensure that the area is evacuated if conditions become too extreme or unsafe.

All children and adults must wear suitable clothing and footwear appropriate to the weather and outdoor conditions.

Before any open fire is permitted, an appropriate fire risk assessment must be completed and all necessary safety and protection procedures followed.

A qualified Forest School Leader must be present throughout every session. Children will receive regular reminders and guidance about safe behaviour and appropriate practices within the Forest School environment.

The school's Health and Safety Policy, Safeguarding Children Policy and other relevant school policies will be followed at all times to support the safety and well-being of everyone involved.

Equality and Inclusion

Wheldrake with Thorganby CE Primary School is committed to ensuring that all children can access and participate in Forest School activities. No child will be discriminated against, and reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to ensure that activities are accessible and inclusive.

Inclusion is central to our Forest School approach. All children will be valued and supported regardless of their ability, disability, gender, race, culture or individual circumstances.

We are committed to:

- Providing a safe, secure and stimulating environment where children can develop, flourish and feel confident to contribute.
- Recognising and valuing the contributions of all children and adults, promoting an understanding and appreciation of equality and diversity.
- Ensuring that inclusion is embedded throughout all Forest School activities and experiences.

The school's Inclusion Policy, Special Educational Needs Policy and Equal Opportunities Policy will be followed throughout all Forest School sessions.

Child Protection and Safeguarding

- All Forest School sessions will be led by trained Forest School Leaders and supported by appropriate members of school staff.
- All staff and volunteers involved in Forest School will receive relevant information and guidance regarding health and safety, site risk assessments and the risks associated with planned activities.
- Staff and volunteers will be made aware of the relevant school policies and procedures and will be expected to follow the guidance and requirements set out within them.
- All school staff and regular volunteers must hold current and appropriate DBS checks.

The safety, welfare and protection of children will remain a priority throughout all Forest School activities.

Cancellation Procedure

There may be occasions when Forest School sessions need to be cancelled due to circumstances beyond our control. These may include:

- **Staff illness:** Where staff absence means that the required adult-to-child ratios cannot be maintained.
- **Severe weather:** Where weather conditions make it unsafe or unsuitable for outdoor activities.
- **Health and safety concerns:** Where any situation arises that could place children or adults at risk.

If a session needs to be cancelled, the following procedures will apply:

- Decisions to cancel should be made as early as possible, and the school, relevant staff and volunteers should be informed by telephone, email or another suitable method of communication.
- The school will make every effort to ensure Forest School sessions go ahead whenever possible. However, the school reserves the right to cancel a session on the day if circumstances require it. Everyone involved will be informed as soon as reasonably possible.

Assessment and Reflection

Children's learning and development during Forest School sessions will be monitored informally through observations, anecdotal notes and discussions.

Children will be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences, learning and achievements. Staff and Forest School practitioners will also use reflection to consider the effectiveness of activities and identify ways to improve future sessions and learning opportunities.

Behaviour

All children are expected to follow the school's Behaviour Policy during Forest School sessions.

Children will be supported and reminded of the expectations for safe and respectful behaviour within the outdoor environment.

If a child's behaviour places themselves or others at risk and they do not respond appropriately to a verbal warning or adult intervention, they may be asked to leave the Forest School session and return to school.

Emergency Information

The Forest School Leader must carry the following items at all times during each session:

- A working school radio.
- A first aid kit.
- All necessary resources and equipment required for the planned session.
- Relevant risk assessments and school policies, should these need to be referred to.

Emergency Contact Numbers

School Office: 01904 553422

Emergency Services: 999

Policy reviewed: November 2026

Next review date: October 2027