



Villa Real School
together we achieve

Forest Schools Policy 2025

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Introduction

Forest Schools at Villa Real School is accessible for all pupils/students within the School, from 2-19 years in order to ensure that all our pupils/students are given every opportunity to develop self confidence, problem solving, self esteem and risk management skills.

Villa Real School recognises the importance of providing opportunities for the experience of Forest Schools and the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding to as high a level as possible by each pupil/student in order to facilitate their overall cognitive and social development. We also try to ensure that all pupils/students are provided with the opportunities to freely express themselves as creatively as possible and value this self expression as a form of visual communication.

The teaching of Forest Schools can be undertaken throughout all phases of the School both in time specifically allocated to the subject and across the outdoor learning curriculum. Pupils/students are taught by three Forest Schools leaders.

For some pupils and students this requires a multi-sensory curriculum designed to enhance their experience of, and ability to respond to, learning situations and their environment, including other people. Forest Schools sessions at Villa Real are based on the following areas:

- Orienteering and Trail work
- Shelters and campcraft
- Bushcraft skills
- Fire skills and cooking
- Tools and green woodworking
- Creativity and rural / heritage crafts
- Local biodiversity
- Education for Sustainability inc. horticulture
- Environmental awareness
- Muddy Kitchen

What is Forest Schools?

- The ethos of Forest School is based on a fundamental respect for pupils/students and their capacity to investigate, test and maintain curiosity in the world around them. It believes in pupil/student's right to play; the right to access the outdoors and, in particular, a woodland environment; the right to access risk and the vibrant reality of the natural world; the right to experience a healthy range of emotions, through all the natural world; to build resilience that will enable continued and creative engagement with their peers.

- Forest School is based more on the process of learning than it is on the content - more on the 'how' than the 'what'.
- This means that genuine Forest School practice steps boldly out of the shadow and limitation of planned activities and ventures collaboratively into the realms of the unplanned, unexpected and ultimately unlimited. Pupils and students are given encouragement to direct their own learning. This often requires catalyzing on the part of the Forest School leader, either through stimulating play in the outdoors or 'scaffolding' a child's learning, but mostly through simply observing how pupils/students are in the outdoors.
- Significantly, and on many levels, a woodland environment is central in supporting this very dynamic approach to learning; the passage of time from the changing of the seasons to the contemplation of an ancient tree; the dynamic nature of an outdoor environment - an infinite source of smells, textures, sounds and tastes; a range of visual stimuli from near to far, high to low, very big to very small; and the infinite layers of historical, cultural, spiritual and mythological significance that speak of our deep relationship with trees and woodland through the ages.
(Above extract from FSTC)

Scope

This policy applies equally to all students and pupils in the School, with full consideration being given to each individual's specific needs in relation to the development of Forest Schools. As part of that process, advice and guidance is sought, where appropriate, from other professionals working in School in a peripatetic capacity – including speech therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, educational psychologists and teachers specialising in the education of pupils/students with multiple disabilities and multi sensory impairment or complex and multiple learning difficulties. Teaching staff expertise is also shared and relevant training is undertaken and disseminated to other staff. Lessons are planned to ensure that there are no barriers to any pupils/students achieving. This is in accordance with the SEN code of practice. A minority of pupils/students will need access to specialist equipment and different approaches. Many of these resources are aids which pupils/students use as part of their daily life. Leaders plan lessons in a robust and rigorous way so that these pupils'/students' areas of difficulty are identified and addressed at the outset of any work in order to maximise every potential to make progress and achieve.

Aims

This School believes that the aim of the Forest Schools curriculum is to enable each pupil and student to develop his/her full potential for:

- Making and justifying decisions including risk management
- Tackling problems confidently
- An awareness and understanding of themselves, their home, their environment and the world around them
- Self-expression through Forest Schools
- As great a degree of independence as is attainable
- Self-advocacy i.e. the ability to make and communicate choices

Breadth of study

This will include examples from different times and cultures (not all Western European) through visits to woodlands, local countryside and other educational establishments within the areas of study identified on page 1.

Learning across the Curriculum

Forest Schools provides opportunities to promote

- Spiritual development
- Moral development
- Social development
- Cultural development

Forest Schools is also taught within cross curricular activities with other curriculum subjects as the transfer of skills and concepts facilitates learning and is an appropriate activity for pupils/students who are unable to read or write, this is particularly suitable for environmental humanities, science work, art and design, food technology and adventurous outdoor learning.

Forest Schools provides opportunities for pupils and students to develop the Key Skills of:

- Communication
- Application of number
- Risk assessment and management
- Working with others
- Improving pupils'/students' own learning and performance
- Problem solving (and team building)
- Literacy skills
- Thinking skills
- Enterprise and entrepreneurial skills
- Work related learning
- Education for sustainable development.
- Creative and imagination skills

Forest School Rules

At the beginning of every session a quick recap of the rules is reinforced by the pupils/students.

Green Guidelines

Walk within the Forest School Area

Keep everything out of your mouth

Stay within the boundary

Do not throw anything

Drag sticks behind you

Care for nature

Ask an adult before you use a tool and follow the tool rules

Have FUN!

Always wash hands following a session.

It is important that the adults involved try to help pupils/students understand the importance of these rules and support pupils/students in understanding that Forest School will become too dangerous if these rules aren't followed, which may mean that Forest School sessions have to end.

Daily Operating Procedures.

What to do before the session;

Before a session takes place the Forest School Leader will carry out a daily risk assessment of the area and will take any necessary action to ensure the site is safe before use. The Forest School Leader will list resources required for the session on the planning. The resources will be checked out by the Forest School Leader using the check list and all tools will be checked before use by the Forest School Leader following the tool policy procedure. All tools and resources are left in locked storage until required for use at the beginning of a session. Sometimes pupils/students are encouraged to help carry and transport resources safely to the session. The Forest School Leader will provide activity risk assessments (see risk assessments) to all staff and volunteers at the session, to ensure that staff and volunteers are aware of any hazards associated with an activity and the measures in place to control the risk. Before the session staff and volunteers will be briefed on the intended structure of the session and their responsibilities.

Weather conditions;

Following the Forest Schools ethos of..... 'there is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing!' Pupils/students are advised to dress warmly and provided with waterproofs. However, there are some occasions where it may not be safe or practical to go ahead with a planned session due to extreme weather;

- In the case of high winds of 25mph or more determined by the met office online
- In the case of extreme temperature determined by a met office amber weather warning

- In the case of extreme cold of below '0' a session will be cancelled if it is near to this we will ensure pupils/students are appropriately dressed, sessions will be made shorter and activities will be planned to ensure pupils/students are kept moving.

Tool Handling Handling policy

Tool usage

Pupils/students will not be using tools until they are ready in every way; emotionally and physically. Specific tool policies are in place for each tool that may be used within Forest Schools; these can be found in the appendices. The policies cover specific ratios for tool usage and any PPE required for adults or pupils/students whilst using the tools. All tools are initially modelled by the Forest School Leader to pupils/students and adults as set in the ratios determined by the tool policy. All adults participating must receive basic training on the safe use of tools before being allowed to use them with pupils/students.

Tool Maintenance

As tools are prepared for the beginning of a session, tool safety checks are completed by the Forest School Leader. If any tools are deemed unsafe for purpose, they are marked with fragile tape and are moved to the designated damaged tools area in the locked shed so they are not used. Through safe modelling of tools, in initial 1:1 ratios, pupils/students and adults are taught how to check a tool before using as a matter of routine. If they notice a tool is unsafe in any way to use they are taught to use the fragile tape to highlight a tool is unsafe. If they are unable to do this, then they are taught to advise an adult so they can mark off the tool as unsafe.

Pupils/students and adults are taught that if they see a tool marked with fragile tape then they are not to use the tool because it is unsafe to do so. Following a Forest School session tools are checked back in by the Forest School Leader or adults. Tools are checked against the checking out list to ensure no tools are missing. The Forest School Leader will be advised immediately if any tools/resources are missing. As tools are returned they are cleaned and maintained following the specific tool policy.

Tool rules!

Pupils/students are taught these and they are reinforced at the beginning of each session.

- Ask an adult before you take a tool from the tool area.
- You must have a purpose for your tool.
- You must make sure you choose a safe working area with nobody near your blood bubble