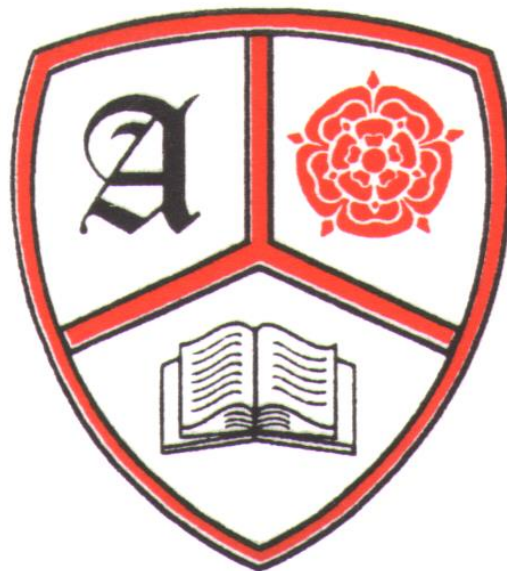


# Anderton Primary School



## Forest School Policy

## **Introduction.**

It is the mission of Anderton Primary School to develop the full potential of everyone at our school in an environment in which 'We Explore, We Create and We Innovate'. To help fulfil our mission, we have introduced Forest School provision in order to help educate the whole child.

This policy has been specifically written so that all parents, staff, volunteers and governors have a shared understanding of the Forest School ethos and its implementation at our school.

The contents of this policy should be read alongside the following policies:

Health and Safety Policy

Behaviour Policy

Safeguarding Policy

Special Educational Needs Policy

Within this policy, the term 'Forest School Leader' refers to the member of staff who holds a fully recognised Level 3 Forest School Practitioners qualification.

## **Aims.**

The aim of this policy is to provide an insight into the ethos of Forest School as operated at Anderton. Forest School builds on a child's innate motivation and positive attitude to learning, offering them the opportunities to take risk, make choices and initiate learning for themselves.

- Our Forest School learning environment provides opportunities for children to:
- Develop self-esteem.
- Develop self-confidence.
- Form positive relationships with others.
- Develop a growing awareness of their emotional needs and the needs of others.
- Learn to cooperate and work with their peers and adults.
- Develop strategies in order to take risks within the boundaries of safety.
- Learn specific skills which link into the curriculum.
- Develop knowledge and appreciation of the natural world and a forest environment.

Anderton Primary School's Forest School is about exploring and experiencing the natural world through practical activities. The children will go out in all weathers, all year round, exploring and learning from the seasons and changes in the environment. Appropriate clothing will be worn. During high winds or lightening it will be considered unsafe to go into the woodland. The children's interests along with the varied natural resources in our woodland are used to stimulate creative thinking, problem solving and skill development, all under the premise of 'play.'

## **Environmental Considerations and Conservation.**

One of the principles of our Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. The children will be taught respect and responsibility for the world around them. Both children and adults are encouraged to respect their environment and to be aware of conservation issues of the woodland around them. We aim to promote respect for wildlife and our woodland environment. We want children to enjoy the outdoors and have freedom to explore and learn. This will have an impact on our outdoor setting. Through our management plan we aim to have no long-term impact and will adjust our sessions as necessary to achieve this. Disposal of food or other such waste is also important – if waste is compostable it will be out into the compost bins on site, if not it will be removed from site and disposed of correctly (recyclable items will be recycled). Bin bag(s) will be taken to site for every session.

## **Assessing and Reducing Risk at our Forest School.**

One of the reasons for introducing Forest School to Anderton is a belief that children are sometimes overly and unnecessarily protected and cossetted from risks and that, ironically, this makes them less safe in the long run. At our Forest School we undertake a range of activities which contain a theoretical degree of risk. Through careful supervision, full training and good practice, we aim to ensure that accidents are avoided and that risks are reduced to manageable and acceptable levels. We have full written risk assessments in place for:

Buildings and shelters  
Rope and String  
Managed Fire  
Collecting natural materials  
Being off the ground  
Blindfolds  
Tools and equipment  
Site

All these Risk Assessments can be found on the school server and in the Forest School section of the Risk Assessment Folder stored in the Headteacher's Office. Written Risk Assessments are the starting point for our safe practice and procedures in Forest School. They are constantly reviewed and regularly updated in order to reflect the safest practice possible at Anderton.

## **Health and Safety Considerations.**

In the first instance please refer to Anderton Primary School's Health and Safety Policy. The health and safety of the adults and children is paramount at all times throughout any Forest School activity and session. Safe practice is reinforced through regular reminders. The Forest School programme provides children with opportunities to develop independence and to take responsibility for their own learning. Whilst being independent in their learning, they will develop early risk assessment strategies and understand that their actions have consequences.

The Forest School Leaders will carry out risk assessments at the beginning of each term which will take account of seasonal changes. In addition, a site sweep will be undertaken before each session by the Forest School Leader who will assess the area for any dangers.

The Forest School site at Anderton Primary School is situated in the far right-hand corner of our school playground.

The Forest School Leaders and other practitioners regard their duty of care when working with pupils as extremely important. For the safety and protection of all individuals – children, staff and volunteers - we ensure the following:

- Everyone involved in Forest School is briefed on health and safety and risk assessment of the site.
- Staff and volunteers are made aware of the Health and Safety Policy, Safeguarding Policy, Equal Opportunities Policy, Disability Policy and Accessibility Plan. This is undertaken as part of induction and orientation of all staff and volunteers. Staff and volunteers must undertake to adhere to the guidance contained within all these policies.
- All members of staff at Anderton Primary School undertake Child Protection training. Any concerns are reported to the Head Teacher or SENDCO, the named Child Protection Officers, to ensure the school's child protection policy can then be followed.
- The Forest School Leaders and other school staff delivering sessions all have an enhanced level CRB check.
- Suitable clothing and appropriate footwear must be worn at all times. During winter months pupils are expected to wear sturdy footwear or wellington boots, hats scarves, gloves and waterproof outerwear. Sunscreen and hats should be worn in the summer months. It is part of school policy that staff do not apply sunscreen to children, they must do this themselves.

## **First Aid.**

Level 3 Forest School Leaders are qualified in outdoor first aid. A First Aid Kit is always available on the Forest School site. It is the Forest School Leader's responsibility to ensure that the First Aid Kit is brought onto the site at the commencement of the session and returned to school after each session. In cases of minor injury, such as cuts and grazes the Forest School Leader will administer first aid and complete a first aid note for the injured person to take home.

## **Dealing with strangers, members of the public and dogs.**

Anderton Primary School incorporates the Forest School site. It is surrounded by a perimeter fence and is secure by design. However, there is always the possibility of these measures being breached. The following procedures will be adopted:

- Children will be informed to never approach any person or animal (living or dead) within the forest or school grounds.
- Staff will look for dog/animal owner and ask for its removal. If the dog is stray, the situation will be risk assessed and it may be determined by staff that children should be taken indoors until the dog is under control.
- Children will be told to inform a member of staff who will challenge any stranger on the site.

## **Emergency Procedures.**

It is vital that emergency procedures are adhered to. These are in place to safeguard pupils and adults alike. If a serious incident takes place, it will be essential to carry out an investigation promptly. Should a serious incident or accident occur, the Forest School Leader will ensure the safety of other participants by adopting different whistle calls (whistle blown once means children are to freeze, whistle blown twice means children are to come together as quickly (but calmly and safely) as possible. Participants will be made aware of this procedure for calling everyone together in initial sessions of Forest School.

In cases of emergency the Forest School Leader or other trained adult will administer first aid to the casualty. They will inform the school office who will alert parents and/or emergency services if necessary. They will inform the head teacher if the incident requires further medical treatment.

If an accident occurs to a pupil, member of staff or visitor that requires help in addition to first aid e.g. Fire, Ambulance and Police then the LA must be informed of the circumstances as soon as possible. An accident form will be completed and a copy sent to the LA. In the event of serious injury (this includes amputation, serious burns, acute illness, fracture, loss of sight or consciousness, or if detained in hospital over 24 hours, or death); the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) must be informed. These notifications are a legal requirement. The 'Accident Report Form' requires a written statement to be made with reference to the sequence of events, actions taken and responses and times of these actions. Names of witnesses should be recorded. The statement should then be signed, dated and given to the Headteacher. A copy will then be sent to the LA. The original form will be kept in school.

## **Tools.**

An important part of using tools is to take responsibility for the maintenance and storage of these tools. The children need to be involved in the checking, cleaning and safe storing. They need to be made aware that their safety depends on the regular maintenance of the tools. Routine inspections and organised storage is good practice and provide guidance to the children. The safety of all participants is of paramount importance. Participants ensure that tools are used safely by adopting the following:

- Tools are stored correctly in school and checked after each session.
- Rules are set out clearly at the beginning of the tool use session.
- Leaders ensure that 'tool talks' are given before any tools are used.
- Children are supervised at all times whilst using tools of any description.
- Inappropriate use of tools will not be tolerated and will result in immediate withdrawal from the task.

### Procedures

As the tools are taken out there needs to be set steps established so the children learn the importance of self-organisation. A numbering system should reinforce this message. The children will participate in cleaning and storing of the tools and realise the importance of keeping them in dry conditions. The Forest School Leader can demonstrate knife sharpening using a sharpening stone (whetstone), emphasising the effort and time needed to keep the knife and tools in general in good condition. The children will witness a before and after situation with the tools. Their understanding of a care and safety regime during maintenance is very important. They will be encouraged to describe the tools and their conditions through close observation and be introduced to the tool maintenance log. All sharp tools will be stored in a locked filing cabinet or tool box with a padlock inside a locked shed.

### **Weather**

Whenever planning a Forest school session consideration of the weather conditions is crucial to its success. There are particular conditions that would necessitate cancellation or changes of plan. The Forest school Leader is responsible for continuing, cancelling or suspending any sessions in the woodland. The up to date weather forecast needs to inform the plans for the session. Reference to BBC local weather forecast to inform decision-making. Weather can be the most influential element in what and how things happen.

Appropriate clothing and footwear must be worn and it is the responsibility of the Forest school leader to appraise this and if necessary provide them, eg. Gloves, Warm hats, Scarves, Socks, Rain Coats, Sun hats, Long sleeved t-shirts and/or jumpers, Long trousers, Wellington Boots, Trainers. A 'just-in-case' box of clothes needs to be available.

'There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.' Planned activities for the sessions will be flexible and so can be adapted to weather conditions. When the weather is cold children will be encouraged to be more active. In the warm/hot weather slower activities will be encouraged. The effect of the weather on the woodland environment will be the prominent factor in the live risk assessment carried out by the Forest school Leader. It is at their discretion as to whether the conditions are acceptable or unacceptable.

### **Roles and Responsibilities.**

The Forest School Leaders hold a fully recognised Level 3 Practitioners qualification; have fully enhanced CRB and outdoor first aid qualifications. Forest School Leaders have the overall responsibility for:

- Safety and risk assessment
- Planning of sessions, evaluation and feedback
- Liaising with school staff and governors

- Administration of first aid
- Responsibility for first aid kit, accident book, etc.
- Supervision of tool use
- Understanding the needs of children with SEND
- Emergency procedures
- Volunteers and trainees
- Supervision of fires and cooking area

With support from the Forest School Leaders volunteers and trainees are responsible for:

- Modelling good practice
- Supporting and talking to pupils to extend their learning as appropriate
- Additional support when Forest School leader is supervising tools or fire activities
- Additional delegated jobs

### **Insurance.**

Insurance for activities within Forest School are included within the school's insurance policy.

### **Equal Opportunities.**

In the first instance please refer to the school Equalities Policy.

All people involved in Forest School sessions will be treated with respect and equality. Our priority is to ensure that children and adults have access to a safe and secure environment. We believe that any contributions made by staff, volunteers and participants in our sessions will be listened to and appreciated.

### **Evaluation Procedure.**

The Forest School Leader has developed a long-term progressive plan. They undertake to reflect and evaluate each session after its completion. At the end of each term the leader will reflect on current activities, take into account feedback from all participants and then use this to inform future planning.

Policy agreed:

To be reviewed:

## **Anderton Primary School Sustainability Plan.**

It is important to bear in mind the ecological impact of running a Forest School in the woodland at Anderton and with that in mind consideration will be given to the following:

- Children will be educated not to pick up anything still growing
- There will usually be only two or three Forest School sessions per week to allow the ground to recover between visits.

## **Woodland Management Plan.**

### Year 1

Coppicing and removal of undergrowth on the site

Use the above to create a natural hedge around the perimeter fence

Staff and volunteers remove rubbish, deadwood and brambles

Establish a fire pit and fire circle

Lay bark chippings in muddy areas

### Year 2

Area to be extended; internal fence to be moved to incorporate more of the playing field at the top of the playground.

Begin planting trees around the perimeter fencing

Erect a shelter above the seating/fire circle to provide shelter from the weather

Establish a cooking area

### Year 3

Continue further planting around boundary fencing

Create a natural pond and meadow in front of the new trees to encourage wild life

Build a storage shelter

Erect a wood store from natural materials

## **Environmental Impact Assessment**

**Site:** Anderton Primary School Woodland area.

The woodland area is located at the back of the school grounds, it is only a small area with a handful of well established trees and other flora. One side of the woodland is bordered by two houses, whose gardens are shaded by some of the taller trees. Access to the area is through the main school playground. There are no established pathways in the woodland.

## **Preliminary Review**

Forest School sessions will take place 3-4 times a week during the course of the year with up to 30 children and 4 adults using the woodland. There is no permanent fire site and the only



use of fire on the site will be in a fire bowl so as to reduce the impact on the site. There is very little dead wood within the woodland to provide fire wood and so this will be bought in from outside sources. The main impact of the project will be trampling and disturbance to wildlife. Although there are no established pathways, the users of the woodland know where not to walk so as to reduce the risk of trampling. As such, woodland grasses are the only species of flora that is subject to trampling.

Within the woodland there is a shrub layer consisting mainly of elder and hazel, brambles and holly. As well as the canopy layer that includes oak, ash, sycamore and beech trees. In terms of fauna there is little evidence of anything other than local birds, squirrels and a large variety of insects invertebrates. We do have domestic cats in our local area, but rarely find much evidence of them having been in the area. The woodland is not under any kind of special protection and no trees have tree preservation orders. The woodland is on private property and is therefore only used by our school community. It is predominantly used solely for Forest School sessions and we monitor issues of over-intensive use throughout the year, particularly in light of adverse weather conditions. It can become very muddy/slippery underfoot in the Autumn/Winter months and as such the conditions are reviewed on an ongoing basis so as to limit the impact this has on the area.

### Impacts of programme and mitigation measures

Potential Impacts	Reduction Measures
Trampling impact to ground flora	Use pathways already created in woodland. Identify any vulnerable areas and avoid them.
Footfall in popular areas of the site, leading to erosion and compaction of soil.	Divert or create new paths. Woodchip paths to reduce soil erosion - but beware importing woodchip from other sites, due to the risk of introducing pests and diseases. Rotate popular play areas and allow areas to recover. Use multiple paths through sites to spread impact
Disturbance/habitat destruction of flora and fauna	Make participants aware of the environment they are in and how to treat it in terms of handling plants and animals and using natural resources.
Overuse of fire area/shelter areas	If ground is becoming trampled/ compacted move these to other areas. If any further Forest School sessions take place rotate the fire circle and shelter locations.
Digging soil / mud kitchens that can damage soil structure and tree roots.	Contain area of digging and reduce frequency of activity. Move areas of digging away from tree roots. Replant/resow areas of digging to allow plants to regrow. Talk to children about how to look after bug life in the soil and any plants that they find. Identify tree roots and talk to children about the role of roots and how we can protect

	them.
Use of natural materials for activities	Only what is required will be taken where there is abundance of that resource
Breaking tree branches through play, tree swings, ropes and slack lines.	Talk with children about how to care for and look after the trees and why. Remove swings from any damaged branches and engage a tree surgeon/ arboriculturist to advise on tree health. Take down ropes at the end of each session for the safety of other users of the site, and protection of the tree.
Bark damage: bark stripping through play, and/or damage through tree swings, ropes and slack lines .	Talk with children about how to care for and look after the tree. Engage a tree surgeon / arboriculturist to advise on tree health. Buy or make tree protectors that pad between the tree and the rope/slack line. Take down ropes at the end of sessions for safety and tree protection.

### **Possible Positive Impacts**

Litter picking – Removing litter from the woodland will take away a threat to wildlife as well as making the woodland more aesthetically attractive.

Creating new deadwood habitats – Forest School sessions will involve positive habitat effects; bug hotels and deadwood habitats to be introduced to the woodland for insects and small mammals including hedgehogs, and other animal life.

Promoting plant diversity – clearing brambles and invasive plant species such as Japanese knotweed etc. *Ensuring that all invasive plant material is disposed of in accordance with government regulations.* During Forest School sessions we will identify any invasive species on site and organise a day for children and staff to clear overgrown areas (ensuring some overgrown areas of brambles, nettles etc are left for wildlife).

Tree planting / new woodland creation – Children will be involved in the planting and subsequent care of young trees into our woodland area. Trees will be protected with tree guards when small and will be monitored so as to reduce the impact of pests/disease. A range of species will be planted so as to increase biodiversity (plant, bird, and invertebrate habitats). This will also have a positive impact on climate change through carbon absorption.

Creating new habitats for birds – During our sessions we will plan a bird box creation and monitoring activity with the children. As well as activities to identify birds, observe their behaviour and chart biodiversity change over the seasons. Bird feeders and boxes will be made with children, ensuring the feeders are available and replenished at all times.