

Layston C of E
First School



FOREST SCHOOL

A Guidebook for
Helpers and Parents

Welcome to Forest School at Layston C of E Primary School

Forest School is starting at Layston in the second half of the Autumn Term for Years 1 - 4 and will provide rich opportunities for learning in beautiful surroundings. YR have many opportunities to work in our outside on a daily basis.

What is Forest School?

Forest Schools use wood and forests as a means to build independence and self-esteem in school-age children. Topics are cross-curriculum (broad in subject) including the natural environment, for example the role of trees in society, the complex ecosystem supported by a wilderness and recognition of specific plants and animals. The forest also gives the children opportunities to develop other personal skills, such as teamwork and problem solving.

A usual Forest School unit involves taking the children to woodland once a week for a period of a least 6 weeks. The ethos behind forest school is that it is child led, allowing the children to discover things for themselves without being hurried.

Most importantly we teach the children to enjoy spending time in nature without leaving a trace that they have been there.

“Take only memories, leave only footprints”



In forest school sessions, children are encouraged to find things out for themselves, dig deeper and to be curious, as this is how they learn best.

Work during forest school can link in to curriculum areas but offers a different approach to learning in a different environment to the classroom.

Examples of activities that may be covered during the sessions are knot tying, den building, natural craft activities, learning to respect nature and fire safety.

History of Forest Schools

The Forest School movement originated in Denmark and it has been an integral part of early year's education there since the 1980s, when it was introduced as part of nursery provision. It is based on the idea that young children can develop enthusiasm for education through an appreciation of nature. In Denmark, forest schools have boosted pupils' confidence and improved their behaviour and social skills.

A group of nursery teachers from Somerset established the UK's first Forest School in 1995, after their trainees visited Denmark. In 2006, there were approximately 140 forest schools in Britain.

The number of Forest Schools is increasing annually throughout the UK.



LOCATION OF FOREST SCHOOL SITE USED BY LAYSTON SCHOOL

Layston School site

At Layston School we have an established Wildwood area at the top of the school field.

This area has a wildflower meadow, paths through the tree and shrub canopy and a fenced off wildlife pond. In the coming months the site will be enhanced with a log circle and a place for a camp fire.



What does forest school do for the children?

From the very first session, forest school aims to increase each child's self-confidence, self-esteem and independence. These skills make up an important and key platform so they can maximise their potential. The learning happens not in the confines of four walls but in the open natural forest.

Where everything changes throughout the year, children learn by doing, talking and taking on challenges. Forest school gives each child a chance to express themselves in a way they might not be able to within a classroom setting.



Other Benefits for children at Forest School:

- ☺ Develops social skills by encouraging group work as well as individual work.
- ☺ Increases understanding and knowledge of outdoor environment.
- ☺ Develops communication and language skills and increases awareness of others.
- ☺ Promotes a healthy, happy and active lifestyle.
- ☺ Increases a self-confidence and self-esteem.
- ☺ Gives children time to reflect on their own learning and enjoy themselves.



What will the children be doing?

The children will have the chance to do lots of new, interesting and exciting things throughout the forest school. Below are some examples of Forest School activities:

- 😊 Climbing trees.
- 😊 Pond dipping for living things.
- 😊 Building dens and shelters.
- 😊 Exploring.
- 😊 Finding mini beasts.
- 😊 Observing wildlife.
- 😊 Experiencing nature throughout the year and the changes it has to offer.
- 😊 Green woodworking.
- 😊 Outdoor games.
- 😊 Storytelling.
- 😊 Sensory, trust and teambuilding activities.

In time will come activities such as:

- 😊 Being trained to use tools independently such as saws, knives and loppers.
- 😊 Learning fire safety using small campfires to cook and make drinks on.

The outdoor environment allows for a range of activities which build confidence and self-esteem for achieving success.

How do helpers support the children's social and emotional growth?

Helpers are vital at Forest School sessions as it gives the children confidence to have adult support when it is needed. Ideally, the helper needs to be enthusiastic when outdoors and be keen to play, encourage and listen to children.

Encouragement and praise is deemed hugely important in the development of a child's self-esteem. The relationships that build up through the Forest School sessions between the children and adults help the children feel nurtured, leading to trust and the ability for them to learn to take reasonable risks.



Pointers for Helpers at Forest School

Please follow the guidance below when helping at Forest School:

- ☺ Listen to the children.
Actively encourage them to say how they are feeling.
- ☺ Encourage the children to attempt new things, but respect their choice if they decline. Look for genuine moments for positive feedback eg. "I liked the way you . . ."
- ☺ Always praise good behaviour and ideas.
- ☺ Model honest but positive attitudes yourself:
"I can . . ." "This will be fun . . . etc"
- ☺ Always praise good behaviour and ideas.
- ☺ Model honest but positive attitudes yourself:
"I can . . ." "This will be fun . . . etc"
- ☺ Respect the children's decision making abilities.
The sessions are child led, so try not to solve problems for the children and when possible try to encourage and follow their ideas. Offer help/suggestions rather than just give help/give orders.
- ☺ Ask questions to help to engage the children's curiosity about nature.

- ☺ Encourage children to take responsible risks, whilst not putting themselves at risk.
- ☺ Respect the leader's rules and procedures.
- ☺ Use positive conflict reduction approaches with issues eg. Distraction, negotiation/suggesting more than one solution, rational discussion of feelings/empathy, use of space.
- ☺ If it's more major, let the teacher or Forest school leader deal with the matter. Don't forget to stay calm yourself.
- ☺ Model respect for each other and the environment; leave nothing but footprints; take nothing but memories.







How will the children be supervised?

Whenever a Forest School session takes place there will always be a qualified leader present who has up-to-date outdoor first aid training equipped with an emergency first aid kit. Each session will be carefully organised so that there are enough adult helpers to supervise any tool-based work or activities involving risk.

In the event of an emergency school procedure will be followed.

The sites used for Forest School has good mobile signal so that in the event that either the group needs to be contacted or the group needs to contact the school this can take place.

In the event of an emergency, school procedure will be followed.

Toileting

Toileting is not an issue as there is easy access to the school toilets.

What are the ground rules for behaviour and how are the agreements made?

Rules are kept simple and to a minimum. These rules are shared with the children and discussed at the start of a Forest School session. The main rules are as follows:

1. We do not eat anything we find.
2. Our hands must be kept out of mouths during Forest School.
3. We must stay within the boundaries of the wildwood during our Forest School sessions.
4. When the call goes out for circle time, we come in quickly and safely.
5. No walking through the fire circle.
6. There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes, we agree that we should be dressed appropriately for any weather.
7. At Forest School we care for all living things and take particular care of our special forest, we do not pick flowers or plants.

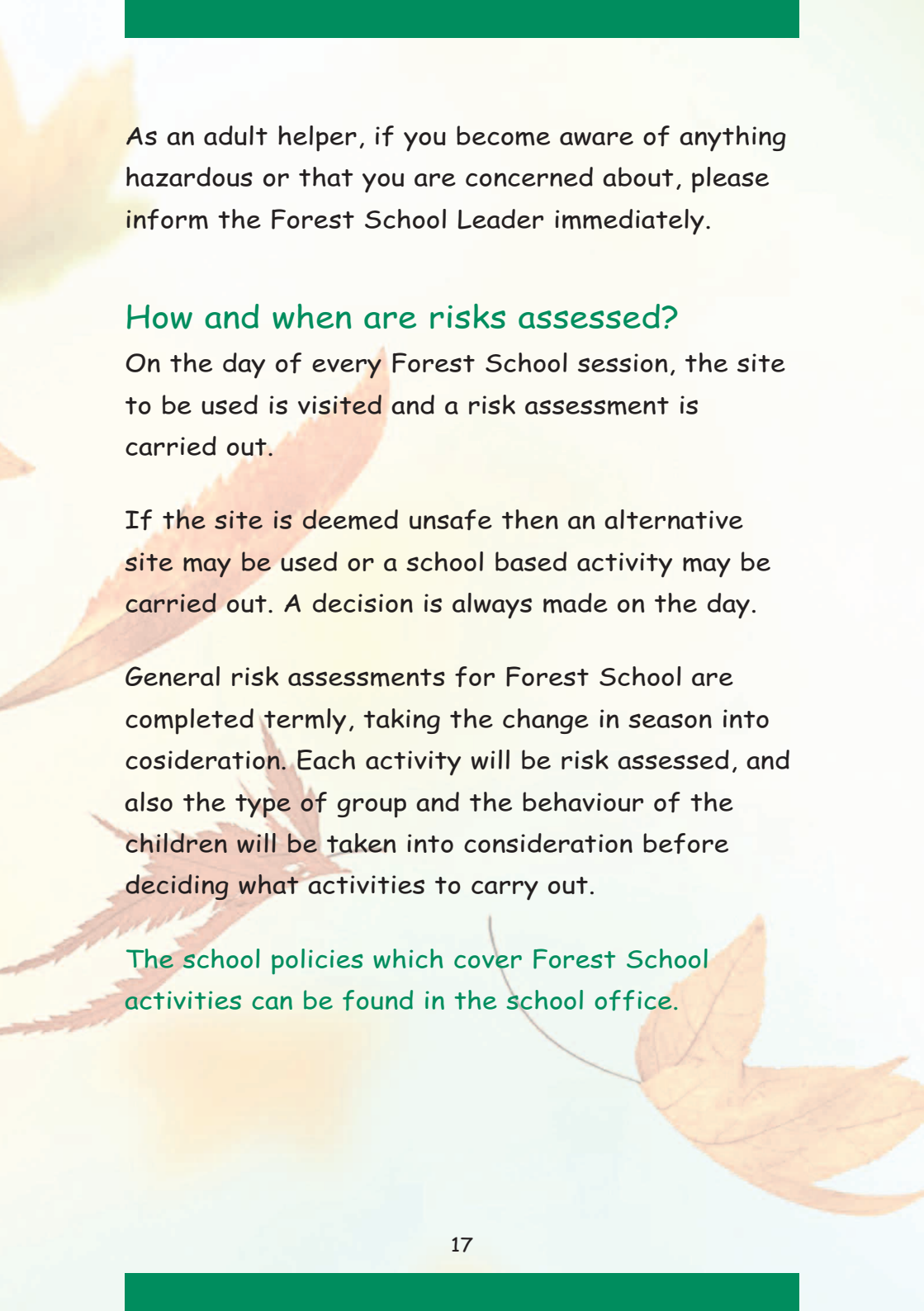
These are Layston School's ground rules for behaviour in the forest. As forest school is essentially child led, it is important to ask children's opinions about how they think they should behave and what rules they feel should be put in place to keep us
ALL SAFE!

What are the hazards and risks in the Forest School environment?

As with any natural setting, there are plenty of hazards and risks in the forest, but knowing the hazards and risks will enable staff and helpers minimise them so everyone stays safe!

Hazards and risks

1. Hazard - Canopy and shrub level - risk - falling dead wood - how to minimise risk - site inspection before entering the forest, do not enter in high winds.
2. Hazard - Field layer -risk - injury from thorns and low branches, eating of berries, nuts, fruits and flowers that may be poisonous - how to minimise risk - warn children to the risks, do not eat anything and keep hands out of mouths, close supervision.
3. Hazard - Ground level -risk - slips, trips and falls, litter - glass and sharp objects, fungi that may be poisonous, dead animals/ birds and animal/bird droppings - how to minimise risk - close supervision, warn children of risks, check forest before entering, teach children not to eat anything they find and keep hands out of mouths.



As an adult helper, if you become aware of anything hazardous or that you are concerned about, please inform the Forest School Leader immediately.

How and when are risks assessed?

On the day of every Forest School session, the site to be used is visited and a risk assessment is carried out.

If the site is deemed unsafe then an alternative site may be used or a school based activity may be carried out. A decision is always made on the day.

General risk assessments for Forest School are completed termly, taking the change in season into consideration. Each activity will be risk assessed, and also the type of group and the behaviour of the children will be taken into consideration before deciding what activities to carry out.

The school policies which cover Forest School activities can be found in the school office.

How are the children kept safe in more risky activities such as shelter building and around a fire?

The children need to be made aware of the dangers around certain activities and need to know how they can keep themselves and others safe by following simple rules. The Forest School leader will give the children guidance and will discuss certain rules with the children before they take part in any risky activities. Before building dens, giving guidance and agreeing rules prior to starting is important.

Typical rules for den building are as follows:

- ☺ Do not run when carrying large sticks.
- ☺ Keep sticks below shoulder height.
- ☺ If you are carrying anything longer than yourself, ask another child to help you by holding one of the ends.
- ☺ Keep your den at ground level.
- ☺ Equipment for making dens should be safely stored when not in use.



Typical rules for building a fire are as follows:

- ☺ Walk; don't run around the outside of the Fire Circle to get to the other side.
- ☺ Only enter the Fire Circle when instructed by the Forest School Leader.
- ☺ Tie back long hair and secure loose clothing when sitting within the Fire Circle.
- ☺ Never throw anything onto the fire.

How are the tools introduced to children, supervised, maintained and stored?

Tools are introduced to the children during the Forest School sessions when and if the leader thinks it is appropriate. The children are shown how to use each tool correctly and safely and are taught the rules that belong to using each tool. Supervision is vital when using tools to minimise risk, with the amount of adult involvement depending upon the age and ability of the children.

How can you help?

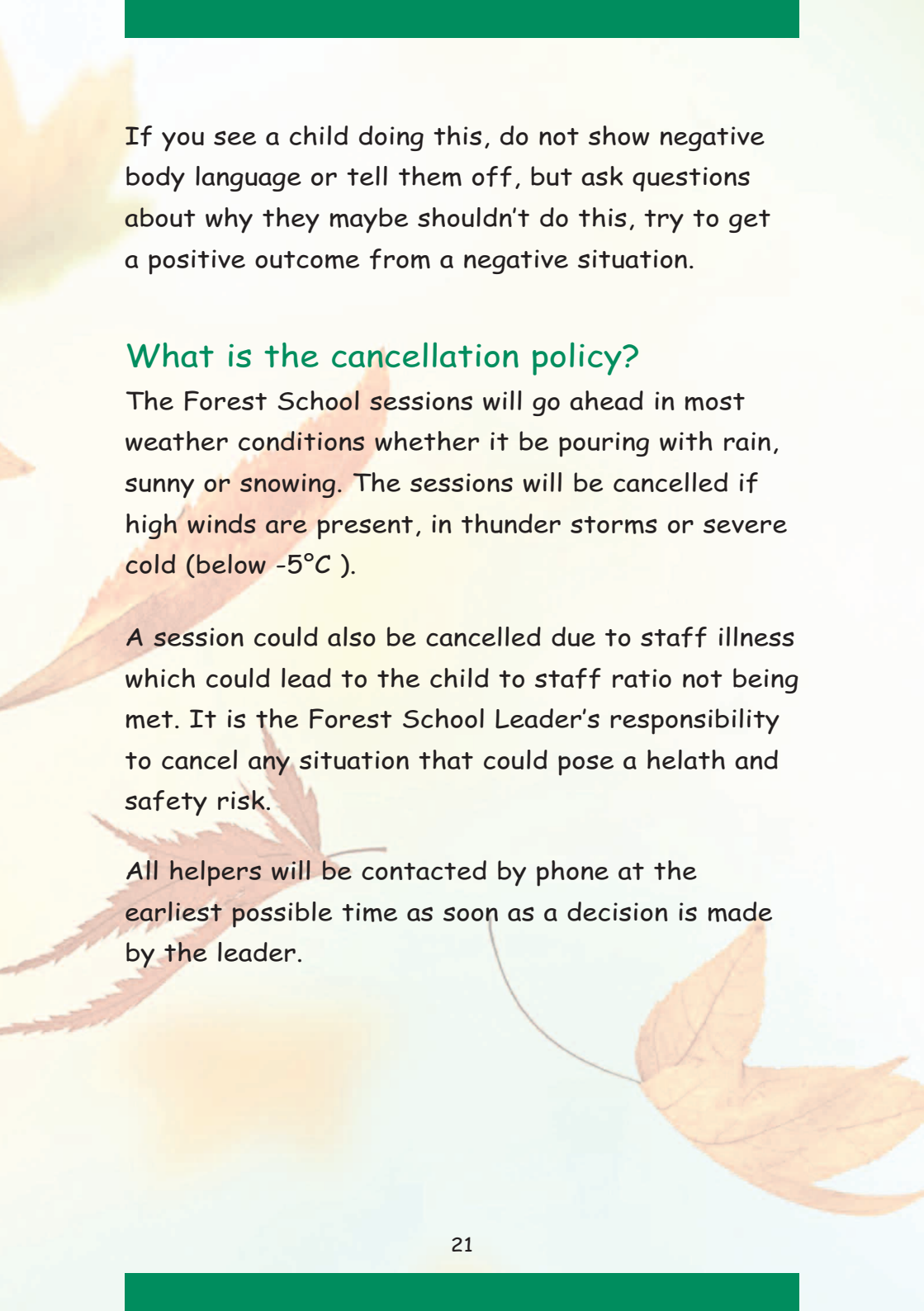
Please ensure:

1. That you report any equipment or area which has become unsafe and avoid using such areas/ equipment.
2. That you and the children you are working with, follow the safe systems of work and procedures which were given to you by the Forest School Leader.

What is the impact of regular Forest School sessions on the environment and how will you manage this?

The impact of our regular Forest School sessions in the forest and environment will be minimised; children taught to respect the natural environment and to keep the forest a "special place" tend to look after it.

Adults should ensure that children do not snap branches on living trees, do not pick rare or poisonous flowers or harm or purposely destroy a habitat (for example, rabbit holes).



If you see a child doing this, do not show negative body language or tell them off, but ask questions about why they maybe shouldn't do this, try to get a positive outcome from a negative situation.

What is the cancellation policy?

The Forest School sessions will go ahead in most weather conditions whether it be pouring with rain, sunny or snowing. The sessions will be cancelled if high winds are present, in thunder storms or severe cold (below -5°C).

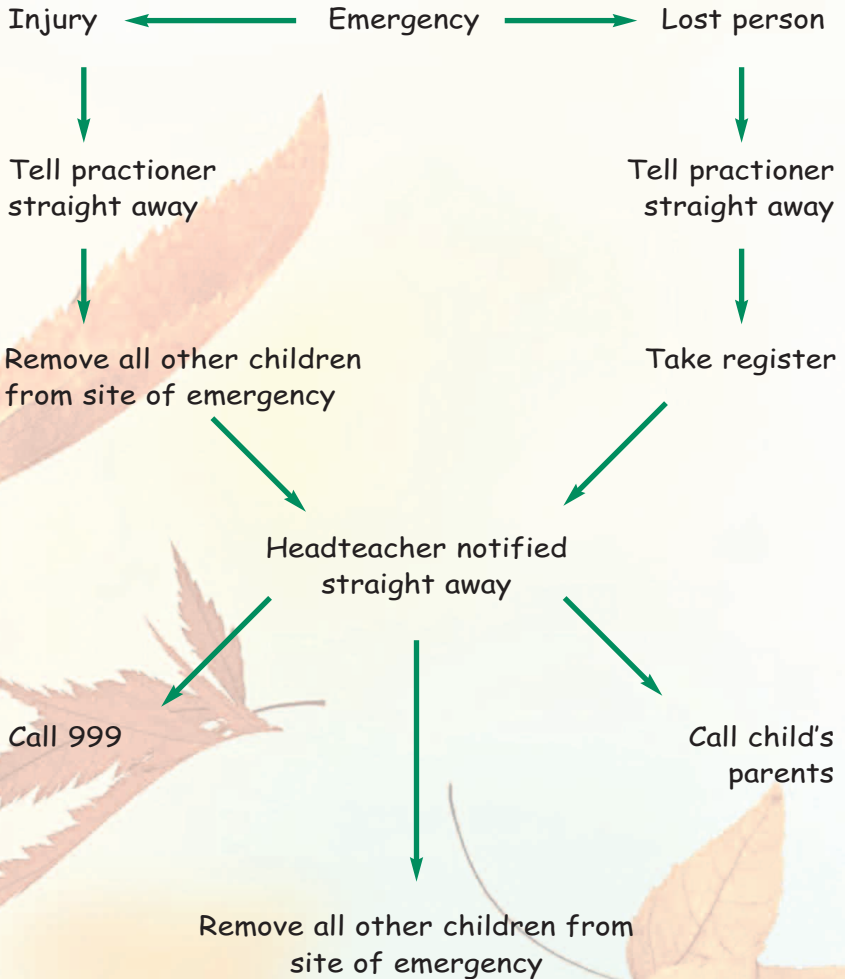
A session could also be cancelled due to staff illness which could lead to the child to staff ratio not being met. It is the Forest School Leader's responsibility to cancel any situation that could pose a health and safety risk.

All helpers will be contacted by phone at the earliest possible time as soon as a decision is made by the leader.

Forest School Clothing



What are the emergency procedures?





We would like to thank fellow Forest School Practitioners Lee and Kirsty for their inspiration in designing this booklet.