

**Forest School pack for**  
**Senior Leadership**  
**Team meeting**

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**15/06/2022**

## **What is Forest School?**

### **The Forest School Ethos at Drake**

Forest Schools is a unique educational experience and process that offers children the opportunity to succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment. Children engage in motivating and achievable tasks and activities throughout the year and in almost all weathers.

Children work with tools, they play, learn boundaries of behaviour; both physical and social, grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world. The Forest School concept originates in Denmark, originally aimed at preschool children, where it was found that children who had attended Forest School then arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, having the ability to work in groups effectively, generally had high self-esteem and a confidence in their own abilities. These foundations helped them to raise their academic achievements. At Drake Primary, we currently provide Forest School for Reception, Key stage one and Key stage 2 children (R to year 5) to compliment and extend the curriculum.

### **Principles of our Forest School**

Our Forest School is a specialised learning approach that sits within and compliments the wider context of outdoor and woodland education. The principles are shared by thousands of trained practitioners across Norfolk, the UK and beyond. Forest School At Drake is

- A long-term process or regular sessions, rather than a one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaption and review links each session.
- Takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- Uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
- Aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- Offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- Run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

### **Children who take part in Forest School are seen as**

- Equal, unique and valuable
- Competent to explore and discover
- Entitled to experience appropriate risk and challenge
- Entitled to choose, and to initiate and drive their own learning and development
- Entitled to experience regular success
- Entitled to develop positive relationships with themselves and other people
- Entitled to develop a strong, positive relationship with their natural world.

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. At Drake we

- Develop personal and social skills
- Work through practical problems and challenges
- Use tools to create, build or manage
- Discover how they learn best
- Pursue knowledge that interests them
- Learn how to manage failures
- Build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk
- Develop practical skills
- Understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- Explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- Regularly experience achievement and success
- Reflect on learning and experiences
- Develop their language and communication skills
- Improve physical motor skills
- Become more motivated
- Improve their concentration skills

## **How holistic development of the children is facilitated at Drake**

Holistic development in children is when we focus on addressing all the needs of a child's life. In the classroom, individual lessons are planned and structured to meet certain outcomes and criteria. However, with consistent and long-term visits to a Forest School site, this will support and develop all areas of holistic development using the natural environment. By applying SPICES when planning, as a forest school leader I will be supporting holistic development for every child. Here are some examples of how I develop all areas of holistic development in Forest School: -

### **Social**

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- Blindfold trail and other games are played with the children. This allows and encourages children to lead but also support each other. It helps build self-esteem and a belief in yourself to be able to achieve. There is also an element of sharing and turn taking whilst playing these games which is encouraged and supported and will help children to manage this independently.
- Our Forest School groups encourage new friendships and positive relationships between their peers. During Wednesday lunchtimes a mixed group of children across the year groups come to Forest School which gives children the opportunity to spend time with others of different ages, classes, backgrounds as well as differing abilities.
- The mud area provides endless fun and role play opportunities with other children. This encourages friendships by promoting social interaction as well as team building.

### **Physical**

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- Our children are provided with opportunities to develop their fine motor skills. Making Gods-eyes is an activity I introduce to all children and some enjoy repeating this activity again and again. We create characters using conkers and drawing pins as well as making mud faces on the trees and logs around the Forest School site.
- Our children are taught how to use peelers to peel sticks, knives to shape wood, saws to cut wood and palm drills to make holes in wood. These activities are age appropriate and further tools will be introduced throughout their time in Forest School.
- Our Children are given many opportunities to develop their gross motor skills by climbing trees, balancing on logs, lifting and rolling logs and obstacles to name but a few.
- Our mud kitchen helps the children to develop their muscles and fine motor skills as children use resources to create and mix which also enhances hand-eye co-ordination.

### **Intellectual**

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- Our children have access to wooden blocks to be able to build and play with. They love building towers and structures. Many children enjoy balancing them and making bug houses/hotels as well as bridges over logs or puddles. This takes a great deal of thinking about – planning, problem solving, making decisions as well as coming up with new ideas.
- As the Forest School leader, I share my own knowledge and experiences when talking to the children. However, I encourage the children to try and find out information for themselves and ask them for their thoughts and suggestions about what they think before responding and offering information. This helps the children to continue to think about the information and maybe seek out the answer themselves which encourages further investigation in class and possibly at home.

## **Communication**

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- Our children using the mud kitchen talk about what they are doing, and they share their ideas as well as their excitement of being able to participate in messy play on a larger scale. Children from all year groups love playing in the mud! The children create storylines which build their confidence to speak not only to children they are friends with but also to other peers who join in.
- At the end of most sessions we have circle time using a talking stick. As the stick is passed round children can share their thoughts, ideas, experiences and activities with the group but also to listen to their peers. Who has the talking stick can speak and everyone else must listen. Children are told that they can pass the stick to the next person if they don't want to share anything with the group. However I have observed that over time those children who are quiet/shy become more confident to speak and use a louder voice as they have observed others and therefore feel more comfortable and confident.
- Craft activities provide opportunities that encourage children to share thoughts and ideas but to also help each other to achieve by offering help to each other. This also develops the child's ability and confidence to ask for help from their peers and/or adults. I see on a regular basis when making Gods-eyes.

## **Emotional**

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- Our circle times are provided for the children to be given the opportunity to reflect on their activities and experiences at the end of the sessions. This encourages mindfulness and self-awareness. Children also have endless opportunities to approach an adult if they chose to celebrate their success or concerns etc. throughout the session. The adults make themselves available and approachable always. Children are comfortable and relaxed when in Forest School therefore this can be the best time for them to open up if something is troubling them or on their mind.
- I have many situations where children approach an adult to resolve a conflict they are having with another peer. I encourage independent resolution and compromise before stepping in to develop their conflict management skills.

## **Spiritual**

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- Our Children are given the insight into the beauty of nature and how important it is. Children carry out sit spots during Forest School and are asked to breathe deeply and at times close their eyes and listen. At the end of this we have circle time and the children share how it made them feel and/or what they saw/heard etc. For some children it takes a while for them to be able to switch off and relax for a little while, so this is an important thing to teach them. Others love to carry out sit spots and they are now requested frequently.
- When we group the children they are with children from other backgrounds, beliefs, religions etc. so they can experience communicating and working with each other. Children are encouraged to share their own points of view and beliefs.

## **How self-esteem and emotional intelligence has been promoted**

As a Forest School leader we promote high self-esteem but also ensuring it is realistic self-esteem. We also promote emotional intelligence which is the ability to identify and manage their emotions and the emotions of others. Our Forest School is child-led therefore promoting motivation for the children to explore their interests using their preferred learning style and we as practitioners encourage the children to follow but also lead activities which will further support and develop their motivation. We work to ensure that children develop positive relationships in order to believe in themselves, each other and to be proud of what they have and can do. With regular and consistent visits to our forest School our children will experience and enhance their skills which will support and strengthen their self-esteem and emotional intelligence.

We promote self-esteem by continuously giving positive praise to our children. Things that we praise are risk taking and challenging themselves, their ability and safe approach to activities, working together and supporting each other and resolving conflicts independently.

We provide our children with experiences and challenges to take risks and be brave, but ensuring they are achievable so the children don't experience failure. These experiences promote a feeling of satisfaction and achievement that will encourage the children to challenge themselves further. This also promotes self-awareness. Children will reflect on these activities and they will self-assess and analyse both successes and failures (which there are few as children show a great deal of determination and perseverance). Children will reflect over the process and think of alternate ways to succeed.

Each of our Forest School sessions is concluded with circle time. This gives children the opportunity to shine as this is allocated time to share their achievements/successes with the group and celebrate the things they have made. It allows discussions of feelings and emotions which the adults can express and share to emphasise and encourage openness, but also to show the children that it is okay and acceptable to talk about to others. These opportunities will develop the children's empathy when they talk about their feelings

## **How risk taking influences our children's learning and development**

Risk taking is a common choice or activity at our Forest School. Children enjoy climbing trees and for some this has been their first experience. I have observed children attempting to climb, but being very cautious, yet after a few attempts they start to show more confidence and ability to achieve. Children set themselves challenges i.e. how far they can climb or a route they will take to reach a certain point. Children who have encountered this experience then use their confidence and belief in themselves to try other activities. This will be a skill that will be used throughout their lives.

Children at Drake Forest School like to roll down the hill both on their side and also in a barrel when one is available. Some children can be quite nervous to try rolling in the barrel but after observing others they have a go.

The use of tools is another risk-taking activity however it shows we trust our children to be sensible and safe. Children enjoy the experience of using peelers, saws, knives, palm drills etc. to create and it's possible that not all children have experienced this opportunity before. Children have to risk assess for themselves when using tools i.e. blood bubble, working away from themselves, making sure the non-working hand is at a safe distance etc.

Our children need and want opportunities to take risks. They like to challenge themselves to see what they can achieve but also to push themselves to achieve more. Through risk taking children gain and develop their confidence, a belief in themselves, an awareness of their own limits and boundaries. This all contributes to their self-esteem. By taking risks our children learn how to be safe.

## **The key principals at Drake for free-flow, independent, participant-led play**

Forest School is a specialised approach to learning that offers every child an opportunity to learn outdoors in the natural environment. This gives the children a special place away from the norm where they feel free and are given the sense of timelessness and space. The children lead the sessions giving them the freedom and knowing that their choice is respected allowing them to apply their own decision making skills.

When our children enter the Forest School site for the first time they look to us practitioners to be told what to do and how to do it. With our support, they very quickly learn that the session is about them and their choices of what they would like to do (participant-led).

Our Forest School sessions are not structured or subject specific so the children can learn independently through play and experiences of their choice. We provide different resources for free-flow activities however this is to give children opportunities if they wish to have a go. It is not about having lots of activities but giving the children the experience of connections and relationships.

As a Forest School leader, I ensure that where appropriate I will take part in activities to show awareness that everyone is an equal. This helps to encourage others that aren't sure to have a go and positive praise and support is given to ensure a positive experience is had. Once children have tried activities I have seen them revisit independently as they feel more confident and able.

## **How Drake Forest School has fostered resilient, confident, independent and creative learners**

Our Forest School sessions were first introduced in 2016 and the number of sessions being run has significantly increased in 2019. Now in 2022 Forest Schools is being run twice a day every day to ensure children are able to access this provision as often as possible. Especially with the last 2 years with the pandemic, it is crucial that children have this time outside to play and interact with others.

I have observed children across the sessions and have found it such a positive experience with positive outcomes to date.

### **Case Study – Child A – Reception**

This child struggles in class. He needs structured routine and doesn't cope with change. He can lash out during class time and also at lunchtime on the playground. During Forest Schools this child shows a strong level of confidence and shows the ability to play with older children. He can get frustrated at Forest Schools but will normally come and tell an adult instead of instantly responding in an appropriate away i.e. hitting out, etc.

When he first came to Forest Schools he would request to go back to class when he saw reception tidying up their outside area. During the weeks he has been attending we have managed to extend the time he stays out. Now he will stay till the end of the session.

### **Case Study – Child T – Year 4**

This child struggles in class. He has a personal timetable where he spends so much time on doing a class work job and then has some time to choose something he would like to do i.e. football. When this child attends Forest Schools I see a child who loves the outdoors and therefore thrives. He asks if there are any jobs he can do and is always happy to help if there is anything that needs doing. At times he will join in with activities that are on offer such as the Woodland Trust Award challenges or peeling a stick. He can become frustrated at times when playing with his peers, some of which are younger than him in his forest schools group. However, he shows the ability to deal with the situations fairly well and at times will come and speak to an adult if he is getting frustrated.

### **Case study – Child G – Year 5**

This child struggles with his emotions and how to respond to these. He has had quite low self-esteem and low resilience. Since he has been regularly attending Forest Schools his self-esteem has significantly improved and shows increased perseverance in class. This child Thrives in Forest Schools and when out with younger groups he chooses to run an activity with them – go find it cards, peeling a stick etc. He remembers all of the safety rules and assists the children with great confidence using appropriate language for their age.



## **Child's quotes**

At the end of most sessions we have circle time using a talking stick. The children enjoy this time to reflect on their time in Forest School and share their experiences and ideas. This helps develop their confidence, self-esteem and it extends their ability to speak in a group, listen to each other and understand everyone has different experiences and opinions etc.

### **Reception**

"Play mud kitchens"  
"Making a house with sticks"  
"Climb up the trees"  
"Getting all dirty"  
"Rolling down the hill"  
"Jumping in puddles"  
"Going on the swing ladder"

### **Year 1**

"I enjoyed Decorating a house"  
"I liked Finding worms"  
"I liked Making my own see-saw"  
"I enjoyed climbing and sitting on trees"  
"I liked building the house and seeing if it is stable!"  
"I enjoyed jumping in muddy puddles"  
"I enjoyed playing with ..... building a fire"

### **Year 2**

"I felt relaxed because there was a nice breeze" (describing their sit spot)  
"I liked finding worms and making a home for them"  
"I enjoyed making an Autumn house"  
"I liked playing the last one to leave the hill"  
"I liked playing with my friends and building dens"  
"Playing Harry Potter with our magic wands and broom sticks"  
"I liked digging to make a mud fall like waterfall"

### **Year 3**

"I enjoyed making a Stone Age tent and making a bed"  
"I enjoyed flint knapping"  
"I enjoyed making a grapple" (an instrument for seizing hold of something; a grappling hook)  
"I enjoyed flint knapping and sharpening sticks"  
"I enjoyed making a hot tub/tank"  
"I enjoyed digging and rolling the big tyre"  
"I am good at designing things" (Sharing what we are good at)

### **Year 4**

"I enjoyed making a bakery and serving people"  
"I enjoyed making a farm and looking after slugs and worms"  
"Playing in the drums and making a fire"  
"I enjoyed sliding down the mud slide"  
"I enjoyed playing world war 2"  
"I enjoyed playing family warriors with my friends"

### **Year 5**

Year 6 have just come out for the first time this year.

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