**Seven key features of effective practice**

* 1. **1. The best for every child**
  + All children deserve to have an equal chance of success.
  + High-quality early education is good for all children. It is especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
  + When they start school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are, on average, 4 months1 1 behind their peers. We need to do more to narrow that gap.
  + Children who have lived through difficult experiences can begin to grow stronger when they experience high quality early education and care.
  + High-quality early education and care is inclusive. Children’s special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly. All children promptly receive any extra help they need, so they can progress well in their learning.

At Forest Schools, we recognise that every child can achieve their full potential, but is unique in their skills and abilities. All Children have an equal chance/opportunity to succeed in any activity they choose, even if they need an adults support to complete their self-chosen task/challenge. Regardless of background, age, stage and ability, all participants have the opportunity to grow stronger through high quality experiences in the outdoor.

* 1. **2. High-quality care**
* The child’s experience must always be central to the thinking of every practitioner.
* Babies, toddlers and young children thrive when they are loved and well cared for.
* High-quality care is consistent. Every practitioner needs to enjoy spending time with young children.
* Effective practitioners are responsive to children and babies. They notice when a baby looks towards them and gurgles and respond with pleasure.
* Practitioners understand that toddlers are learning to be independent, so they will sometimes get frustrated.
* Practitioners know that starting school, and all the other transitions in the early years, are big steps for small children.

High quality care is expected at Forest Schools from the children and is to be provided by the adults too. The adult’s role is to observe the children from a distance and be approachable if the children need them or want them to play etc. The Forest School practitioners will enjoy spending time with the children and ensure every child has a positive experience throughout their session. During transition back to school, adults are aware that this may be a difficult time for children and will support this in a nurturing way, ensuring that the high quality care is maintained until they are back in class.

* 1. **3. The curriculum: what we want children to learn**
* The curriculum is a top-level plan of everything the early years setting wants the children to learn.
* Planning to help children to develop their language is vital.
* The curriculum needs to be ambitious. Careful sequencing will help children to build their learning over time.
* Young children’s learning is often driven by their interests. Plans need to be flexible.
* Babies and young children do not develop in a fixed way. Their development is like a spider’s web with many strands, not a straight line.
* Depth in early learning is much more important than covering lots of things in a superficial way.

Forest school meets the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. This is shown on the pages to follow. The children’s interests drive their learning, as Forest Schools is child-led play. These sessions adapt and change every week to engage the children with topics and interests of their choosing, and learning outdoors enhances their curiosity and learning experiences.

* 1. **4. Pedagogy: helping children to learn**
* Children are powerful learners. Children can make progress in their learning, with the right help.
* Effective pedagogy is a mix of different approaches. Children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other, and through guided learning and direct teaching.
* Practitioners carefully organise enabling environments for high-quality play. Sometimes, they make time and space available for children to invent their own play. Sometimes, they join in to sensitively support and extend children’s learning.
* Children in the early years also learn through group work, when practitioners guide their learning.
* Older children need more of this guided learning.
* A well-planned learning environment, indoors and outside, is an important aspect of pedagogy.

Children make progress through repeated activities in Forest Schools; therefore, they are improving their abilities and skills through hands on experiences. Children learn through play, by adults modelling activities including skills, and through extended knowledge offered by the Forest Schools Practitioners when appropriate to do so.

A learner-centred pedagogical approach is employed by Forest School that is responsive to the needs and interests of learners. The Practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote during their programmes through careful planning, appropriate dialogue and relationship building. – Forest School Association principles and criteria for good practice

<https://forestschoolassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice/>

* 1. **5. Assessment: checking what children have learnt**
* Assessment is about noticing what children can do and what they know. It is not about lots of data and evidence.
* Effective assessment requires practitioners to understand child development. Practitioners also need to be clear about what they want children to know and be able to do.
* Accurate assessment can highlight whether a child has a special educational need and needs extra help.
* Before assessing children, it is a good idea to think about whether the assessments will be useful.
* Assessment should not take practitioners away from the children for long periods of time.

Assessment is carried out differently in Forest Schools as the idea is to learn resilience, build confidence extend their emotional and spiritual aspects etc., which children will transfer into the classroom over a period of time. Forest Schools is the perfect setting to collect observations to meet the Early Years framework – Development Matters, in a child-led environment.

Principle 3: Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

• Where appropriate, the Forest School leader will aim to link experiences at Forest School to home, work and /or school education

• Forest School programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and spiritual aspects of the learner.

– Forest School Association principles and criteria for good practice

<https://forestschoolassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-good-practice/>

**6. Self-regulation and executive function**

* Executive function includes the child’s ability to: hold information in mind
* focus their attention
* think flexibly
* Inhibit impulsive behaviour.
* These abilities contribute to the child’s growing ability to self-regulate: concentrate their thinking
* plan what to do next
* monitor what they are doing and adapt
* regulate strong feelings
* be patient for what they want
* Bounce back when things get difficult.
* Language development is central to self-regulation: children use language to guide their actions and plans. Pretend play gives many opportunities for children to focus their thinking, persist and to plan ahead.

Children in Forest Schools tend to engage in role-play, which gives them the opportunity to focus, plan ahead and join in with their peers. Children show the ability to self-regulate and are learning to problem solve and resolve any conflicts that arise with their peers.

Children enjoy being in the Forest Schools setting as they focus on their own interests, and are learning in a child-led way through play.

* 1. **7. Partnership with parents**
* It is important for parents and early year’s settings to have a strong and respectful partnership. This sets the scene for children to thrive in the early years.
* This includes listening regularly to parents and giving parents clear information about their children’s progress.
* The help that parents give their children at home has a very significant impact on their learning.
* Some children get much less support for their learning at home than others. By knowing and understanding all the children and their families, settings can offer extra help to those who need it most.
* It is important to encourage all parents to chat, play and read with their children.

Partnerships with parents can vary regarding Forest Schools. Photos of the experience are on the school website, with permissions given, and parents can access this at any time. Photos are also shared on Tapestry to the individual families. This shows their child/children’s accomplishments and the fun they have had whilst achieving them. Children enjoy sharing what they did on the weekend with their families whilst at Forest Schools and parents can share this on Tapestry if they wish to do so.