



FOREST SCHOOL / OUTDOOR LEARNING CLASSROOM POLICY

2023- 2024

Pear Tree Mead Academy
Part of the Passmores Co-operative Learning Community

Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Policy

Forest schools / outdoor classrooms are an inspirational process that offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a local woodland environment. Outdoor learning, used in a range of ways, will enrich the curriculum, and make learning fun, meaningful and relevant for children and young people.

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1. The Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Ethos

Forest school / outdoor learning classroom 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 will work with tools, 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 / outdoor learning classroom concept originates in Denmark, originally aimed at pre-school children, where it was found that children who had attended forest school / outdoor learning classroom 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.

A Forest school / outdoor learning classroom encourages children to:

- 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.

2. Our Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Code of Conduct

The Forest:

Entering the Forest

We will enter the woodland area respectfully and know that when at Forest school / outdoor learning classroom expectations are in place. We will explore, investigate, learn, and play in a manner that will not damage our Forest environment. We understand that we share our woodland area with plants and animals and that when we are in our Forest School, we are sharing the environment with them.

Boundaries

Before each session begins children are made aware of how far that they can explore and of any fixed boundary markers. If children move to explore hidden areas an adult should also move into the cover deep enough to be able to see the children but allowing the children, the freedom to explore independently. If you lose sight of a child shout '1,2,3, where are you?' The children have been taught to respond '1,2,3, I'm here' through classroom games that are practised regularly. (Generic site risk assessment)

Lighting a fire

When lighting a fire, the Forest school / outdoor learning classroom leader will take control of the operation and all accompanying adults will be briefed before we start. A lit fire will not be left unattended at any point. A fire may not be lit until it has been confirmed to all that our fire safety equipment is in place. Open fires will be built within a fire square. (Fire risk assessments)

At the Fire Circle

An open fire will be lit within a fire square. A fire circle using log sitting stools may be established around the perimeter, 1.5m from the fire square. No one may enter the fire circle perimeter unless invited to do so by an adult. There may be no running past the fire circle. No items must be carried and placed within the fire circle unless by an adult. If you wish to move around the fire to a new stool, you must step out of the circle and walk around the outside of the log circle. Even when the fire is unlit, we will treat it as if it is still lit. (Fire risk assessments)

Using Tools

All tools have their own clear code of conduct for correct use which will include consideration of specific personal protective equipment, correct use of a specific body posture, and consideration of the appropriate types of activity that each tool may be used for. (See tool use guides and risk assessments).

Picking up and playing with sticks

Children can carry sticks shorter than their arm's length but are encouraged to think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks may be dragged or carried with the help of another

person when each person is at either end. Sticks must not be thrown. Sticks must not be pulled from living trees.

Picking up and playing with stones

Stones may be picked up and transported. Children often like to make patterns and pictures with them. Stones may not be thrown. They may be dropped but thought must be given to whether it is safe to do so, i.e., what is beneath where I am dropping it?

Digging

Digging large holes is not encouraged. Children may carefully move soil to look for insects and their habitats using lolly pop sticks, fingers or small sticks found within the woodland, but deep holes should not be made.

Collecting wood

Wood is collected for fire lighting purposes. It is collected in four thicknesses – matchstick sized, pencil sized, thumb sized, and wrist sized. This is a good mathematical activity involving sorting and matching. Sticks may be collected for creating pictures and patterns but should be collected sparingly so as not to disrupt creature habitats.

Eating and Drinking

Nil by mouth policy for anything found in the woodland, unless this activity has been specifically planned for during the session (e.g., blackberry picking). Children must be reminded not to put their fingers or hands in their mouths or noses. When having drinks and snacks children will use wipes & water to clean their hands before consumption.

Rope and String Use

We encourage the collection and transportation of materials. We do not allow children to tie up each other. If a child has a good idea and wants to tie up something, for example a tarp or a swing, an adult should help them as needed, modelling appropriate knot tying and modelling how to talk through ideas and decisions.

Carrying and Transporting Materials

Children are encouraged to roll, lift, drag and to pull materials, either by using their hands or by using ropes. We encourage safe lifting by bending our knees and keeping our back straight. Safe lifting should always be modelled by adults. Heavier objects should be rolled, lifted, or carried by more people working together. (Safe lifting risk assessment)

Toileting

Children are invited to use the toilets before we leave the school buildings. Children may go to the toilet in a designated area behind bushes or return to a nearby classroom with an adult.

Leaving the Site

We work according to the ethos 'leave no trace' that we were in the woodland as much as is reasonably possible. Shelters should be taken down; imported materials need to be removed. Very occasionally large items may be left between sessions. All rubbish and toileting items will always be removed. If artefacts have been found or made these may be taken off the site with the consent of an adult.

Tree Climbing

An adult must be present when wanting to climb trees in the woodland area. The ground cover should be checked for sharp objects and the tree marked as suitable for climbing. A visual check must be made for loose and rotten branches. Children are permitted to explore to their own limits or to a maximum height of 1.5m. Adults should be near enough to catch if a child should fall but far enough away to not be invasive to the children's exploration. (Tree climbing risk assessment)

3. Suggested Activities for Forest Schools

Activities for Forest Schools are diverse and numerous, but it should be reminded that we are trying to create independent learners who are inspired to try their own ideas, explore their own interests, and attempt new ideas.

Some activities might include:

- Fire lighting.
- Shelter building
- Tool use
- Studying wildlife
- Playing team games and group games
- Sensory activities
- Tracking games
- Cooking on an open fire
- Rope and string work
- Art and sculpture work
- Woodland and traditional craft
- Developing stories and drama, and meeting imaginary characters
- Physical movement activities

Other outdoor learning areas

Outdoor learning in practice.

PTM use outdoor learning to support the teaching and learning taking place indoors. Teaching may be linked to cross curricular planning, a certain subject, or a one-off experience.

There is a bank of ideas on the outdoor learning cards, which provide teachers with ideas on what to plan and what subjects are supported by outdoor learning.

Areas for outdoor learning

We are very lucky to have a large school ground. The following can be found onsite:

- Pond
- Allotments
- Outdoor classroom
- Woodland area
- KS1 and KS2 adventure playgrounds
- Climbing walls
- School fields
- Pergola x2
- EY's covered areas and playground with climbing equipment, pirate ship and tarmac spaces.
- Some classes have an outdoor area accessible from their classrooms.
- Outdoor gym
- Covered outdoor classroom.
- Digging mud area
- Sand pit.
- Opal play scheme areas.

Areas that are used off site regularly:

- Library
- The common
- Community walks
- Local shop e.g.: Bush Fair for the bakers or post office etc
- Church
- Local schools

4. Equipment for Forest School

In addition to tools suited to the planned for activities, the Forest school / outdoor learning classroom will always take an emergency bag with them. The contents of the emergency bag will vary depending on the time of year and weather conditions, the site being used, and the planned for activities according to the relevant risk assessments and daily risk assessment. There are of course also essential items that should be carried out for every session.

Essential Equipment:

- First aid kit
- Emergency procedures
- Medical information for each individual

- Risk assessments.
- Clean water
- Whistle
- Accident forms/booklet
- Medication for individuals – clearly labelled.
- Appropriate clothing
- The Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Leader will always carry a mobile phone.

Other Possible Equipment:

- Wet wipes, hand gel
- Nappy sacks and toileting things
- Trowel
- Spare clothing
- Plastic bag
- Plastic sheeting and blanket

Essential Equipment: Clothing

No person will be permitted to go to Forest school / outdoor learning classroom without appropriate clothing that will protect them from extremes of heat or cold, keep them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes, which fits appropriately for comfort, and that meets any religious requirements.

Children and parents are encouraged to think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities, and to be aware they are likely to take some of our mud home with them after a session. In the forest it can often be cooler than expected under the shade of the trees.

Clothing List:

- Waterproof coat, with a hood
- Long sleeved top
- Full length trousers
- Warm boots (wellies can be cold during the winter)
- Warm socks, and a spare pair
- Gloves and woolly hat – cold weather
- Sun hat that fits well to ensure good visibility – sunny weather.

We work on the principle that ‘there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing.’

Essential equipment: First Aid Kit

- Latex gloves
- Bandages
- Plasters
- Dressings
- Burn gel.

- Burn dressing.
- Scissors
- Antiseptic wipes
- Medication for individual children
- Water
- Cling film.

Essential Equipment: When having a fire

- Flame retardant gauntlet glove.
- Fire blanket.
- Bucket of water
- Fire steel.
- Vaseline
- Cotton wool
- Matches
- Bucket of sand

5. Using and Storing Tools

All tools are counted out and back in at the beginning and end of each session in which they are used. When not in use in the woodland area they are kept secured away in a locked container. Before each tool is to be used it will be checked for damage and working order.

Each tool type is kept in their own suitable containers, many of which are also lockable. Children must never be allowed to help themselves and will always have adult supervision when collecting, transporting, and using tools.

Tools are only used for a specific purpose. All adults should model correct and safe tool use, storage, and transportation always. When using a tool, they are used well away from others in the group, in a 'blood bubble' and ensuring that others are aware that a tool is in use. Only walking is permitted when transporting a tool.

Only wear a glove when using a bow saw and only on your bracing hand. No other tools may be used when the operator is wearing gloves.

Potato Peelers and Knives – for peeling or sharpening sticks (whittling)

A ratio of 1 adult to 2 children will be observed. This tool must be used seated on a log with elbows placed upon knees and using the tool in a downward motion between the legs. A 'blood bubble' space must be determined ensuring a safe distance away from others. If someone wished to pass through your bubble they must verbally ask and you must stop whilst they pass. Safe, very temporary, storage is to store the blade end of the peeler in the soil. When carrying peelers, you must walk with them held down by your side. Once a child is deemed to be competent by the forest leader, they may be allowed to use a fixed blade knife to whittle. The same rules as above still apply. When carrying a knife

return it to its sheath and tie it in securely using the strings. Carry the knife either by your side or with the string around your neck. Tools must be returned to the storage container when no longer in use.

Bow Saws – for cross cutting wood up to 12cm diameter.

Children may be taught how to use a bow saw with 1:1 supervision, or with a 'buddy' helping in a 'push-pull' fashion. Adults must always supervise closely and should place their hand (gloved) between the child's hand and that of the saw blade. The safest method of use is to brace the wood through the bow saw itself. The saw blade must be covered when not in use. When being carried the bow saw blade (in its' cover) should be pointing downwards, and to the back. When not in use (shed storage) blades should be loosened off by an adult.

Palm Drills/Bit and Brace – for making holes.

The item to be drilled should be placed and held (by the adult) securely on a firm flat surface. Work in a safe space being aware of others moving around you, think 'blood bubble.' Safe, very temporary, storage is to store the blade pushed downwards into the soil. Carry these tools by your side facing downwards and remember only to walk.

Kelly Kettle

The Forest leader may use this to heat water. Never leave the bung in whilst heating water. This is only to be in place during storage to keep the chamber clear from forest debris or insects and minibeasts. Once the fire is going in the Kelly Kettle base carefully add the chimney top to it by holding the handle parallel to the ground and supported on each side by your hands. When lit, do not stand directly over, or look straight down the chimney. Never blow into the top. When pouring out the water support the base by holding the bung chain in one hand and the handle with the other. To put the fire out, pour the remaining water into the base.

When not in use all tools will be securely locked away in the tool shed. Tools should be checked and cleaned before they are put away. Half termly the Forest Leader will ensure that each tool is thoroughly cleaned and oiled. Wear and tear will be monitored daily.

6. Health and Safety Policies

Pear Tree Mead Academy Health and Safety Policy sets out clear statements of intent regarding the Whole School's approach to the health and safety of its children, staff and visitors to the School and the School Site. Provided below is a list of additional points and measures which relate directly to our Forest school / outdoor learning sessions.

The trained and named Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Leader is always the person in charge of Forest school / outdoor learning classroom sessions.

The Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Leader has overall duty of care for the children in their charge. However, all adults involved in the Forest school / outdoor learning classroom session are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe.

The Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Leader or Assistant will always carry and take a first aid kit into the forest at every session.

The Forest school / outdoor learning classroom leader or Assistant will always carry an emergency bag into the forest for every session.

The Forest Leader will review the risk assessments before every session.

When tools are used the adult child ration will be 1: 1.

There is one exception to this – when using peelers for whittling the ration can be.

1: 2.

The Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Leader is responsible for the maintenance and checking of all tools and equipment to be used at Forest school, prior to their use.

The Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Leader is responsible in training the children in how to use the tools and equipment safely and appropriately.

The Forest Leader will be responsible for the pre visit check of the woodland site prior to a Forest school / outdoor learning classroom session.

7. Safeguarding Children, Confidentiality and Forest School

Everyone at Pear Tree Mead Academy has a responsibility in relation to child protection.

We are committed to:

- Taking all reasonable measures to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child and young person (pupil) in our care.
- The practice of safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children and young people.
- Protecting each pupil from any form of abuse, whether from an adult or another pupil

Adults working within Forest school / outdoor learning classroom need to appreciate that when children feel comfortable and content, when their instinct to trust and risk take is encouraged, they may be moved to disclose information which they might have otherwise kept to themselves. Any volunteer, or member of staff, who finds that a child is telling them something that concerns them should follow the course of action set out below in simple steps:

Listen to the pupil but ask NO leading questions. Allow the child to lead the discussion but do not press for details.

Keep calm and offer reassurance. Accept what the child says without challenge.

Make NO promises. You cannot 'keep a secret.' You should make it understood that there are limits to confidentiality at the start of the disclosure.

Inform the Child Protection Officer, Mrs Rebecca Arnould. Keep an accurate, **written record** on CPOMS of the conversation, including the date, the time, the place the conversation occurred in and the essence of what was said and done by whom and in whose presence.

8. Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Forest School

The mission statement of Pear Tree Mead Academy emphasises the value placed on the individuality of all our children. We are committed to giving each child every opportunity to achieve the highest of standards, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, attainment, age, disability, gender, or background. We actively seek to remove the barriers to learning and participation that can hinder or exclude individual children or groups of children. We aim to provide all our children with the opportunity to succeed, and to reach the highest level of personal achievement.

We will:

- Ensure equality of access for all children
- Employ a range of styles, including collaborative learning, so that children can value working together.
- Seek to involve all parents in supporting their child's education.
- Take account of the performance of all children when planning for future learning and setting challenging targets
- Make best use of all available resources to support the learning of all groups of children.

Our teachers ensure that our children:

- Feel secure and know that their contributions are valued and appreciate and value the differences in others.
- Take responsibility for their own actions.
- Participate safely, in clothing that is appropriate to their religious beliefs.
- Are taught in groupings that allow them all to experience success.
- Use materials that reflect a range of cultural backgrounds, learning styles and linguistic needs, without stereotyping.
- Have a common curriculum experience that allows for a range of different learning styles.
- Have challenging targets that enable them to succeed.
- Are encouraged to participate fully, regardless of disabilities or medical needs.

Forest school / outdoor learning classroom does mean Forest school / outdoor learning classroom FOR ALL. We do have a stock of extra all-weather clothing but ask that both parents and children think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities, and to be aware that they are likely to take home muddy and wet clothes after a Forest school / outdoor learning classroom session. We encourage a level of risk-taking, always under close adult supervision, and actively foster friendships and collaboration between all children and adults. Forest school / outdoor learning classroom activities are always designed to produce success and enjoyment, even when this appears to be of a transitory nature. The Forest environment is an environment to which we are all entitled, and we strongly believe that the experiences we will have there will linger in the memory for years to come. Children with medical needs or disabilities will be helped so that they can take part fully in each Forest school / outdoor learning classroom session. Those children with challenging behaviour will be risk

assessed and may need one to one supervision, but their entitlement to participate in Forest school / outdoor learning classroom remains the same.

9. Risk Assessment Guidelines

A **SITE** risk assessment is undertaken each week, and a **DAILY** risk assessment and check is made prior to every Forest school / outdoor learning session at our Forest site.

In addition, an **ACTIVITY** risk assessment will be established prior to any activity that may require it. These will include whittling, cutting wood, shelter building, fire lighting and cooking on an open fire, and palm drilling.

Specific additional risk assessments will be undertaken for children whose medical condition or whose behaviour requires them.

The risk assessment process is detailed below:

- We look for potential hazards.
- We decide who might be at harm.
- We think about how harm may occur and the worst outcome that we could face.
- We evaluate the current level of risk.
- We decide on a course of action or set of precautions that will be put in place to minimise the potential risk.
- We then re-evaluate the level of risk once our course of action and precautions have been put in place.
- We create a risk assessment and collate them in the Forest school / outdoor learning classroom file.
- We inform all adults with accompanying the group and require them to sign each relevant risk assessment to show that they have read and understood the assessments.
- We regularly monitor and review each risk assessment, half termly and as an action are needed.

10. Accident and Emergency Procedures

First Aid:

- Follow Policy and Procedures Document. Any illness or injury to be treated by a qualified first aider.
- Check Dr –A-B-C, Administer First Aid.
- Remove others in group from the situation, ensuring they are safe.
- Notify school office. And if necessary, call for further assistance, or notify emergency services.
- Have medical details available in medical bag and notify parents/guardians as appropriate.
- All accidents, however minor, must be reported on the appropriate forms.
- Follow up to parents as usual.

Behaviour Problems:

- Talk child involved down.
- Remove other children from the area of risk if it is deemed to be necessary.
- Inform office and call for help as needed.
- Debrief child after calming down period.
- Log incident.
- Inform parents/guardian
- Create risk assessment, if necessary
- Close supervision and monitoring of behaviour.

11. Poor Weather Procedure

We will not go to Forest school / outdoor learning classroom if the conditions are deemed dangerous such as in high winds (25 mph and above), during thunderstorms, or during periods of extreme cold. We will use the BBC weather online forecast to make judgments about the expected conditions. In accordance with our Severe Weather Clause in the School's Health and Safety Policy documents the Head Teacher, Mrs Peden, will ultimately make the decision deeming if the weather is suitable for Forest School.

When it is wet a shelter will be built immediately by a trained adult so that there is a sheltered area that is available from the start that can be used.

Many of our activities can be carried out inside, such as our tracking, sensory and team games so no child will miss out if conditions do not allow us to go out into the Forest.

Forest school / outdoor learning classroom Leader: Kim McCombie

