



Bracken Hill School

Forest School Policy

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Policy Type: Whole School

This policy is reviewed biennially to ensure compliance with current regulations

The Governors of the school recognise that all staff play a vital role in the achievement of high standards and in providing our pupils with the best opportunities matched to their needs.

Statement of Intent

Bracken Hill School is an area Special School that meets the needs of a diverse population of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The school is committed to providing an individualised and targeted provision for all pupils and recognises the importance of a varied curriculum which utilises outdoor spaces for the Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs of its pupils.

Many of the students at Bracken Hill have low self-esteem and require support from parents, carers or school staff and rely on encouragement from staff to attempt tasks which present as challenging. We continue to support students to be as independent as possible in all aspects of school and forest school provides an additional environment where students can experience success and develop greater independence.

What is Forest Schools

‘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.’

‘Forest School is a specialised learning approach that sits within and complements the wider context of outdoor and woodland education.’ Forest School Association.

Forest Schools uses a learner centred technique, which aims through long term, regular sessions in the outdoors to foster a relationship between the learner and the outdoors. Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners, who take supported risks with the assistance of qualified Forest School leaders.

Risky Play at Forest School

Risky play has tremendous value for young people.

Risky play comes in all sorts of shapes and forms, but its premise is always the same. Children learn lots about themselves and the world through an element of risk that is just enough to provide challenge without being overly dangerous. This is why it is a key element of a modern curriculum. Activities at forest school are carefully risk assessed to ensure that they provide the balance of giving students new opportunities and the perception of danger within a safe and carefully managed environment.

Risky play often falls into 6 categories:

1. Climbing up high objects
2. Experiencing speed such as on a log swing
3. Using dangerous tools such as saws

4. Being near risky elements such as fire or water
5. Rough and tumble play with others
6. Disappearing games, such as hide and seek

Implementation

Forest School sessions will be led by 2, level 3 qualified practitioners with the support of qualified teaching assistants employed by Bracken Hill. The sessions will be offered to primary age students for one afternoon a week for a term per group, with groups typically consisting of 10-15 students.

Prior to attendance, class teams identify 3 key areas of need for the group and a programme of activities aimed at enhancing these skills is planned. Students will be transported to the providers premises by minibus and will work alongside Forest School practitioners; Mrs. Brown and Mrs Watson. A range of activities will be available for students to opt into which may include games, crafts, woodland knowledge, imaginative building, mud kitchen, tool use, climbing and building fires. Staff will demonstrate activities in small and whole group sessions, make suggestions about what a student may want to try and ask open ended questions to encourage review of tasks. Ultimately the sessions will be directed by the students' individual interests and state of mind, adults will act as enablers. The challenges will be risk assessed termly, matched to individual abilities and level of comprehension and dynamically adapted to suit the situation.

Phase 2 students are provided with an outdoor learning session for one afternoon a week each half term. This is a more structured and directed session which builds on prior Forest School knowledge and focusses on the use of tools to provide the element of risk.

Safety

The advantages of the activities offered at Forest School will always outweigh the risks of taking part. Each activity will be risk assessed, the correct technique will be demonstrated and further guidance and support provided as necessary. If at any point a student acts in an unsafe way despite demonstrations, training and guidance, then they will need to be removed from the activity for a period of time. Medical conditions, individual strengths and limitations and appreciation of current mental state will be regularly reviewed in order to plan suitably challenging and inclusive activities. The actions of a student in other environments, should not impact their opportunity to access Forest School.

Assessment

Whilst Forest School is primarily concerned with personal development and individuals reviewing and acknowledging their progress through verbal exchanges, staff are able to report progress using the proforma in appendix 1 and make contributions to PSHE SOLAR targets or EHCP outcomes.

Impact

There is significant evidence offered by Forest School Association to suggest improvements in a young person's self-reliance, confidence, self-esteem, social interaction, emotional regulation, achievement and an ownership of their environment and of themselves. These personal developments, whilst important in their own right, also contribute to a student's achievement in academic subjects, however this cannot be quantified.

Forest School has been established at Bracken Hill for approximately 6 years and has been enhanced in 2024 by a second qualified level 3 leader and in 2025 by a level 2 trained staff member. The qualitative data from staff and students has been strong, with many teachers reporting an excitement about attending sessions followed by calmness and reduced anxiety behaviours, post Forest School.

Appendix 1

GENERAL MOOD		CONFIDENCE WITH PEERS	CONFIDENCE WITH LEADERS or Significant Adults	EYE CONTACT and Body Language	LANGUAGE USED	ENGAGEMENT IN TASKS THE FOUR P's
+VE = POSITIVE VE = NEGATIVE R = RESPONSIVE UN = UNRESPONSIVE HYP = HYPERACTIVE		1 = LOW 5 = HIGH	1 = LOW 5 = HIGH	APPROPRIATE	SOCIAL	Participant – actively engaged in task / activity, enjoying it, positive Prisoner – disinterested in task / activity, reluctant, feels like they are forced to be there Passenger – engaged in task / activity, will take easy option, won't actively help Protester – disinterested in task / activity, wants everybody to know it, complains, responds negatively, disruptive, un-engaging
				%	%	PARTICIPANT PASSENGER PRISONER PROTESTER
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE						
Self Awareness		Self Regulation		Self Motivation		Empathy
Consciousness of emotions, feelings, thoughts and how this impacts on behaviours		Consciously and unconsciously manage own emotions and behaviour appropriate to the social situation		Able to identify, set and achieve short, medium and long term goals		Ability to influence and respond to others using appropriate verbal and non verbal communication
Score 1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5		1 2 3 4 5
WELLBEING						
Extremely low in well-being. These young people usually feel and look 'low'. They show no signs of well-being		About half the time, these young people display signs of emotional discomfort. They seldom enjoy themselves and may enjoy hurting others.		These young people seem quite happy. Occasionally they show signs of discomfort or leave a neutral impression with regard to well-being.		These young people seem generally happy. Moments of well-being clearly outnumber the moments of discomfort.
Score 1		2		3		4 5
CHALLENGE / ENGAGEMENT						
This young person shows nearly no involvement or activity, absent and passive, no exploration and imagination, no mental activity and can become disruptive.		Often interrupted, limited concentration, easily disrupted, limited results and daydreams		Busy; whole time but without concentration, action superficial, is easily distracted, no challenge or deep learning level is achieved.		Continually engaged and absorbed in the activity, absolutely focussed and absorbed, shows attention to detail, motivated capable, imagination and skill are engaged. Little can distract this young person.
Score 1		2		3		4 5
EXCEPTIONAL BEHAVIOUR: General behaviour, from or about young person						