



Bracken Hill School

Forest School Tool Use

Policy

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Policy Type: Whole School

This policy is reviewed bi-annually 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 lack confidence in their abilities and have become reliant of parents, carers and teachers to meet their needs. This is an area of personal development the school has been working to improve for a few years.

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 a qualified Forest School leader.

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.

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

Using tools in Forest School allows children to experience danger in the form of risky equipment.

Implementation: Tools used in Bracken Hill's Forest School

- Hand saws
- Knives
- Vegetable peelers
- Bill hooks
- Secateurs
- Loppers
- Axe
- Hammers / mallets
- Bradawl

Tool Storage and Maintenance

All tools will be stored in lockable tool boxes at all times. The boxes will be locked during transport to and from site and when not in use, on the Forest School site. At school, tools will be kept away from pupils in clean and dry conditions.

Tools will be inspected regularly to ensure they are in working order. Tools will be wiped down after each session and sprayed with WD-40 to prevent rust. If they are found to be broken, they will either be mended or safely disposed of. Blades will be sharpened by trained staff on a regular basis.

Tool use on Site

Tools will only be used in Forest School sessions where there is a level 3 qualified Forest School practitioner on site and delivering the sessions. Other staff can support in the delivery of these sessions.

A designated tool storage area will be identified at the site, using a tarp shelter (as required) to keep the tools dry and to signify what is stored there.

The area to be used for working will be made safe by removing trip hazards and leaf litter. A sawhorse or additional logs may be used to stabilise logs being cut.

When an individual, or pair are using a tool, safety gloves will always be worn on the non-working hand. No other person should enter their working sphere of two arms and a tool lengths distance.

Tool use by Pupils

The Forest School leader will assess the capabilities of the group over a period of time to ascertain whether the students are safe to work with tools. The leader will instil the need for safety and respect for the woodland environment. For Phase 2 students, level 3 leaders will rely on prior knowledge of pupils and liaison with class teams to identify which tools can be safely used.

There will always be a tool talk prior to using any tools and students should be able to recite their own tool talk to display their understanding of the risks. Tools will be demonstrated a number of times, then be very closely supervised in 1:1 or 1:2 ratio. This can only be relaxed if the students

consistently show safe practice, building skill and confidence until the student is independent in their tool use.

There may be times when a session is postponed or specific students don't participate because the dynamic risk assessment carried out by all members of staff suggest a child would be unsafe. If at any time, the leader feels there is unsafe practice and that students are a risk to themselves or others, the leader will stop the activity immediately. The tools will be cleaned and stored away in a locked box. The tools may be reintroduced in a future session after the leader has re-taught all the safety requirements.

Impact: Tool use supporting Education

Forest Schools and the use of tools within Forest Schools is one element in the holistic development of a child.

There is significant evidence to suggest improvements in self-reliance, confidence, self-esteem, social interaction, emotional regulation, achievement and an ownership of their environment and of themselves.

Forest School has been embedded in the curriculum of Bracken Hill for approximately 6 years. Throughout this time, students have become more accustomed to attending Forest School and the staffs' knowledge of suitable challenge for students has developed. In Phase 1, there is very little tool work offered but this has now led to a progression route for phase 2 students into tool work in outdoor learning and use of fires in phase 3 Duke of Edinburgh.