

Bridgewater

Forest School

Parental Handbook





Welcome to our Forest School.

This is where the journey begins and like any great story we enter slowly through the big brown wooden gate and down into the deep, deep, deep Forest. We go quietly as we start to hear a noise... is it a bird, mouse or dragon? The wind whistles by and the adventure in the Forest begins.

Forest School is the place where magic can start to happen as imaginations, self-confidence and vocabulary start to grow. Every visit to the Forest will be to the same places, yet the story will always change and be different. The amazing memories and adventures that take place in Forest School will always be enjoyed.



We are delighted to introduce the Bridgewater School Prep Department Forest School handbook for parents. This booklet addresses frequently asked questions about this exciting concept and provides vital information for our pupils to fully enjoy our Forest School.

## What is Forest School?

Forest School has developed from the Scandinavian education system and is about children and young people building self-esteem and independence through exploring and experiencing the natural world. Forest School is a long term programme led by a trained practitioner within a natural environment.

Bridgewater Forest School will provide all our children with the opportunity to access, experience and enjoy learning, while working in the outside environment. We take the classroom outside and use our surroundings, weather and sounds to enhance the visual, oral and sensual learning of our pupils.

This holistic approach develops a child's independence, imagination, self-esteem and creates the desire to understand, learn and respect the natural world through exploration and discovery in a safe, yet challenging environment. Children are able to take calculated risks in a controlled environment. Pupils are given the opportunity and responsibility, under supervision, to use tools and help to be part of a team. As the children's skills progress we will be using our fire pit to keep warm and cook food.

Equality, achievement and self-belief enable children to feel more confident that they can accomplish and succeed in whatever they do. Every child is valued and their input is vital; we work as a team and they are able to respect and treat each other fairly and as equals.

## How can Forest School help my child's learning and development?

It is proven from research that outdoor learning involves all the senses and is therefore incredibly powerful and memorable. Forest School helps children develop through a child-led approach and teaches them how to assess risks for themselves. In addition, Forest School supports the holistic development of the child.

- **Health and fitness** – being active in an outdoor, natural environment
- **Increased emotional wellbeing** – building resilience and relationships
- **Social development** – communicating and negotiating with peers and adults to solve problems and share experiences
- **Skills development** – developing fine and gross motor skills and coordination for real purposes
- **Knowledge and understanding** – multi-sensory, real-life learning
- **Individualised learning** – careful observation allows adults to tailor support to a child's own interests and stage of development
- **Curriculum links** – Forest School supports many areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework, National Curriculum and the Every Child Matters agenda.



## What sort of activities do the children do?

The Forest School routine varies. Earlier sessions will concentrate on safety; establishing boundaries and routines. As the children develop in confidence and familiarity with the environment, they will progress to more challenging activities. Forest School will run all year round and in all weathers (unless weather conditions are dangerous).

Possible activities may include:

- **Hunting for mini-beasts**
- **Singing special songs and sharing stories**
- **Natural crafts** – making necklaces from elder, crowns or dreamcatchers from willow, collages from natural materials, weaving with long grasses, tree cookies and many other artistic skills
- **Mud sculptures**
- **Shelter building and knot tying**
- **Using tools for a purpose** – such as peeling bark from sticks with potato peelers to make toasting forks
- **Fire building and cooking on a campfire**

## What tools will be used in Forest School?

In Forest School the children will use some tools at appropriate times. The use of tools will of course be adapted to reflect the age of the children. Examples of tools used by older children may be potato peelers, palm drills and, when they are competent, small knives and bow saws. Our Forest School Leader will give the children a safety talk each session and, when appropriate, will explain how a tool should be used and when it can be used safely.

## What is the adult / child ratio?

The child to adult ratio will differ depending upon the age of the children and the activity being conducted. There will always be at least two adults present for the activities. However, during an activity where children will be using a tool, the ratio will be minimum of 1:1 with our Forest School Leader.

## Are there first aiders on the site?

We always have a minimum of one member of staff who is first aid trained. The first aider will have all necessary first aid equipment on site including epi-pens and inhalers when required.

## If it is cold or raining, will Forest School still take place?

Forest School take place in all seasons and all types of weather unless the weather becomes extreme and therefore dangerous. Our excellent Forest School area has large tarpaulins which can be used for shelter.

## What is the children are cold or wet?

Before the Forest School session starts, the children are reminded of the importance of wearing appropriate clothing and to tell an adult if they are cold or wet. During the session the children are carefully monitored by the supervising adults.



## What about during hot weather?

During the summer months, the children will need to wear hats and bring in sunscreen that can be reapplied during the lesson. Pupils will be encouraged to drink plenty of fluids and there will be frequent drinks stops throughout the session. The Forest School area has natural shelter to keep the children out of the sun, so they can still enjoy the activities outside.

## How often will my child participate in Forest School?

Each pupil will have approximately 18 afternoon Forest School sessions during the academic year. Each class will be taught in half-termly blocks so that every child will experience our Forest School during each seasonal term.

## More questions?

If you have any further questions or concerns, however small, please speak with Mr Connolly, Forest School Coordinator, who will be happy to discuss these with you.

## Suitable clothing

The children will be outside in varying weather and will need appropriate clothing for the conditions, including extra garments. Pupils will need to come to school dressed in their school PE kit, including tracksuit and school coat, with their Forest School clothing in a named bag. It is recommended that Forest School pupils look at the weather forecast and decide what items would be suitable for the day ahead.

### Cold and wet weather

- Hats and gloves
- Jumper or fleece (with warm undergarments)
- Warm socks (plus spare socks)
- Wellington boots
- Waterproof clothing
- Coat

### Hot weather

- Sun cream protection
- Sun hat (preferably one that offers protection to the back of their neck)
- Sensible, sturdy, closed-toe shoes
- Covered legs (no shorts)
- Spare socks
- Wellington boots
- Waterproof clothing
- Jacket
- Refillable water bottle



