



Outdoor Learning Policy - Forest Friday
**Outdoor Learning Policy –
Forest Friday**

Statement of Intent

At Playhouse Pre-School, we value outdoor learning and recognise the many benefits that spending time in nature can provide for young children.

Our Forest Friday sessions provide the children in the Butterfly Room, aged 2-4 years, with regular opportunities to explore the natural environment, develop their curiosity and learn through first-hand experiences.

Forest Friday takes place on Friday mornings and usually takes place in the Secret Garden wooded area within the grounds of Longmeadow Primary School. On occasion, the children may also go for a supervised walk along the lane to Shephalbury Park.

Outdoor learning supports children's physical development, confidence, independence, communication, social skills, problem-solving and understanding of the world. Children are encouraged to explore, investigate, ask questions, make choices and take appropriate risks within clearly defined and supervised boundaries.

Our outdoor learning experiences are based around the children's interests, the natural environment and the changing seasons. Activities may include bug hunting, bark rubbing, collecting and investigating natural materials, looking for signs of wildlife, observing plants and trees, nature walks, creating natural artwork and other age-appropriate activities.

The focus is on exploration, discovery and enjoyment of the natural environment, rather than completing a set activity every week.

Aims

Through our Forest Friday sessions, we aim to:

- provide children with regular opportunities to learn outdoors and connect with nature
- encourage children's curiosity and sense of wonder
- support children to develop confidence and independence
- provide opportunities for children to make choices and follow their own interests
- develop children's understanding of the natural world and seasonal change
- support physical development through walking, climbing, balancing and exploring different surfaces
- encourage children to develop appropriate risk-awareness and understand how to keep themselves safe
- support communication, language and social development through shared experiences
- encourage children to care for and respect plants, animals and the environment
- provide opportunities for children to develop problem-solving and critical-thinking skills
- offer learning experiences that complement the children's learning within the preschool.

Forest Friday Sessions

Forest Friday sessions take place on Friday mornings and are primarily for children in the Butterfly Room aged 2-4 years.

The children will usually visit the Secret Garden wooded area within the grounds of Longmeadow Primary School.

The session may include:

- exploring the woodland and natural environment
- looking for insects and other wildlife
- bug hunting

- bark rubbing
- observing trees, plants and flowers
- looking for signs of animals
- collecting suitable natural materials that are already on the ground
- creating pictures or patterns using natural materials
- nature-based crafts and activities
- listening to and identifying sounds
- exploring seasonal changes
- simple physical challenges such as balancing, stepping and climbing where appropriate
- free exploration and child-led investigation.

The activities offered will vary according to the children's interests, the season, the weather and the conditions of the site.

Friday is an outdoor learning opportunity delivered by appropriately qualified and suitable Playhouse Pre-School staff as part of the preschool's normal provision.

Outdoor Walks and Visits to Shephalbury Park

On some occasions, the children may walk from Playhouse Preschool along the lane to Shephalbury Park.

Before leaving the preschool premises, staff will consider:

- the children's ages and individual needs
- staffing levels and ratios
- the weather and ground conditions
- the condition and safety of the route
- road and traffic risks
- any hazards present along the route
- children's clothing and footwear
- medical needs and medication
- whether the outing is appropriate on that particular day.

A suitable risk assessment will be completed and reviewed for the route.

Children will remain under the direct supervision of Playhouse staff throughout the walk and visit. Staff will establish clear boundaries and regularly check that all children are present.

Children will be reminded about road safety, staying with the group and following adult instructions before and during the walk.

The preschool's arrangements for outings, including emergency procedures, safeguarding and parental permissions, will be followed.

Risk Assessment and Safety

The safety and wellbeing of the children and adults is paramount.

A risk assessment will be completed for the areas used for Forest Friday and will be reviewed regularly and whenever there is a significant change to the environment, activities or circumstances.

A pre-session check of the area will be completed before the children enter the Secret Garden or other outdoor learning area.

Staff will look for hazards including:

- fallen branches or unstable trees
- sharp objects or litter
- broken glass
- animal faeces

- poisonous or harmful plants
- stinging or biting insects
- trip hazards
- water or areas where a child could fall
- damaged fencing or gates
- unsafe equipment
- evidence of dangerous or inappropriate activity by members of the public
- other seasonal or environmental hazards.

Any identified hazard will be dealt with, avoided or reported before children enter the area.

Where a hazard cannot be made safe, the area or activity will not be used.

Risk assessments will take account of the age, development and individual needs of the children attending.

Appropriate Risk and Challenge

Outdoor learning provides valuable opportunities for children to experience appropriate challenge and develop an understanding of risk.

Children will be supported to:

- assess simple risks with adults
- make appropriate choices
- understand boundaries
- follow safety instructions
- develop independence
- learn how their actions can affect themselves and others.

Staff will use professional judgement to balance children's need for challenge and exploration with their responsibility to keep children safe.

Children will not be prevented from participating in an activity simply because it involves an element of manageable risk. However, activities will always be appropriate for the age and development of the children and will be supervised appropriately.

Staffing and Supervision

Forest Friday sessions will be staffed in accordance with the current EYFS statutory requirements, Playhouse Pre-School's staffing arrangements and the individual needs of the children attending.

Staffing will be reviewed before each session and additional staff will be used where necessary to ensure children can be safely supervised.

At least one member of staff with an appropriate and current paediatric first aid qualification will accompany the children on outings and outdoor walks.

All staff involved in Forest Friday will:

- be suitable to work with children
- understand their safeguarding responsibilities
- be familiar with the relevant risk assessments
- understand the boundaries of the outdoor learning area
- know the emergency procedures
- have access to the information they need about children's individual medical or additional needs
- actively supervise children throughout the session.

Staff will position themselves so that children can be appropriately observed and supported.

Children will be counted before leaving the preschool, on arrival at the outdoor learning area, regularly throughout the session, before leaving the area, on return to preschool and whenever the group changes location.

Clothing and Weather

Outdoor learning will take place in a range of weather conditions where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Parents and carers will be reminded that children need suitable clothing and footwear for outdoor learning.

Depending on the weather, children may require:

- waterproof coat
- waterproof trousers or suitable outdoor clothing
- wellington boots or suitable outdoor footwear
- warm layers
- hat and gloves
- sun hat
- sun cream.

Staff will monitor the weather conditions throughout the session.

Sessions may be shortened, changed or cancelled where weather or environmental conditions create an unacceptable risk.

Forest Friday will not take place in conditions such as high winds, lightning, extreme weather or other circumstances where staff consider the environment unsafe.

Particular attention will be paid to the condition of trees and branches following strong winds.

The decision to continue, change or cancel a session will be made by the manager or the staff responsible for the session, taking into account the current conditions and risk assessment.

Sun Protection

During periods of hot or sunny weather:

- children will have access to shade
- children should have a suitable sun hat
- parents/carers should apply sun cream
- children will have access to drinking water
- staff will monitor children for signs of overheating or discomfort.

Environmental Awareness and Conservation

Forest Friday provides opportunities for children to develop respect and responsibility for the natural environment.

Children will be encouraged to:

- treat plants and wildlife with care
- observe animals without disturbing them
- avoid damaging plants and trees
- leave living plants, flowers and fungi in their natural environment
- understand that some plants, berries and fungi must not be touched or eaten
- avoid disturbing nests, habitats or animal homes
- take care not to damage the woodland floor
- put rubbish in appropriate bins or remove it from the area
- understand why it is important to care for the environment.

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Children may collect suitable natural materials that are already on the ground for use in activities, where this is appropriate and does not cause harm to the environment.

We will follow any relevant requirements or guidance provided by Longmeadow Primary School regarding the use and care of the Secret Garden.

Plants, Wildlife and Insects

Children may encounter insects, birds and other wildlife during outdoor learning.

Staff will teach children to observe wildlife respectfully and not to intentionally handle animals unless an activity has been assessed as safe and appropriate.

Children will be encouraged to look carefully and observe rather than disturb.

Staff will be aware of individual children's allergies, medical needs and previous reactions to insects or other environmental factors.

Children will be reminded not to eat plants, berries, fungi or other natural materials.

Any concerns regarding a child's health or an allergic reaction will be dealt with in accordance with the child's individual health care plan and the setting's first aid and medical procedures.

Dealing with Dogs, Members of the Public and Other People

The Secret Garden and the route to Shephalbury Park may be accessed by other people.

Children will be taught not to approach unfamiliar adults or animals.

Staff will remain vigilant and maintain appropriate supervision if other members of the public, dogs or other animals are encountered.

Children will not approach or touch unfamiliar dogs.

If a dog is loose or behaves in a way that staff consider unsafe, the group will move away from the area.

Staff will use their professional judgement to decide whether the group should leave or change location if an individual, animal or situation presents a safeguarding or safety concern.

Tools and Equipment

Forest Friday activities will primarily use natural materials and simple, age-appropriate equipment.

Any equipment or resources used will be checked before use and will be appropriate for the children's age and abilities.

Where an activity involves an item that could cause injury, staff will complete an appropriate risk assessment and provide close supervision.

Children will not have unsupervised access to potentially dangerous equipment.

Any equipment brought into the outdoor area will be removed at the end of the session and checked before being stored.

Fire, Cooking and Food

Forest Friday sessions will not routinely include fire lighting, campfires or outdoor cooking.

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If the setting wishes to introduce an activity involving fire, cooking or other higher-risk activity in the future, this will only take place following a specific risk assessment and in accordance with the setting's Health and Safety, Food Safety and safeguarding procedures.

Children will not be permitted to independently access or approach a fire.

Emergency Equipment

Staff will take appropriate equipment with them when leaving the preschool, including:

- first aid kit
- children's required medication and emergency medication
- emergency contact information
- accident/incident recording materials
- tissues and wipes
- spare clothing where appropriate
- any other equipment required for individual children's needs.

The contents of the emergency bag will be checked regularly.

Safeguarding

All Forest Friday sessions will follow the Playhouse Pre-School Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Policy.

Staff will maintain appropriate supervision of children at all times.

Children will remain within agreed boundaries and staff will ensure that no child is able to leave the group or outdoor learning area unnoticed.

Any safeguarding concern, disclosure or incident will be dealt with in accordance with the setting's safeguarding procedures.

The designated safeguarding lead will be informed of any safeguarding concern as soon as possible.

Missing Child

If a child is found to be missing during a Forest Friday session or outdoor walk, staff will immediately follow the setting's Missing Child Procedure.

The remaining children will be kept safe and supervised while staff implement the procedure.

The manager/DSL will be informed immediately and emergency services will be contacted where necessary.

First Aid and Emergencies

All accidents and injuries will be managed in accordance with the Playhouse Pre-School First Aid Policy and Health and Safety Policy.

A member of staff with an appropriate current paediatric first aid qualification will accompany children when they are on an outing.

In the event of an injury:

- appropriate first aid will be administered
- another member of staff will supervise the remaining children
- emergency services will be contacted where necessary
- the manager will be informed
- parents/carers will be informed in accordance with the setting's procedures

- the accident or incident will be recorded appropriately.

Where an incident meets the criteria for statutory reporting, the setting will follow the relevant reporting requirements, including RIDDOR where applicable.

Lost or Found Items

Children will be encouraged to respect the natural environment and leave it as they found it.

If staff identify potentially dangerous objects such as broken glass, sharp objects, needles or other hazardous materials, children will be moved away from the area and staff will follow the setting's Health and Safety procedures.

Inclusion and Individual Needs

Forest Friday activities will be planned to enable all children to participate as fully as possible.

Reasonable adjustments will be made where appropriate.

Where a child requires an individual risk assessment, health care plan or additional support, this will be considered before the child participates.

Planning and Evaluation

Forest Friday sessions will be planned with flexibility so that children's interests and discoveries can influence the learning experience.

Staff will consider:

- children's current interests
- seasonal changes
- observations from previous sessions
- the condition of the outdoor environment
- planned activities
- individual children's needs
- opportunities to extend children's learning.

Staff will reflect on sessions and use children's comments, interests and observations to inform future activities.

There is no requirement for every session to have a completed adult-led activity. Time for children to explore and investigate independently is an important part of outdoor learning.

Communication with Parents and Carers

Parents and carers will be informed that Forest Friday sessions take place on Friday mornings and that children will regularly spend time in the Secret Garden and may occasionally walk to Shephalbury Park.

Parents and carers will be reminded to provide suitable clothing and footwear.

Any significant change to the arrangements for Forest Friday will be communicated to parents and carers where appropriate.

Insurance

Outdoor learning activities and outings will be covered by the setting's insurance arrangements, subject to the terms and conditions of the policy.

Equality and Inclusion

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All children will have equal opportunities to participate in Forest Friday activities.

Activities will be adapted where necessary to ensure that children are not disadvantaged because of disability, additional needs, medical needs or other individual circumstances.

Please also refer to the Playhouse Pre-School Equality and Inclusion Policy.

This policy was agreed by the staff of Playhouse Pre-School Broadwater

Adopted on 13th January 2014 and will be reviewed annually.

Reviewed on 30th September 2026 by Z. Munford