



**Forest School Handbook**  
To be read by all Forest School leaders, assistants and helpers.

## **Beckers Green Primary School**



**Written by Rosie Hatchman**

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Beckers Green Road,  
Braintree,  
Essex,  
CM7 3PR**

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## **2 An Introduction to Forest School**

### **2.1 Forest School Principles**

Forest school sessions and learning is based on the 6 core principles of:

1 Learner centred – all about the users and learners, their individuality and creating a forest school community where all are accepted.

2 Natural setting – in our case, our stunning copse, but a natural setting to allow users/learners to develop a connection with the natural world.

3 Appropriate risk –for the individual – this will not look the same for everyone – and will depend on the natural setting and what it can offer too.

4 Qualified practitioners – all sessions will be run by a Forest school leader, who continuously strives to develop their skills, competencies and love for the outside world.

5 Holistic development – focussing on all areas of learning and development – fostering well rounded learners and users.

6 Long term – regular sessions, to allow learners and users to develop along their forest school journey, with the cycle of planning, observations, adaptations and reviews to foster their development.

### **2.2 Forest School activities and invitations**

Although a Forest School session will begin and end in the same way, no two sessions will look the same! Children will begin their session by entering the copse and finding a seat at the log circle, they will be 'invited' to take part in a welcome game – find a nature spot or find a tree for example, and take some time to settle into the copse. Upon return to the log circle, the learners will discover their invitations or activities for the session – should they wish to choose to take part of course.

Then, the session is their own – exploring ditches, building dens, looking for birds and minibeasts, or simply hugging trees, feeling nature below their feet or the wind in their hair or perhaps choosing to take part in an activity.

Initiations on offer may include:

Whittling

Building dens

Mud faces

Weaving

Camp fires

Climbing trees

Swinging in hammocks

Learning to use tools

Learnt to tie knots

Singing

Playing games

Looking after the copse – litter picking, woodland management

Quiet times – listening and reflection.

At the end of the sessions, children will be called to the log circle - a talking stick will be passed round where children will be invited to reflect upon the session – what did you enjoy? What did you learn today? What would you like to do next session?

These reflections will build upon future sessions and any particular interests of the learners.

### **2.3 Vision Statement**

At Beckers Green, we want all children to have access to the great outdoors, to feel at one with nature, to enjoy exploring the outside world and all it has to offer and to develop confidence in their own skills and abilities when outdoors. We want children to get muddy, experience hands on learning and to know they play their part in protecting our world.

## **3 Site**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Beckers Green Primary School is home to a copse area at the back of the school, that runs alongside the housing estate on Beckers Green Road. The copse is approximately 2 acres, and is a large woodland area, containing a ditch that runs through the middle of the site. Trees found in the copse include silver birch, oak, hazel and maple. The copse is owned by the local council, but is used, maintained and cared for by the school.

### **3.2 Site Information**

The copse is located at the back of Beckers Green Primary School. Located via the school gates and through the playground – emergency access through green gates.

Beckers Green Primary School

Beckers Green Road

Braintree

Essex

CM7 3PR

01376 322687

Grid Reference TL 77737 22683

### **3.3 Environmental Impact Assessment**

Please refer to management plan document for the Environmental Impact Assessment.

### **3.4 Management plan**

Please refer to management plan document for the Environmental Impact Assessment.

### **3.5 Tree Safety Policy**

Please refer to the school tree survey. Forest School leader will check the trees prior to each session and after any storms or high winds. Forest School leader will inform the school of any concerns regarding trees, who will liaise with a qualified tree surgeon.

## **4 Daily Procedure**

### **4.1 Pre Session**

Prior to the sessions starting:

- \*parents of users will be informed via a letter or school ping, stating what the sessions will involve, and what the users need to wear/bring eg change of clothing, welly boots
- \*Site check – this will identify any areas of the copse that need to be highlighted to the users/made out of bounds, and any hazards eg branches at eye level.
- \*Adult ratios are able to be met at all times for the session – any assistants/helpers to have read and signed this handbook, and dressed appropriately for taking part and supporting users.
- \*Activities and invitations planned for the session and on offer are resourced, and equipment/resources are checked and in good working order.
- \*Risk benefit assessments linked to the invitations/activities for the session completed and in the forest school folder.
- \*First aid and fire pit equipment is available.
- \*Emergency contacts/radio charged and on hand.
- \*Copse key obtained from the office.

#### **4.2 Session**

- \*Users are invited in to the copse and gather at the log circle for introduction.
- \*Talking stick is passed around to invite the children to give their ideas of what they would like to do in the session/how they are feeling/how their day has been prior to the session.
- \*Set groundrules and expectations – no users to access the left hand side ditch running along the boundary, gather back at the log pit when whistle blows, leave nothing, taking nothing, help each other, have fun.
- \*Begin session with a game – find a tree, nature spot for example.
- \*Offer invitation for the session – users do not have to take part in this but this is the activity on offer –but be free in the copse.
- \*Ensure leader and assistant know all users whereabouts during the session.
- \*Observe interactions and use of areas/activities on offer – this will support further planning/sessions.
- \*Have fun with the users – support as needed- be at one with nature.

#### **4.3 End of session**

- \*Using whistle, gather users back to the log circle.
- \*Gather tools and equipment back in – ensuring all is safely stored as needed and according to RA.
- \*Talking stick – what did the users enjoy from this session? What would they like to do next week?
- \*Reflections
- \*Head count – at log circle and leaving the copse.
- \*Users back to classrooms, de kit from outdoor suits/wellies.
- \*Check site – gather any rubbish and leave as we found it.
- \*Lock the copse and return the key to the office.
- \*Report any messages/observations back to class staff eg 1<sup>st</sup> aid/wow moments.

#### **4.4 Post Session**

- \*Adult reflections – FS Leader/assistants - what went well, what did the users enjoy?/what needs changing?/thoughts for next session.
- \*Log any 1<sup>st</sup> aid/behaviour incidents using school protocol.
- \*Update any Risk Benefit assessments as needed.
- \*Observation forms completed as required – this will support further sessions.

\*Plan next session – what changes need to be made from the original planning?  
What resources are needed?

## **5 Weather**

### **5.1 Wind Policy**

Forest School sessions will be cancelled according to the Beaufort scale 8- fresh gale. Forest School leader will make an informed decision about the weather – wind specific, and as to whether the session can take place in the copse, or in the playground/indoor classroom.

Scale	Description	Miles per hour	Effects	Risk
0	Calm	0-1	smoke rises	Low
1	Light air	1-3	Smoke drifts	Low
2	Light breeze	4-7	Leaves rustle	Low
3	Gentle breeze	8-12	Twigs move	Low
4	Moderate breeze	13-18	Leaves and small branches sway	Low
5	Fresh breeze	18-24	Small trees sway	Low
6	Strong breeze	25-31	Large branches sway	Low
7	Moderate gale	32-38	Whole trees in motion	Low
8	Fresh gale	39-46	Twigs break off trees	Medium
9	Strong gale	47-55	Branches break off trees	Medium
10	Whole gale	56-64	Trees uprooted	High
11	Storm	65-74	Widespread damage	Very High
12	Hurricane	75+	Devastation	Catastrophic

### **5.2 Temperature Policy**

Hot weather – all users will need to ensure appropriate clothing is worn, and that sun cream is applied prior to the session. If extreme heat, sessions will be timed accordingly, the Forest School Leader will decide on the length of time outside. All users should ensure they have water with them which will be left at a designated drinking station within the copse.

Cold weather – all users should ensure they are dressed appropriately for the cold weather – including footwear. Sessions may be shorter in time to allow users back inside to warm up and access to warm drinks. The Forest School Leader will decide on the length of time outside and activities on offer to ensure they are suitable for the weather.

### **5.3 Thunder and Lightning Policy**

If thunder and lightning is due, forest school sessions will be cancelled prior to starting. If thunder and lightning occurs whilst sessions are underway, they will be cancelled and all users will return inside.

#### **5.4 Rain Policy**

All users should wear appropriate clothing and footwear to allow sessions to take place in the event of rain. Shelter is provided within the copse – natural shelter of the tree canopy, and the bird hide, but manmade tarpaulin shelters will be made available. If excessive rain means the copse is not safe, the session will be cancelled.

### **6 Emergency Procedures**

#### **6.1 In the event of an accident, injury or illness**

In the case of an emergency, call across to the school using mobile phone/radio - 01376322687. Explain the emergency and whether an ambulance needs to be called for/has been called for – depending on situation as to if more staff will be required to come over to copse.

If minor injury, first aid to be administered by trained member of staff – Forest School leader or support. Accident form to be completed – within main first aid book located by the school office. If ambulance is called, all other users to be taken from copse and return to school building, whilst the FS Leader and support staff stays with the injured user and act upon advice from emergency services.

#### **6.2 First Aid**

A well-resourced and inspected Forest School first aid kit will always be on site for all sessions, along with first aiders – forest school leader as a minimum, but generally more in the copse and on school site. In accordance with **Health & Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981** – Forest School leaders and assistants are required to provide adequate and appropriate equipment, facilities and personnel to enable first aid to be given to participants that are injured or become ill. Any first aid administered will be reported via the first aid book found in the school office and parents informed. In accordance with **Reporting or Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 1995** – the Forest School leader or assistant will report of any work-related death or injury lasting over three days, diseases or dangerous occurrence that may not have resulted in reportable injury, but which clearly could have near misses.

#### **6.3 Lost Child Procedure**

As users enter the copse, they will be counted to ensure the Forest School leader, support staff and any adults in the copse are aware of how many users are in the session. The gate to the copse will be padlocked behind the last user to enter, and the key will be kept with the Forest School Leader. Should children need to leave, for the toilet for example, they will do so with a member of staff.

If a child is found to be missing, all children will be asked to return to the log circle to allow a head count to take place. Children and adults will be involved in searching for the missing user if appropriate. If the child is not found within 5 minutes, the school office, head and deputy head teachers should be informed. If the child remains missing and the police are informed, the Forest School leader will remain at the

copse, whilst the other users are taken back into school with the supporting staff. A report will be filed to the school, and site RA will be reviewed.

## **7 Health and Safety**

In accordance with **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** and **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**, Forest school leaders and assistants have a duty to provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment with risk assessment and procedures laid down for serious and imminent danger.

### **7.1 Risk-Benefits Assessments**

All activities and invitations of offer will have had a Risk Benefit assessment completed prior to the users taking part, to highlight any risks linked and what control measures are to be put in place to ensure the risk level is lowered.

Risk Benefit assessments are completed by the Forest School Leader – Rosie Hatchman and will be continuously updated and reviewed as appropriate and after sessions.

Hard copies of these assessments can be found in the Forest School folder and electronic copies, on the shared system under Forest School and Risk Benefit Assessments.

### **7.2 Fire Rules and Regulations**

To have a campfire in the forest school sessions, ratios must be always adhered to – and where possible, extra staffing to allow the leader to be based at the campfire and more involvement from the users. To have a fire, we must have:

Fuel, air, ignition, water and permission.



#### **Site:**

- \*Sheltered area, from direct wind blow
- \*Above is clear by a minimum of 8ft
- \*Ground below fire pit is flat and bare
- \*The surrounding area is free from trip hazards
- \*Correct seating area, minimum 1.5 metres from the fire pit.

#### **Kit:**



Forest school leader is responsible for ensuring all fire kit equipment is present and in good condition prior to any campfire sessions. Time organising this should be included in set up time for the sessions and is of paramount importance.

#### Personal Safety:

- \*Long hair tied back
- \*Sleeves rolled up and lanyards removed
- \*Loose clothing and jewellery secured
- \*Fire gloves are worn for handling hot objects

#### Essentials to light the fire:

- \*Ignition – flint and steel
- \*Tinder – cotton wool and newspaper
- \*Kindling – small matchstick width sticks/twigs.
- \*Fuel – pencil thickness, thumb thickness, wrist thickness.

#### Rules of the fire pit area:

- \*Enter and exit the fire pit area by walking outside the log seat area – stand up, step back and behind the logs and walk.
- \*Ensure adult to user ratio is adhered to.
- \*Safe stance – kneel in front of the fire – one knee up, one knee on the floor
- \*Ensure the fire is fully extinguished at the end of the session – fully douse the fire pit/tray with water.
- \*Leave no trace – clear away the fully extinguished wood and coal and place in the rubbish bin back at school.

### **7.3 Clothing and PPE**

In accordance with **Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992**, personal protective equipment is to be supplied and used whenever there are risks to health and safety that cannot be adequately controlled in other ways. Risk assessment will inform what PPE is needed. PPE can include waterproof clothing, wellies, hats, gloves, work gloves, sunhats, long trousers and sturdy footwear. Spare sets of waterproof trousers and jackets will be available, and users are informed of what spare clothing they need to bring for forest school sessions, to change in to before the session, weather dependent:

#### Warm weather clothing:

Wellies/old trainers  
Long sleeved tshirt

Long sleeved trousers/leggings  
Sunhat  
Thin waterproof  
Sunhat and suncream

Cold weather clothing:

Wellies and thick socks  
Long sleeved tshirt  
Long sleeved trousers/leggings  
Warm waterproof coat  
Hat, scarf, gloves – waterproof  
Additional under layers such as vests/tights as needed – layering is best in cold weather.  
Waterproof trousers/snow suit

#### **7.4 Manual Handling**

Forest school leader has undertaken online manual handling training, which is reviewed annually and correct handling should take place to prevent injury to users and leaders/assistants. Leaders have responsibility for ensuring users are supervised in manual handling, including moving logs, branches for example, to ensure that all are kept safe. Conditions need to be taken in to account – weather, users age and physicality, along with the weight and shape of the object they are attempting to move.

#### **7.5 Tool Procedures**

In forest school sessions, users will learn to use a range of tools and develop their skills over time. They will be supported by skilled and confident leaders/assistants and learn to use tools safely and with confidence and will learn skills to keep themselves and others safe.

\*Tools will only be used under supervision and will not open for use at all times – only in planned sessions.

\*Invitations to use the tools will be given – ratios will be adhered to during these invitations and explanations and teaching time will take place prior to children using them. Users must show they are able and trustworthy.

\*Tools will be used within the log circle, and will be counted out/in to ensure safety for all.

\*Users will be taught the correct positions for handling tools, including where and how to sit when using equipment, to keep themselves and others safe.

\*Risk benefit assessments will be carried out prior to sessions using tools, whereby users, tool use, ratios, PPE, storage, transport, maintenance, positions and safety is included and assessed for all tool types that users may experience.

#### **Details of individual tool use can be found below:**

##### **Bow Saw (1:1)**

Usage: To cut wood – into log slices for example

Maintenance: Check guard, wipe debris after use, release mechanism, lift blade and replace with new, re tighten.

Carry: with guard on , blade away and by your side.

Safety: Check blade, and ensure guard is on.

Action: Back and forth, glove on non working hand.

Storage: Guard on and in locked tool bag.

### **Loppers (1:1)**

Usage: cut specific amount of a branch, eg willow.

Maintenance: wire wool for cleaning, alongside bevels, baby oil, sharpening stone, in circular motions.

Carry: down your side, alongside your leg, blades together pointing downwards, handles held together.

Safety: Check blade, handles, awareness when carrying, space around when using them.

Action: Branch between blade, down by feet and chop if downwards. Open arms, wood at mouth, close arms to cut.

Storage: In locked cupboard/store

### **Sheath knives (1:1)**

Usage: splitting wood/whittling

Maintenance: Clean with wire wool, match angle of the bevel, flat side, tip and off with whet stone. Curve for tip of the blade. Keep the stone wet – the paste helps to sharpen the blade. Clean on both sides.

Carry: In sheath/guard, by your side, blade downwards.

Safety: Glove on supporting hand. Inspect blade before and after every use. Seated at log circle and space – log in between each user to be kept free.

Action: 1 – legs wide apart, arms on knees for support, knife in between legs, blade away from body, or, 2 – legs together and blade to side of body, again, blade and action away from body.

Storage: In locked tool bag – blade should be a maximum of 3 inches long to be legal.

### **Potato peelers (1:4)**

Usage: stripping bark, whittling sticks

Maintenance: wire wool for cleaning, alongside blades.

Carry: down your side, alongside your leg, blades together pointing downwards,

Safety: Check blade, handle, awareness when carrying, space around when using them. Glove on supporting hand. Seated at log circle, log in between each user to be kept free.

Action: 1 – legs wide apart, arms on knees for support, knife in between legs, blade away from body, or, 2 – legs together and blade to side of body, again, blade and action away from body. Striking away from body.

Storage: In tool bag.

### **Axe (1:1)**

Usage: Splitting wood in to smaller pieces.

Maintenance: curved bevel, follow this when sharpening, oil and whet stone, circular motion, sharpen the edge, both sides.

Carry: Down by side, case on and secured.

Safety: 3 questions to ask – How many? How hard? Are you ready? - partner work with tool.

Action: no gloves when holding axe, partner needed. On knees for stability, 2 hands on axe. Partner holding log/mallet to hit the top of the axe.

Storage: In locked tool bag.

### **Hand drill/bit and brace (1:2)**

Usage: to make holes in log slices

Maintenance: replace drill pieces when worn out.

Carry: drill piece faced downwards.

Safety: Space and flat surface to work at, balanced and steady weight. Check drill piece for wear and tear.

Action: Lean on left hand, right hand to spin the drill. Kneel or bend, and on hard surface eg log.

Storage: Tool bag.

As and when more tools are added, assessments will be completed and the handbook updated with details of tool usage.

## **7.6 Cooking and Food Hygiene Procedure**

Forest school leader, Rosie Hatchman, has level 2 food hygiene certificate and this is renewed annually. In some forest school sessions, users will cook pre prepared food on the campfire and consume during the session.

Food will be prepared inside, by the leader, and could include toast, crumpets, marshmallows, apple and sugar slices, hot chocolate and pizza muffins for example. Prior to the cooking sessions, leaders will complete RA which will include any users with allergies/intolerances and be mindful of these. Users will use antibacterial gel/hand washing station prior to cooking.

Fire safety rules must be adhered to when cooking, including having 5 children and leader around the campfire at any time. When toasting/cooking, users will kneel around the camp fire, with leader kneeling on one or two knees for support, and fire gloves will be worn by the leader when cooking utensils such as tongs/fish slices are being used. Food and drink will only be consumed in the log circle and all rubbish must be placed in the bin, which is then removed at the end of the session.

## **7.7 Toileting/Sanitation at Forest School**

All users, including adults to use the toilet prior to the forest school session. If a user needs the toilet whilst outside, they will need to leave the copse and return back to the school building and use the classroom facilities. Forest school leader to be informed of any users leaving the copse for the toilet.

All users to wash hands at end of the session when back in the classroom.

## **7.8 Staff Ratios**

A ratio of 1:5 will be adhered to for all forest school sessions – forest school leader will be the main leader for all sessions. Any support staff/assistants included in the ratio will have read and signed this handbook and have been briefed by the FS Leader.

## **7.9 Hazardous plants and fungi**

Hazardous plants known to the Forest School Leader include nettles, brambles, ivy and fungi. Prior to sessions, a risk assessment will be carried out by the FS Leader and any pre-existing/new hazardous plants and fungi will be identified and added to the assessment. These will be discussed with the users and ground rules put in place – do not touch/taste/enter any areas out of bounds. Users will be included in the ongoing assessment of the site during sessions – if you find something interesting, don't touch it, inform the leader and let's learn about it together. Forest School Leader to use apps on phone to identify any plants/fungi that are unknown eg Seek/LeafSnap/Picture This.

## **7.10 Biting and Stinging insects**

A 1<sup>st</sup> aid kit will always be on site during all forest school sessions, along with trained 1<sup>st</sup> aiders in the possible event of a bite or sting from an insect. Any pre existing medical conditions linked to these will be known from users details and special care will be taken as needed, along with details of these found in the RA. Leaders and assistants will follow the 1<sup>st</sup> aid policy as appropriate. Users will wear long sleeved and long trousers to give some protection against bites and stings.

## **8 Safeguarding**

### **8.1 Behaviour and Code of Conduct (including anti bullying procedure)**

Please refer to the school behaviour and code of conduct policies – these can be found on the school website or within the school handbook/staff room.

**The Education and Inspections Act 2006** outlines several legal obligations regarding schools' response to bullying. Under **section 89**, schools must have measures in place to encourage good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying amongst pupils.

### **8.2 Confidentiality statement**

Please refer to the policy located in the staff handbook – this can be found in the school office, staffroom, or on the school website.

### **8.3 Consent**

In loco parentis - Duty of care for those responsible for the care, custody and control of the children to take the same care that a reasonable, prudent and careful parent/guardian would take in the same circumstances

### **8.4 Protections: child protection and DBS, Disclosure**

#### **Child Protection and DBS**

In accordance with **The Protection of Children Act 1999**, all Forest School leaders/assistants/ helpers will be DBS checked dated within 5 years and at the current home address, and must sign and date a form to show they comply with this.

#### **Disclosure**

Appropriate steps will be taken where concerns arise regarding the safety of a participant. Concerns will be reported to a designated safeguarding person and we

