



Inspiring All to Excellence



Violet Way Academy

Forest School

Statement of intent

At Violet Way Academy, we appreciate the value of a holistic approach to education. Forest Schools is an inspirational educational experience that offers our children opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on experiences in our beautiful, natural woodland environment.

Children are motivated by exciting and achievable activities throughout the year in almost all weathers. Forest Schools experiences enable children to develop an understanding of the natural world around them. They learn about seasonal changes and recognise how the environment changes over time. Forest School sessions provide opportunities for children to develop their communication, speaking, listening and team building skills alongside increasing their knowledge of the natural world and learning about trees, mammals, plants and birds. They will use tools, learn to cooperate and work with their peers and adults, developing strategies in order to take measured risks.

This guidance is designed to ensure that the Forest School is a beneficial experience for pupils by making staff aware of their duties and expectations, and ensuring that the wellbeing of pupils is considered at all times and appropriate safeguarding measures are in place for all Forest School activities.

Forest School Facilities

At Violet Way Academy, we are extremely fortunate to have an extensive and beautiful woodland area. Every child experiences regular Forest Schools sessions in our woodlands.

We have two trained members of staff in school. Mrs Dawson is a Teaching Assistant and our Forest School Lead. Mrs Jinks is a class teacher, Science and Forest School Lead teacher. Together with Mrs Dawson, she ensures that all relevant risk assessments are in place and supports staff in making effective use of the woodlands to enrich our curriculum offer. They plan activities to spark curiosity and develop life-long skills. When planning Forest School sessions, they consult with the teaching staff, providing meaningful links to our school curriculum. Our Forest School ethos is to encourage and empower the children to lead their own learning whilst the teachers support the children's questions, comments and learning, setting appropriate challenges.

Roles and responsibilities

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- Ensuring staff adhere to the relevant policies and that pupils are aware of their responsibilities.
- Contacting a play inspector to certify that the chosen location is safe to use, where necessary.
- Liaising with the location's landowner or the site manager to ensure that staff and pupils are aware of any potential hazards.
- Ensuring that a separate Forest School Activities Risk Assessment is conducted to identify, evaluate, and manage the specific risks associated with the Forest School, its location and the activities planned.
- Ensuring that there are arrangements in place for monitoring and reporting incidents associated with the Forest School.
- Ensuring that parents are informed with sufficient notice about planned Forest School activities and any requirements, e.g. clothing and equipment needs.
- Liaising with the SENCO, where necessary, to ensure the Forest School is inclusive for pupils with SEND and reasonable adjustments are made to ensure additional needs are accommodated.
- Appointing Forest School lead practitioners with the relevant experience and qualifications, e.g. a Level 3 Certificate from the Forest School Association.

- Reviewing the effectiveness of this guidance on an annual basis and communicating any changes to staff, parents, and pupils.
- Consulting the Forest School lead practitioner on measures necessary to ensure pupils are safeguarded adequately during activities.

Forest School lead practitioners are responsible for:

- Conducting a detailed health and safety check before Forest School activities.
- Adhering at all times to the Forest School Activities Risk Assessment.
- Carrying a fully stocked first-aid kit during all Forest School sessions.
- Holding an up-to-date First Aid certificate and leading first aid arrangements.
- Inspecting equipment and tools before use to ensure they are safe for use, and that damaged or defective items are not used.
- Planning and delivering Forest School sessions, in collaboration with the Headteacher, that are engaging, informative and develop pupils' skills and appreciation of the environment.
- Conducting Forest School Risk Assessments at least annually to identify, evaluate, and manage the specific risks associated with the Forest School, its location and the activities planned.
- Keeping and maintaining an incident log to record any incidents that occur during Forest School activities.

The SENDCO is responsible for:

- Assessing additional individual needs of pupils with SEND prior to Forest School activities and promoting measures to ensure pupils with SEND can participate safely.
- Ensuring the SEND Policy is adhered to at all times during Forest School activities.
- Liaising with the headteacher to ensure additional provision is available for pupils with SEND as required.
- Ensuring that the provision put in place for pupils with SEND is monitored for effectiveness.

Staff members are responsible for:

- Adhering to this guidance at all times during Forest School activities.
- Ensuring that pupils are always accounted for and supervised.
- Reporting any concerns and incidents to the Forest School lead practitioners and asking for guidance as appropriate.
- Reporting any safeguarding incidents to the DSL and asking for guidance as appropriate.
- Reporting concerns regarding the provision for pupils with SEND to the SENCO.
- Ensuring that pupils are always respectful to each other, staff and the natural environment.
- Following the school's Behaviour Policy at all times.
- Adhering to the Staff Code of Conduct at all times.

Safeguarding

- Volunteers for the Forest School will only be allowed to supervise pupils without direct supervision with a DBS check.
- All members of staff will report any safeguarding concerns to the DSL immediately.
- The DSL will deal with safeguarding concerns in a timely and appropriate manner in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Planning

Mrs Dawson, in conjunction with Mrs Jinks as appropriate, plans activities to spark curiosity and develop life-long skills. Our Forest School Knowledge, Skills and Understanding Progression grid outlines the learning in Forest School in each year group, including caring for the environment, risk assessment, play and exploration, shelter and den building and using tools. In addition, there are links to subject areas, for example science, art and geographical skills. These areas are carefully planned to align to our curriculum.

When planning Forest School sessions, they consult with the teaching staff, providing meaningful links to our school curriculum. Our Forest School ethos is to encourage and empower the children to lead their own learning whilst the teachers support the children's questions, comments and learning, setting appropriate challenges.

Risk Assessment

Location

- Pupils are reminded of the hazards of the site prior to entering and are reminded to remain vigilant throughout.
- The location will be checked regularly by the Forest School practitioner and our site manager to ensure it is safe for pupils to use.
- The Forest School practitioner or site manager will remove or control any minor hazards.
- Any areas that are deemed to pose a substantial risk and cannot be adequately controlled or removed are clearly marked and staff and pupils will not enter them for any reason.
- Staff will communicate clearly to pupils the areas they are permitted to explore and issue frequent reminders, where necessary.
- Pupils will be taught to show respect for the environment, e.g. they do not litter and leave the area clean and tidy.

Supervision

- Staff and volunteers will supervise pupils at the required ratio at all times.
- Supervising staff and volunteers will be adequately trained to ensure they can safely assist pupils during Forest School activities.
- Supervising staff will be informed of any hazards present by the Forest School lead practitioner and ensure mitigating measures are in place and adhered to by pupils.

Tools

- Pupils will be taught how to use tools and equipment independently and safely during activities.
- Staff will model and demonstrate the safe use of all tools before pupils are allowed to use them.
- Forest School lead practitioners will assess the risks posed by particular tools and consequently implements suitable staff: pupil ratios to supervise pupils using these tools.
- All activities planned, including those using tools, will be risk assessed by Forest School lead practitioners.
- All tools will be kept clean and fit for use; tools which are damaged or defective will not be used.
- An inventory of all tools is kept by the Forest School practitioner to ensure they can be accounted for and any lost or misplaced items identified.
- If a member of staff, volunteer or pupil suffers an injury during the use of a tool, the activity will be suspended, and the injury will be handled in line with school policy.

Materials

- Pupils will be encouraged to interact with the environment, which includes touching and moving materials, e.g. rocks and sticks safely and are warned about not ingesting poisonous plants and berries.
- Pupils will be allowed to carry sticks, provided they are shorter than the length of their arm and they maintain a suitable distance from others when carrying the stick to avoid injury.
- Staff will supervise and encourage pupils to work together to move larger materials, e.g. branches.
- Pupils will be asked to return any materials to the environment before leaving the Forest School area.
- Staff will supervise all interactions with the natural world, e.g. climbing, and intervene where there is a substantial risk posed by the pupil to themselves or others.
- Pupils will be taught about the importance of not damaging or defacing living nature, e.g. trees and plants, when interacting with the environment and its materials.
- Forest School lead practitioners will provide materials during sessions, e.g. rope, and encourage pupils to use them to interact with their environment.

Wildlife

- Forest School lead practitioners will plan sessions in order to allow pupils to engage with wildlife as much as possible while considering safety at all times.
- Pupils will be encouraged to discover and learn about the variety of wildlife that lives within the Forest School.
- Pupils will be taught the importance of not disturbing natural habitats and respecting wildlife.
- Staff, volunteers and pupils will be instructed by Forest School lead practitioners about potential risks from local wildlife and the necessary precautions to take, e.g. how to spot and avoid stinging nettles and poisonous plants.
- Pupils will only be allowed to get close to, touch, move or pick up plants or wildlife where it is safe to do so.
- Instances of deliberate harm or damage to wildlife will be managed in line with the school's Behaviour Policy.
- Pupils will be instructed that they are not to consume any food they find, e.g. berries.

Fire

- Fires will only be lit in designated areas surrounded by a safe zone and under the direction of Forest School lead practitioners.
- A suitably trained member of staff who is equipped to manage fire safety is on site at all times when fire is being taught about or is present.
- The fire will only be lit once it is confirmed that all safety equipment, e.g. a sand bucket, is in place.
- The fire will be supervised by an adult at all times.
- Activities taking place near to the fire involving pupils, e.g. cooking are supervised.
- The fire will be created using safe fire-lighting equipment with no accelerants used.
- Safe means of extinguishing the fire, e.g. a sand bucket, will be located nearby in the event of an emergency.
- Forest School lead practitioners will consider what food can be cooked and eaten by pupils using the fire, with any allergies of staff and pupils considered in addition to other dietary requirements
- Food that is to be eaten by pupils will be inspected by a member of staff to ensure it is fit for consumption, e.g. it is thoroughly cooked.
- Forest School lead practitioners will ensure the fire is extinguished safely before the session ends.

Clothing

The Headteacher will communicate to parents in advance of Forest School sessions clothing requirements. These will also be published on the school website and within the Uniform Policy.

All children need a pair of Wellington boots to be kept in school – please ensure they are labelled with your child's name.

Clothing requirements are subject to change and weather dependent. On Forest School days, children should wear:

- School uniform shirt and jumper/cardigan as usual
- Comfortable plain, dark (black or dark blue) jogging bottoms, leggings or similar (no jeans)

Please also be aware that children will have Forest School sessions in all weathers (within reason) so they may need a waterproof coat and/or overalls in poor weather and a sunhat in warm weather, for example. Clothing will be worn to suit the weather; in cases of severe weather, Forest School lead practitioners will decide if it is safe for the session to begin or continue.

In order to make Forest School accessible to all pupils, the school will ensure spare clothing is available to be lent to disadvantaged pupils where necessary. The PTA also have a good selection of donated uniform that parents can access. Parents that are struggling and need some support, should speak to the main school office or email office@violetway.org.

Clothing and footwear appropriate to the Forest School environment, activity and weather will be worn at all times.

Pupils will not take part in Forest School activities if they do not have the appropriate clothing and the school is unable to provide its own; alternative arrangements will be put in place for the pupil.

Parents are asked to apply a high factor sun lotion to pupils before they come to school in the summer.

Toilet and hygiene facilities

- Pupils will be encouraged to use the toilet at school before the Forest School session begins. They are able to use the toilet during forest school sessions if required.
- Any accidents will be managed and children will be supported.
- Pupils using the toilet will only be supervised by a member of staff where necessary and not by volunteers.
- Anti-bacterial wipes or hand sanitiser will be available to allow pupils to clean their hands when necessary.

Behaviour

- Pupils will be informed of their behavioural expectations and that poor behaviour may result in them being unable to participate in the Forest School.
- Forest School lead practitioners will establish set rules which are repeated during each session in order to promote pupils' ability to explore independently while keeping safe and behaving appropriately.
- Positive behaviour, e.g. teamwork and consideration for others, will be promoted through planned activities and praised.
- All staff will model good behaviour, e.g. co-operation and caring for the environment, during Forest School activities.

- Pupils will be made aware that positive behaviour, e.g. displaying respect for the environment, means they will be trusted to explore and lead sessions with greater independence.
- Challenging behaviour is managed in line with the Behavioural Policy.
- Challenging behaviour will initially be dealt with by one-to-one adult support, where possible, to identify its cause.

Inclusivity

- Forest School activities will be planned in line with the school's SEND Policy to ensure that pupils with SEND can participate as much as possible.
- The Forest School Lead and SENCO will liaise with parents of pupils with SEND to identify and assess any additional individual needs for consideration prior to Forest School activities.
- The Forest School Lead and SENCO will liaise with the parents of pupils with medical conditions or allergies to identify and assess any additional individual needs for consideration prior to Forest School activities.
- The Forest School Lead and SENCO will identify if the location poses accessibility issues to any pupils and whether any accessibility means will be required, e.g. accessibility ramps.
- Pupils with SEND will be provided with supervision during Forest School activities where required; this supervision will not count towards other relevant staffing ratios.
- A variety of materials will be used that reflect a range of cultural backgrounds, learning styles and linguistic needs, without stereotyping.
- Sensitivity to the religious and cultural beliefs of pupils will be displayed at all times, e.g. in regard to their clothing or foods they may not wish to eat.
- All pupils will be encouraged to participate and will be made to feel that their experiences and contributions are valued in order to build their confidence and self-esteem.

Incidents and emergencies

At least one trained first-aider will be present during all Forest School activities.

Forest School lead practitioners will create and explain to staff and pupils the procedures to be followed in the event of an incident, e.g. the area where all pupils are to gather in order to be easily supervised.

Forest School lead practitioners will carry a fully stocked first-aid kit at all times during Forest School sessions.

All incidents, injuries and illnesses will be managed in line with school policy.

Staff will be aware of any allergies pupils may have and carry suitable medication, as part of the first aid kit.

In the event of an injury, staff will provide immediate assistance and a trained first aider will remain with the injured person until the situation is resolved. Forest School lead practitioners will assess injuries and decide if further medical attention is needed; the emergency services will be contacted immediately where necessary.

Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed on at least every two years by the Headteacher, in conjunction with Forest School leaders. Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all relevant members of staff, volunteers and other stakeholders.