



Havannah Primary School

Forest School Handbook



Written by: Rachel Hatton – July 2024

**Havannah Primary School, Malhamdale Road, Congleton, CW12
2DF**

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Risk Assessment is complete on a separate document. July 2024

Forest School- An Introduction

At Havannah we value play and creativity, along with the health and wellbeing of our children. We are very proud of our Forest School and how it has enhanced the learning experiences for our children.

1.1 What is Forest School?

Forest School is an inspirational outdoor learning process. It is a unique learning approach within a woodland environment where individuals can explore nature with freedom. Forest school not only gives them the opportunity to engage with nature but also to learn in a different way, free from the constraints of a prescriptive curriculum, as it allows the individual to lead and take responsibility for their own learning in a non-threatening environment.

Forest School sessions at Havannah will take place in the bottom right corner of the field in an especially dedicated area. Forest School will take place on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons each week.

1.2 Why do we do Forest School and for who?

Forest School has benefits for all. Sessions at Havannah are primarily for the benefit of the children however Forest School in general is great for young people and the responsible adults. During our sessions, we become a Forest School family with limited authority and rules. We all respect the nature, environment and each other equally.

It has been proven that Forest School offers children many benefits: it teaches the children respect for nature and each other; encourages them to take responsibility and work as part of a team; raises self-esteem and allows them to understand their place in the world. But above all, it is fun!

1.3 What is different about Forest School?

Unlike the focus of classroom based learning, Forest School offers a holistic and child-centred approach. The child has the freedom to be their own learner. Forest School has potential for many cross curricular links with the core subjects for example building a den requires problem solving, shape and size, communication, physical activity, team building and risk.

For Forest School to be effective, sessions need to be frequent and consistent. This enables the child to build up their knowledge of the natural environment over time, consolidating

progress and enabling long term goals of Forest School such as boosting confidence, creativity and self esteem. It is important for the child to see the natural environment through the seasons, respect its changing biodiversity and learn how to manage the space sustainably.

1.4 Why is Forest School unique?

Forest school allows the child to be autonomous. It gives creative space for the development of positive relationships between peers and adults. The environment and ethos of Forest School equips the children with the abilities to build on these relationships and their own personal skills. Forest School is a journey. It gets even better with time, and the social and emotional benefits become visual by the children's outward actions. Their self esteem and confidence begin to flourish. They are able to build on their physical and academic learning through the dynamic and multi-sensory natural environment.

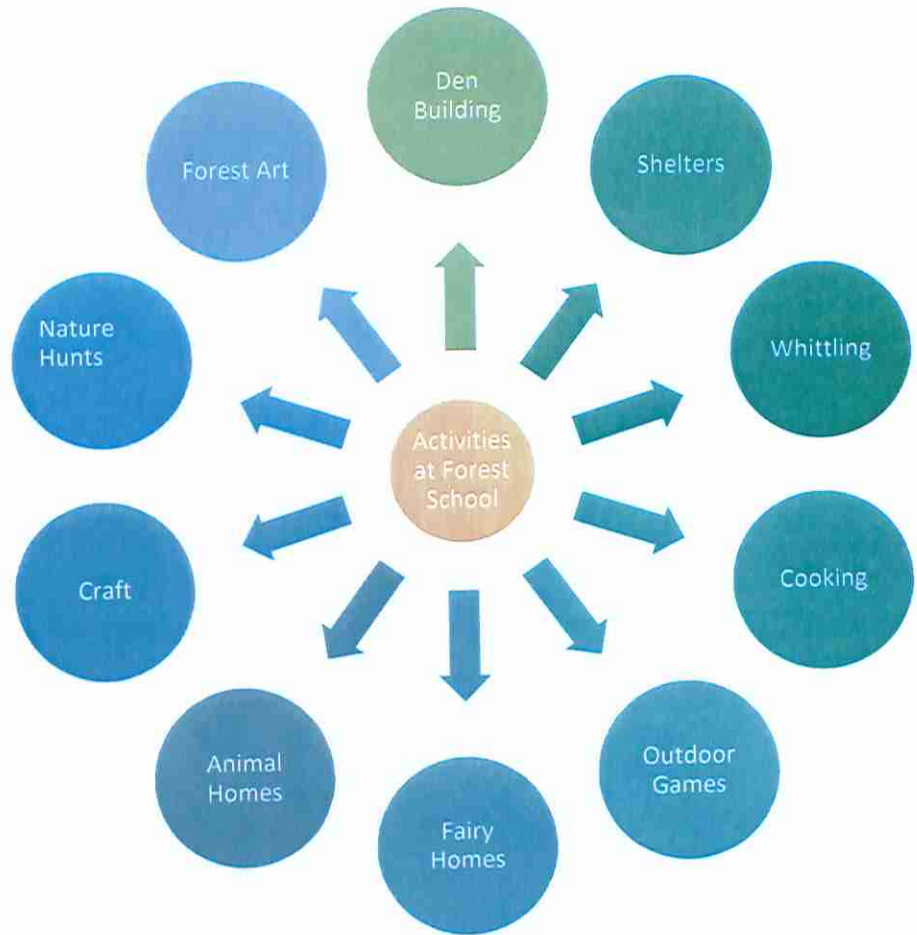
1.5 Why do sessions require a Forest School Leader?

A Forest School Leader qualified to Level 3 is required to run the sessions. This is for a number of reasons. Although Forest School prides itself on minimal rules and plenty of freedom, there are risks and considerations of any natural environment. This is more so during a Forest School session. The Leader needs to be equipped with training on fire, tool and food safety. The leader needs to be educated in the natural environment in order to impart that knowledge to the children. Awareness of woodland management, flora and fauna and sustainability, is crucial to the respect and upkeep of the Forest School setting.

In addition, skilled leadership helps to encourage the personal and social relationships with and between the children. The Leader is capable of facilitating the children on their Forest School journey; tapping into the children's own creativity and helping them to become aware of what they want to learn and how they can effectively learn it. The leader can encourage the children to take risks as they are aware of the boundaries and can facilitate them to perform safely within them.

1.6 What activities are done a Forest School?

We facilitate the children’s learning in our Forest School. We loosely plan, but there are no set activities for any given session however we offer the children plenty of opportunities. Some activities are not right for some but perfect for others so it is important to be flexible with any ‘planning’ and provide children with ideas to facilitate their own learning journeys. Some activities are dependent on ratios and age as well as interest for the leader will show awareness of this. Most sessions will have a fire lit, so the leader will demonstrate fire safety to the children.



Forest School can adapt to harmonise with the curriculum. Activities in the forest can complement and enhance the learning outcomes in the

classroom. It can enrich the children with a fresh perspective on the ideas being taught in a teacher led way and give the children freedom to explore these ideas more for themselves. For example, children learning about the Vikings can attempt role modelling or they could create a visualisation of a Viking settlement from natural resources.

1.7 Forest School Rules

We follow the rules of the countryside code:



At Forest School, we respect one another at all times. We value each other's opinions and contributions and respect the safety of others at all times. We also respect the natural wildlife there.

We endeavour to protect the forest school environment and keep it as natural as possible. We will do this by finding out as much as we can about the flora and fauna there and using woodland management techniques to sustain the area. We will encourage the children to be part of this process by educating them about the habitats nearby. We will make sure we leave the woodland at the end of a session as we find it at the beginning, for example leaving no traces of fire and taking any litter away with us.

At Forest School, we aim to provide the children with space and freedom to enjoy the outdoors and engage with nature at many levels. At Havannah, Forest School sessions will be available to all children. Our sessions will be child led and we will offer the children the opportunities to take risks, make choices and initiate learning for themselves. We only have the following set of simple rules:

- Look after your Forest School
- Do not pick anything growing (with the exception of fast growing plants such as ivy which we sometimes use for weaving)
- Do not put your fingers or anything in your mouth

Forest School Routine

2.1 Start of each session in the classroom.

Children get changed and into their forest school protective clothing in the classroom with their class teacher and teaching assistant. Any children that haven't brought the correct clothing in, will be provided with any spares or will not be able to take part.

2.2 Start of each session in Forest School

Children are brought down to the Forest School area by a member of the classroom staff. All Forest School Sessions then start at the log circle. I have a short chat with the children to discuss the activity opportunities for that session. There will always be 1 adult led activity that is a higher risk activity such as fire, fire lighting or tools. The rest of the activity opportunities will be for independent play and are assisted if needed by the assisting member of staff for that session.

2.3 End of the session and leaving

At the end of each session, the children will help to clear everything away. The leader will ensure that all tools are safely collected and that any fire is fully extinguished. Before going back to the classroom, we come together again at the log circle and discuss the things we've done today and ways to develop those ideas next time.

Emergency Procedures

3.1 Accidents

Minor incidents/ accidents, for example minor cuts and grazes, will be dealt with on site with the first aid kit that is brought down by each class. Each incident will be recorded in the Havannah accident file, clearly stating the time, date and treatment given and an accident note will be sent home, according to the school policy

In the event of a major incident/ accident, for example a suspected broken bone, the Forest School leader will follow first aid guidelines and use their mobile phone to contact emergency services, following the emergency procedures guidance of the Managing Medical conditions policy. All staff must be aware of the school postcode for this purpose. The school office would be immediately contacted to inform parents/carers and an additional adult(s) requested. The forest school leader/first aider would stay with the casualty and the second adult would gather the rest of the children together and dismiss them back to their class

3.2 Lock Down and Fire Drills

In the case of having to evacuate the Forest School site, eg due to sudden adverse weather conditions/a stranger alert or fire drill. The Forest School leader would blow the whistle to indicate that the children to stop and come to the circle. The class teacher would walk them to the playground with their class list and the forest School leader to follow.

If there was a case of lockdown during a forest school session due to a danger identified outside of the forest on school grounds, one of the forest school team would immediately lock the gate and gather the children around the log circle.

Staffing

4.1 Staff Presence during sessions

All sessions will be delivered by the Forest School Leader. The session will be assisted by a member of staff in school that may change from session to session. There will be extra adults in the Forest School sessions that are assisting children with additional needs.

4.2 Volunteers, parent helpers and on-site visitors

If we have parent volunteers/students or any on-site visitors, each adult must be DBS checked and be shown our Forest School handbook prior to volunteering and agree to adhere to its contents. They are required to wear adequate protective clothing.

Health and Safety

5.1 Health and Safety Policy

Health and Safety Policy at Havannah is to be adhered to at all times by the Forest School Leader and assisting staff on site. All other relevant policies will be adhered to for example safeguarding, managing medical conditions in school and the supervision policy. There will be a minimum of 2 adults present at each session.

If Forest School trips are organised, then the Local Educational Authorities guidelines will also be referred to alongside our policy.

Each session of Forest School at Havannah will reflect good practise as set out in the guidelines of the schools Health and Safety Policy and the Child Protection Policy.

5.2 First Aid

There is to be one fully trained first aider present during each session. A First Aid kit will be carried during each session. This kit will include essential first aid. The Forest School Leader must carry a mobile phone for emergency purposes and to call over to the school for any additional first aid.

5.3 Equipment

All children and adults must be suitably dressed for each session. Appropriate footwear and long trousers must be worn at all times, regardless of the weather as these are a safety requirement when doing high risk outdoor activities.

Below is a checklist to follow:

- Woolly hat/sun hat

- Gloves
- Jacket/waterproof coat
- Long trousers/ waterproof trousers
- Fleece/sweatshirt
- Spare socks
- Walking boots/ strong trainers/ wellies/boots
- A carrier bag for dirty/wet clothes

5.4 Fire at Forest School

Fires will only be built within the fire pit. At least one member of the Forest School team will be present at the fire circle at any given time and have had safe fire management training. Any adult tending to the fire will wear fire retardant gloves. Children will be positioned at a safe distance from the fire and will be closely supervised at all times when taking part in activities such as toasting marshmallows. They will be taught to:

- Never cross the circle but instead travel around the circle at all times, particularly when a fire is lit.
- have one knee on the ground at a safe distance when toasting and cooking on the fire
- carry the toasting fork carefully in an upright position to sit on a log and to wait for 10 seconds for it to cool before eating
- Keep long hair tied back/ do not have any loose items of clothing hanging for example, tuck scarves in coats
- Keep fire area clear of objects and leaves

There will be at least 5L of water present when the fire is lit for emergency extinguishing. Weather considerations will be taken into careful consideration when building and maintaining the fire such as windy conditions. The forest school leader will be responsible for making sure the fire is fully and safely extinguished at the end of a session and no visible signs remain.

5.5 Tool Safety

At Forest School, the children will get the opportunity to use tools such as knives, palm drills and bow saws. They will be taught the importance of handling these safely and correctly. All tools will be locked away whilst on school grounds and stored in the leader's bag and supervised at all times during a session.

Children will be strictly supervised 1:1 by the Forest School Leader when using any tool. Children must never travel holding a tool and when tools are not in use, they will be sheathed and stored. Children must wear protective gloves at all times when using tools. It is the Forest School leader's responsibility to maintain these tools by cleaning, sharpening and oiling them after each session.

5.6 Food Safety

The Forest School Leader and other members of staff must follow food safety regulations when storing and preparing food in Forest School. All Food will be stored and transported in a cool bag. Staff and children must wash their hands before preparing and eating food.

5.7 Risk Assessment

As Forest School is all about taking safe risks and learning how to manage risks, it is vital that the Forest School leader carries out a risk assessments

A safety sweep will be carried out prior to every Forest School session by the Forest School leader to determine that conditions are safe for Forest School to take place. Potential risks such as hanging deadwood, branches at eye level, animal faeces and rubbish will be removed. The children will be encouraged to be part of the risk assessment process by following the following rules:

- If you see anything dangerous, report to staff
- All litter or rubbish to be removed at the end of each session. Do not pick up litter with your hands. Use the litter pickers provided.

5.8 Legislation

Forest School Leaders and assistants should be aware of the following relevant legislation to Forest School:

- **In Loco Parentis** – common law of the 19th Century which is a duty of care for the individual to take on the role as if they were a parent.
- **Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)** – a duty to provide a safe working environment where risks are assessed and incidents recorded and managed. (www.hse.gov.uk)
- **First Aid Regulations** – First Aiders to be fully qualified and equipped. Employees on site must provide an adequate first aid kit when needed and tend to those in need. (www.hse.gov.uk)
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Regulations (1992)** Appropriate forest school clothing to be worn at all times. (www.hse.gov.uk)

- **Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR, 1995)** – To report any near misses, serious injuries or hospital admissions. (www.hse.gov.uk)
- **The Protection of Children Act (1999)** - All staff to be DBS checked who come into the forest school site. (www.hse.gov.uk)
- **Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH 2002)** - to control any exposure although in FS this may only be relevant if any herbicides are used. (www.hse.gov.uk)
- **The Children Act (2004)** – to safeguard all children and being equal and inclusive. (www.hms.gov.uk)
- **Knives Act (1997)** – To be knowledgeable on all definitions of weapons and for the safe transportation of knives to and from site. (www.gov.uk/buying-carrying-knives)
- **Countryside and Wildlife Act (1981)** – Leaders and assistants to be aware of the impacts of FS on protected species and demonstrate a general awareness of the flora and fauna on site. (jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1377)
- **Disability Discrimination Act (1995)** – staff to have sensitive awareness to the needs of all children, catering to those needs inclusively and respectfully.
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5.9 Responsibilities

Before a Forest School session

It is the responsibility of the Forest School Leader to inspect the forest site before each session and assess conditions of the environment, weather etc. It is also their responsibility, alongside the class teachers, to ensure that all children are dressed appropriately and are ready and properly equipped for Forest School. It is the class teacher's responsibility to ensure that any inhalers/ medication are brought to Forest School.

During a Forest School session

Again, the overall responsibility lies with the Forest School leader to manage risk and ensure that all children stay safe. Any new planned activities for each session will be planned by the group leader and assistant. Adults and children will be briefed of these opportunities at the start of each session. Class teachers at Forest school may be asked to direct or assist with one of these. It is the role of all adults in the Forest to supervise and facilitate the children with their chosen activities. If any adult volunteer helper is unsure of the suitability of an activity, they must check with the group leader.

It is the child's responsibility (with the adults' support where necessary) to follow the Forest School rules we have agreed on and understand that if they do not, that they will have to leave the forest school session.

If the children need to use the toilet, they must be supervised by an adult back up to the main building. Children are encouraged to use the toilet before coming down to sessions so

that the need for adults to be taken out of session to supervise the children back to the building is reduced.

After Forest School Sessions

It is the responsibility of the whole group (under the guidance of the leader) to leave the forest site generally as they found it, collecting any equipment and taking rubbish away with them. The group leader will be responsible for making sure that any fire is completely extinguished safely before leaving the site and also for the safe storage of tools.

In between sessions, it is the responsibility of the Forest School Team to sustainably manage the woodland and conduct any site maintenance that needs to take place.

Handbook to be reviewed – July 2025

Forest School Site Risk Assessment



Emergency Telephone Numbers
 School Reception:
 01260 542182 Option 2
 Emergency Services: 999

Location of Site
 Havannah Primary School, Malhamdale Road, Congleton, CW12 2DF
 Forest School is located in the bottom right corner of the school field. Access is only via the school gates and school grounds.

Responsible staff	Rachel Hatton (Forest School Leader L3) 1 Assisting Member of Staff. Class dependent	Possible Visitors to site	Kathryn Rogers (Regular Grandparent Volunteer Helper) Class Teachers and Assistants that will accompany the class into Forest School.
Risk Assessment written by Position Signature	Rachel Hatton FSL	Risk Assessment Checked/Approved by	Stef Williams – Headteacher
First Aiders on School Site to assist with First Aid during sessions	Kirstin Thorpe	Qualifications obtained and dates	First Aid at Work – June 2024

Generic hazards on site

The Hazard	Who could be harmed?	How could they be harmed?	Level of risk (with no control measures in place) <i>High Medium Low</i>	Control	Who will carry out control measure and when (before or during activity)?	Level of risk (with control measures in place) <i>High Medium Low</i>
Fire	Children or Adults	Burns	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate the children on the risks of fire and the rules for the fire circle. • Ensure the children adopt the correct safety position for toasting food on the fire (one knee kneel) • Ensure children are wearing the correct clothing to protect against any spits from the fire wood or wind blown ash. • Make sure children and adults are wearing fire retardant gloves when adding sticks to the fire. 	Rachel Hatton	Medium (Measures in place will reduce the risk but not eliminate. Educating the children to be risk aware)
Small Pond	Children	Drowning	Medium	<p>The pond is situated at the top edge of the Forest School area. It is a recycled sand pit measuring 1m diameter and the water inside is about 3-4inches deep dependent on rainwater. The pond is used to house tadpoles and frogs and used as a visible learning opportunity only. The children are educated not to enter the pond or even put their hands in. The children are closely monitored at all times when near the</p>	Rachel Hatton	Low

				pond.		
Brambles and Nettles	Children or Adults	Scrapes and cuts from sharp thorns	High	Brambles are managed to ensure minimal risk to the children. Protective clothing will minimise risk from any brambles growing amongst any other plant species that are more difficult to contain from the children (field edges). Children will also be educated on the risks presented by brambles and we will show the children what they look like so they know not to pick or touch this particular plant.	Rachel Hatton	Medium
Rope Swings	Children	Falls, slips and rope burns	High	We have 3 rope swings in Forest School. All are designed to be sat on to swing with either a knotted end or stick. Children are told not to climb the ropes so this significantly reduces the risk of rope burns. Children are educated to give others space when swinging to reduce the risk of falls and bumps.	Rachel Hatton and Assisting Staff	Medium
Tools	Children or Adults	Cuts, Personal Injury from tool use.	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate the children on how to use tools safely. • Store Tools away from reach of children at all times • Ensure the children use basic forest school tools (trowels and spades) safely. Below shoulder line at all time. • Tool work (knives, bow saw) is to be done under strict 1:1 supervision with the FSL. • Tool gloves must be used when using tools at all times 	Rachel Hatton	Medium

Tree Climbing	Children	Falls	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children will be briefed on the risks of climbing trees. • We only have one tree that is climbable in our Forest school. • Only one children climbing the tree at any one time • Children will be encouraged only to climb within their ability and comfort zone. They are educated to stay close to the trunk and inspect the branches before climbing higher • Children who are climbing trees will be watched at all times. 	Rachel Hatton and Assisting members of staff	Medium
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Forest School Site Risk Assessment completed on 21-07-2024 by Rachel Hatton.
 To be reviewed on 21-07-2025 time unless any changed occur, or any additional/ seasonal risks need documenting before this date.