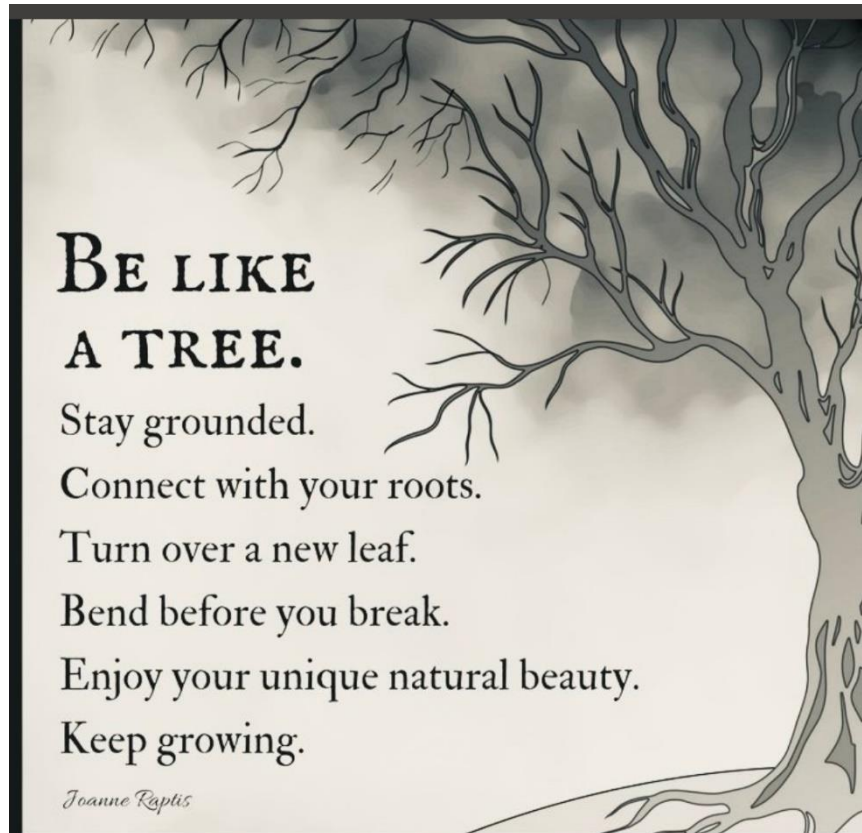


# Forest School Information Pack



Written by Mrs Charlotte Clutterbuck 2023

# Welcome to Forest School

*This information pack has been created for those assisting the Forest School programme and other interested parties.*

## What is Forest school?

Forest School is an inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.

Forest School is a specialised learning approach that sits within and compliments the wider context of outdoor and woodland education.

## Time

Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observing, adaptation and review links each session.

## Space

Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment with trees to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

## Learners at Play

Forest School uses a range of learner-led processes to create a community for being, development and learning.

## Leaders

Forest school is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice. They take the role of facilitator rather than teacher, providing opportunities to learn through play and exploration. Sessions are flexible and learners' interests followed and nurtured.

## Growth

Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of ALL those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent, and creative learners.

## Risk

Forest School offers learners opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves. For example: tool use, fire lighting and tree climbing opportunities will build self-confidence, allowing learners to learn and develop their physical and mental limits and make them better equipped to handle risk.

## What is Holistic Development?

Holistic development is centred around the principle of the whole being and addresses all of the needs of a learner's life. These may include any combination of emotional, physical, relational, intellectual, creative and spiritual needs. Holistic development is the very sense of some educational philosophies, such as Montessori. As an Early Years Foundation teacher, holistic development is at the core of everything I do and this approach to learning compliments the EYFS Curriculum.

Holistic education involves practitioners being not so much teachers in the traditional sense of disseminating information but are seen more as mentors or facilitators, along with the stimulating environment, supporting learner's self-actualisation and self-development. A considered framework for planning holistically is the SPICES well-being model. SPICES stand for **S**ocial, **P**hysical, **I**ntellectual, **C**haracter, **E**motional and **S**piritual.

## How does Forest School foster resilient, confident, independent and creative learners?

The forest is the ideal place to develop resilient, confident, independent and creative learners. Forest School sessions take place throughout the year in **all** weather conditions which fosters resilience and creativity as the learners have no option but to adapt the way they approach and tackle activities as direct result of the seasons and weather conditions.

Risk taking is incredibly beneficial and this is acknowledged. Learners are encouraged to take considered risks and push themselves out of their comfort zone; promoting confidence as learners understand their

physical and mental limits and, in turn become increasingly capable of assessing situations and understanding their own limits.

Forest School encapsulates creativity, providing endless opportunities to be creative. Being free to choose and explore ways to approach challenges and activities fosters an environment where learners are encouraged to think critically and creatively. The beauty of the woodland is that it is an open-ended environment and the ethos of Forest School encourages learners to interact appropriately with any materials they find there. The woodland provides an array of wonderful natural loose parts (materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways), such as: stones, logs, sticks, leaves, soil, rope and a multitude more, all of which are on hand and accessible in every session. Access to loose parts play encourages creativity and provides a greater range of opportunities.

The role of the leader at Forest School is not to teach the learners or direct them with what to do. The leader provides ideas, activities and resources and facilitates opportunities for learners to pursue their own developing interests and curiosities. It is this learner-led learning which encourages independence and supports self-reliance. Learners learn that they do not have to seek the leader's approval before attempting something or, rely on adults to help if something does not go to plan. Learners who attend Forest School sessions over time become increasingly confident in making significant decisions about their own learning and experiences.

#### Who can take part?

Everyone. Forest School provides the equal opportunity for all ages, genders and abilities to learn in an unbiased way. Owing to the approach of Forest School stereotypes or expectations that will have largely been determined by an individual's gender, age, sexuality, belief system, race and cultural background are bypassed. Learning can therefore be applied universally and without prejudice. There are no exam standards or national averages to meet, Forest School is accessible for all and sessions are differentiated accordingly to accommodate individual's needs. The Forest School volunteer policy means that DBS checked adults or relatives can also accompany individuals for extra support in sessions if needed.

#### Who organises and runs Forest School?

Forests School sessions are planned, resourced and run by qualified level 3 Forest School practitioners. At Tonacliffe, Mrs Charlotte Clutterbuck (EYFS Lead/ Reception Class Teacher) and Mr Paul McCormick (Site Supervisor) are qualified Level 3 Forest School practitioners.

### Curriculum linked/compatible learning

Although Forest School is not part of the curriculum and seeks very much to be viewed as a type of learning independent of the school system, the positive learning supported by Forest School carries over and can dovetail classroom learning incredibly well. FS leaders regularly liaise with teachers and learners in order to plan sessions which support what they are learning in class, thus providing rich opportunities for new learning, concepts and skills to be transferred to varying contexts. The ultimate aim is that classroom teachers will be choosing topics that can be positively added to or even brought to life by tying in with an outdoors learning environment.

### Supporting our children

Taking children into the natural environment, provides a unique space to teach concepts, such as mindfulness, that simply means being in the present and stopping to be still and take notice of what's around them. This can greatly benefit their well-being and is a skill or tool that they apply into their lives away from Forest School. An example of a mindfulness activity in Forest School is the popular 5-minute activity 'Magic Spot' where the children independently find a place in the woods to sit alone in silence and either just close their eyes and listen/feel/experience the woods around them, or for children that find this difficult they are instead given a paper and pen to sit down quietly and draw or record what they can see or hear and actively engage with the here and now. Reflection is a key element of each Forest School session and learning how to reflect and be grateful is a valuable attribute to one's self.

### Is Forest School safe?

Forest School sessions operate and are regulated by the same health and safety policy and guidelines that schools have to operate under and comply with. In addition, with further policies and procedures that pertain directly to FS activities and the site itself. All sessions are conducted with a team of parent volunteers and/or teaching assistants (TAs), DBS checked and with an appropriate adult to child ratio. All helpers are briefed before the start of each session and then assigned to oversee an activity or area of

the site. The size of the site is appropriate for the number of children and the capability of the adults to effectively supervise the area during a session. Fixed physical boundaries are created with the children, and marked out. These are communicated and reinforced to children and adults during the sessions. Using a process of risk assessment, the site will prior to any sessions taking place have been risk assessed for potential and existing hazards, and measures will be put in place to reduce or remove risk where necessary. Ultimately, children are made aware of all hazards or risks that we have identified and how we have either reduced or removed the risk.

### Children and Risk.

Amongst the wide range of experiences Forest School offers, one that is incredibly important is risk taking. It is an inbuilt survival instinct that people will seldom take risks which would expose them to significant harm, yet children are largely, through the best of intentions, removed or prevented from taking any risk in their daily lives. This presents a challenge if you agree with the Forest School theory that children cannot learn to safely assess and negotiate risk unless they are exposed to it. So how do we teach children to safely engage with risk?

Forest School aims to answer this by actively encouraging self-motivation in children which leads them to challenge themselves and engage in controlled and monitored risk taking, led at their own pace. Using this method, they learn personal responsibility for themselves and how to spot undue risk taking in others. For example, tree climbing. The children learn that, to safely climb a tree you must have three points of contact at all times i.e. two hands and a foot, or two feet and one hand, and not climb so far that you have your feet higher up the tree than an adults head height.

### Emotional learning

Risk taking in our lives isn't just in a physical sense. The holistic development of Forest School objectives aims to support emotional learning by nurturing an individual's self-motivation, self-esteem and self-confidence, through providing a secure environment where children will approach and successfully negotiate emotional as well as physical risk. This may be learning how to make a new friend or even playing amongst the trees for the first time! Providing small achievable tasks, enable children to develop their self-esteem, however achievable doesn't always mean something is easy! Providing the

opportunity to master trickier but attainable skills, supports the development of personal resilience, perseverance and the ability to handle disappointment by giving them an understanding that it's ok if they cannot immediately complete it. Neurological changes happen when positive experiences along the same lines are repeated and, eventually over a period of time (which is why Forest School is recommended as a series of sessions) these small repeated successes eventually lay pathways that enable children to build upon their initial primitive response of flight or fight to a more sophisticated emotional response. Something which they will carry through and can naturally apply outside of Forest School, to better handle new experiences or stressful situations in their daily lives.

### Social skills

In life, and wider society social cues, norms and expectations are often unspoken and therefore confusing for children. Forest School helps children to communicate with each other and adults in a positive way. Behavioural expectations are put on the children in terms of respecting others and themselves. Empathy is continually modelled and communicated to children by leaders. In addition, teamwork activities are encouraged and all-inclusive games, both energetic or relaxed, are a fun way to make new friends or enrich existing friendships. Social skills are supported and developed by encouraging positive communication and exchanges between the children. Reflection time around the campfire involve children sitting and talking together or individually sharing their thoughts and feelings (if they want to) over a hot chocolate or refreshing cup of squash.

### Site management and Protecting the woodlands

Part of Forest School is about conferring a deep respect and appreciation for the woodland environment and its flora and fauna. We do this by increasing the children's intellectual knowledge and understanding of the woods; explaining and naming systems and cycles and the animals, plants and trees within it. Forest School can be viewed as a programme of conservation and future preservation as when children have associated nature with positive and enriching experiences, they are more likely to appreciate, respect and use it when they become older.

An environmental impact assessment has been created which identifies and minimizes any adverse effects that could or are caused by running the sessions. In addition, a 3-year woodland management plan has been created specific to the site in order to manage and monitor all environmental impacts.

Both documents can be viewed upon request.

### Forest School Kit

Forests School sessions are carried out in all weathers, with the exception being strong winds and stormy weather and, at the discretion of the leader; extremes of hot, cold or rainy conditions. The clothing and footwear policy for Forest School must be adhered to in order to prevent scratches, cuts and stings, soggy socks and cold hands! Children dressed appropriately for the weather will be able to ward off physical discomfort and maximise their fun. Please refer to Forest School Kit list attached.

### A typical session

Sessions will be planned in advance with a view to progressing children in their own personal buildup of understanding over a 6-week period. Sessions will often start sat around the campfire with a welcome, an introduction and a name learning game in later sessions it will start with a recap of the rules of Forest School. Children will be told what activities or experiences are available in that particular session they are then free to choose what to do and for how long they do it. Some children will have a go at everything some children will choose to do one activity for the whole session and then move on the following week. All children are observed and encouraged to challenge themselves by providing support to participate in different activities. All activities run simultaneously. Leaders aim to meet each individual's need each session and all sessions are learner-led.

### Communication with parents and guardians

Photographs from Forest School sessions are uploaded to the class page, on the school website after each session. This is a great way for parents to view what their children have been doing in each session, providing prompts for discussion at home. Regular opportunities are made for parents to come along to Forest School sessions throughout the year and letters are sent home with information regarding dates and times etc. Forest School kit requirements and any updates regarding Forest School sessions are sent



home via letter, email or text. In the event of a Forest School session being cancelled, a text will be sent home at the earliest opportunity. Parents and guardians are actively encouraged to involve themselves in working parties and events at Forest School, and offer themselves as volunteers for Forest School sessions. Due to school policy and ratio requirements, parents are requested to volunteer with groups in which their child is not present. If you have any questions regarding volunteering, please contact the school office.

### Practical skills -Tool use

Forest School sessions are tailored to the age of the children but FS sessions will offer all children (when they are developmentally ready), the opportunity to begin to use a variety of tools in a safe and controlled environment. Using 'tool talks' and adult demonstration, under 1-1 supervision, children are introduced to tools that include bow saws, sheath knives, palm drills and fire steels. For example, before the children progress to using knives, we begin by teaching good practice, body position and technique with a vegetable peeler with a whittled carrot being a popular motivation as a snack to finish! The child would then move onto whittling a stick with the vegetable peeler. The next couple of sessions will be the child demonstrating good practice. Progressing to knife use happens when both the child and adult are confident that the necessary skills and knowledge are in place to use it safely and responsibly. This differs from child to child and may happen in the third session or the sixth session or not at all.

### Fire circle

The fire circle is the heart of the Forest School session and is where children gather at the beginning and end of sessions. Stories are read here, singing for the younger children, cooking skills, reflection time or just a warm place to sit and relax. A trained adult will be at the fire circle for the whole session. Please see Fire Safety Policy for more detailed information.

### Home time/Back to school

Forest School sessions are structured carefully and adapted throughout the session if needed, for example, to control the energy levels of individuals or the group. At the end of a session the focus is on bringing the children down to a relaxed and calm state to safely leave the site and return back to the classroom or home. The children are given plenty of notice that the session will be ending soon which

gives them time to finish their projects or tidy up, before the group meets back at the campfire to sit and briefly reflect, maybe by sharing their thoughts and feelings, relaying something that they saw or did, or show and talk about something they created. Hot chocolate or squash is given out and it's an unpressurised time for the children to be able to regroup and make the mental shift they need to leave in a relaxed and healthy state of mind.

***The following is an outline of the roles and responsibilities you have as a volunteer, teacher or teaching assistant as well as what you should and can expect from your FS leader. Information for landowners can also be found.***

#### Forest School session policy and procedures

- During any Forest School session, the person in overall charge will be a trained Level 3 Forest School Practitioner.
- The Forest School Practitioner has overall duty of care for the children and adults in attendance but all adults that attend the session are also required to take undertake a duty of care to themselves, all children and other adults present.
- All adults present will be verbally briefed by the Forest School Leader in charge as to what that particular session may entail and if they haven't already, sign and date a form to show they have read and understood the risk assessments relevant to the session and verbally agree that they understand their role and responsibility for the session.
- All adults attending will be made aware of the names and number of children on site.
- The Forest School Leader/adult helpers will do a headcount and a visual scan to spot faces each time a new activity is initiated and finished.
- All adults attending will be made aware of the location of and have access to the emergency bag.
- All adults attending will be made aware of the location and have access to the first aid kit.

- All adults, in case of emergency where the Forest School Leader themselves is incapacitated will be aware of their revised role and responsibilities.

### Volunteers, Teachers and Assistants Policy

Parents, grandparents, helpers, teachers and TA's are an invaluable asset to Forest School and can greatly enhance the experience of the children by their presence and are actively encouraged to become part of Forest School sessions.

This volunteer policy provides guidelines for both volunteers and school staff FSVs and school staff will be required to;

Understand the ethos and philosophy behind Forest School by reading the Forest School information pack or attend the information pack presentation prior to attending Forest School.

- Become familiar with the Forest School Handbook, the policies & procedures within and sign off to confirm comprehension and reading of relevant risk assessments, policies and procedures.
- Take part in any pre-session briefings or post session evaluations from the Forest School Leader.
- Take an active part in sessions by assisting or supporting groups and individuals with tasks such as shelter building, free play, cooking preparation and clearing away.
- Join in with group games and activities where they can.
- Assist children with their kit, including waterproofs.
- Take an active role in Forest School activities and assist with discipline, health and safety and risk management when interacting with the children.
- Ensure they model the safe use of the equipment themselves and do not personally take undue risk during the session.
- Report accidents or hazards to the Forest School Leader immediately.

- Provide their own suitable outdoor clothing and footwear
- Assist with the supervision of children whilst walking to and from site.
- Assist with the Forest School Leader in ensuring equipment meets safety standards by reporting any concerns about the state of equipment immediately and directly to the FS leader.
- Assist the Forest School Leader in teaching children to maintain their own and others' health and safety.

#### Child protection/(DBS) Procedure

- All regular attendees will be DBS checked before helping in Forest School.
- A full register of those who have been DBS checked will be held in the main Forest School Handbook.
- Volunteers must never allow themselves to be in a one to one situation with a child.
- All attendees should understand that disciplining the children must take place within the ethos of Forest School. If children behave poorly, they should seek the Forest School Leader's or Class Teacher's intervention immediately.
- Volunteers must not enter the children's toilets or assist with toileting at any time. If they feel there is a problem with a child when using the toilet, they must seek a member of staff to deal with the situation.
- Volunteers, even if first aid trained must not administer any medication to children, including creams.

It is important that all adults or helpers that attend feel valued and are comfortable in what they are doing, so they are encouraged to seek further advice or assistance from the Forest School Leader whenever instructions are unclear or they do not feel comfortable undertaking an activity or any other problems arise. The FS leader's email address will be given to all attendees to enable private communication if unable to speak directly to the FS leader.

## Safeguarding and Behaviour

All adults must ensure they have completed annual safeguarding training with the head teacher and familiarize themselves with the school's safeguarding and behaviour policies, and have read part one of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022.

### The Role of the Forest School Leader and Assistants:

- Create a positive environment which encourages and reinforces caring, nurturing and acceptable behaviour towards one another, the environment and equipment.
- Establish clearly defined standards of behaviour.
- Provide a positive role model for all children and volunteers.
- Involve school staff, parents, children in the establishment of acceptable standards of behaviour.
- Recognise, integrate and provide for the needs of the children, including needs linked to their preferred learning styles, social and behavioural needs.
- Give verbal praise to children demonstrating good work, good behaviour, cooperation and good group and individual work.

At Forest School in order to help achieve the aims of fostering in children independence, self-esteem, motivation and empathy the following behaviour is expected from children in attendance at all sessions.

- Listen when an adult is talking.
- Follow any instructions as directed by the Forest School Leader.
- Keep to the Forest School boundaries agreed with the Leader.
- Be mindful of the outdoor environment and look to keep yourself and other children safe from harm when exploring or completing activities.

- Respect the other children attending the session.
- Respect the environment and the flora and fauna within the site.

### Rewards:

Rewards given at Forest School will feed into the conventional school's rewards system. That said, we are NOT expecting the children to complete specific activities etc. to gain external rewards or gratification from us as the adults. Forest School aims to develop intrinsic motivation; therefore, the children should be completing activities etc. for themselves and their sense of achievement/ feeling proud of themselves should be enough.

### Sanctions

Where sanctions need to be given, the Forest School Leader will follow these steps;

1. Volunteers will defer to the Forest School Leader, Class Teacher or Teaching Assistant who will try to re-engage the child/children.
2. A verbal warning will be given by the Forest School Leader, Class Teacher or Teaching Assistant by taking the child to one side and reminding them of the importance of acceptable behaviour.
3. The child/children will be given time out from the activity. They will be moved away from the activity to a designated area (sitting at the campfire circle under supervision of the adult in charge of the fire) for two minutes (EYFS/KS1) or five minutes (KS2).

If behaviour becomes serious and the child/children's actions are putting themselves, the group or an individual at risk then these steps will be taken;

1. Trained members of staff to use de-escalation strategies.
2. Remove other children from area of risk (if deemed necessary).

3. If necessary, trained members of school staff to use appropriate restraint technique as per the school's policy and procedure.

4. Debrief child after calm down period.

5.1 If the session is on site; the child will be escorted back into school to work in another classroom.

5.2 If the session is off site; the school will be telephoned for someone to walk out and collect the child. If this is not possible, the Forest School Leader will make the decision whether to send the child back to school escorted by an adult or, if supervision levels would be compromised or if there is a danger of the child absconding, the whole group will be taken back to school.

6. Log incident and report to SLT.

7. Inform parents/guardian.

Where the behaviour is deemed to have been very unsafe or their attendance would significantly affect the wellbeing of the group or an individual within the group the child will be excluded from the next Forest School session and a meeting with the school or parents will be sought to find a resolution with a view to integrating the child back into future sessions.

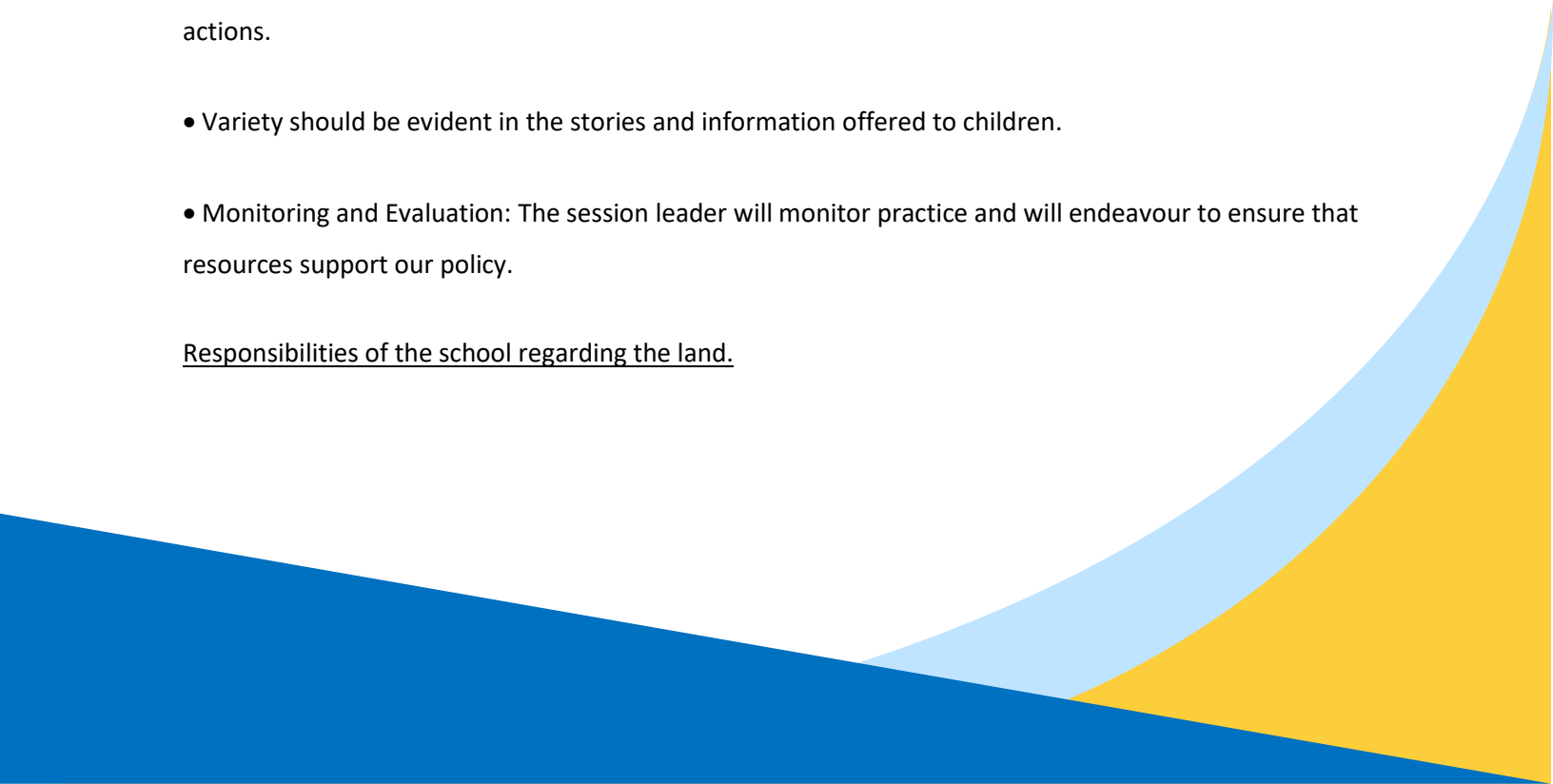
### Equal Opportunities Policy

The following guidelines concern our equal opportunities policy. All attendees should follow the below guidelines.

- Discrimination is unacceptable at Forest School sessions.
- Every child and adult in attendance will be encouraged and ultimately required to contribute towards this aim by showing respect for, and appreciation of each other as individuals.
- Forest School sessions will strive to holistically develop all children whatever their colour, culture, religion, disability or sexual orientation.

- Forest School sessions will seek to support children through positive awareness and acceptance of the diversity of society.
- Forest School sessions will allow equal access for all children to all activities.
- Forest School will promote positive attitudes to gender equality by removing gender stereotypes when promoting and discussing activities with the children.
- The Behaviour Policy will be applied with fairness and consistency to all children.
- Differentiation: sessions will recognise the need to cater for the abilities of all children present, including the more able as well as children who are catered for under the Special Educational Needs policy by providing a differentiated and flexible programme.
- Discrimination: All forms of discrimination by any person within a session are to be treated seriously. A note will be kept of any incident and the behaviour policy procedures will be employed to deal with such incidents.
- Language: Children who do not have English as their first language will be supported to ensure they have comprehension and understanding of the rules and boundaries at session. British Sign Language will be used for those who are hearing impaired and BSL signs used to accompany storytelling/ songs at every opportunity for all children (not just those who are hearing impaired).
- Adults and any staff at Forest School sessions will not engage in racist, sexist or derogatory language or actions.
- Variety should be evident in the stories and information offered to children.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: The session leader will monitor practice and will endeavour to ensure that resources support our policy.

Responsibilities of the school regarding the land.





- The woodland should be under an active management plan and will have had a professional tree surgeon assess the woodland for any diseased trees or potentially dangerous trees or branches the latter especially after occasions of severe storm force winds.
- The site is exclusive to Forest School during school sessions and visitors are permitted only if accompanied by a member of school staff. The public footpath will be maintained by school staff to ensure public right of way remains and is not compromised.
- Domestic pets or animals should be kept away from the site.
- A full environmental impact assessment, which will encompass the direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the site from the activities and experiences Forest School offers. In turn, this will be looked at to see the effects it would have on the native flora and fauna present on the site. Environmental impacts will be assessed as to whether they are reversible or irreversible and the likely duration of said impacts with regards to being of a temporary state or impacts that may take longer to remediate. Using the results of this, a 3-year management plan will be created to monitor and mitigate all impacts.

I hope that this information pack has provided you with sufficient information regarding Forest School at Tonacliffe Primary School. If you have any further queries, please don't hesitate to get in touch via the school office.

Thank you,

Charlotte Clutterbuck

Forest School Leader

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