



**Ysgol Y Waun**

**Forest School Policy**



**December 2021**



## What is Forest School?

When children spend time outdoors in a natural environment regardless of the weather (unless it is deemed to be potentially unsafe), exploring and making things from the natural materials available, away from the rules and regulations that classrooms have.

Children have a higher ratio of adults to children than in the classroom, but less rules and are actively encouraged to do their own thing and take risks that they would otherwise not enjoy, such as tree climbing and using sharp tools.

The sessions have been shown (through research) to increase the **resilience, confidence, creativity, and independence** of the children involved.

## Forest School background

In 1927 H.L. Russell, Dean of the College of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison came up with the idea of teaching students in the forest or natural environment as a method of improving self-esteem and confidence.

This idea travelled to Scandinavia in the 1950s but it wasn't until 1993 that a group of nursery workers from Bridgwater College in Somerset went on a visit to Denmark to look at their methods of pre-school teaching.

Denmark had a culture of open-air play teaching called 'frulitsliv' which seems to permeate through people's lives in this country right down to

Early Years nursery environments. It was a huge part of the education of children.

These Nursery Workers were so taken with the idea that on their return to Somerset they created their own 'Forest School' in the college creche. They found that the children who were involved grew in confidence and increased their skills in problem-solving; teamwork; and creativity.

By 1995 the college put together a course for people who wanted to take Forest School further but did not have the skills to do so and in 2000 the concept took off across England and Wales.

### **Ysgol Y Waun Forest School Ethos**

- Play and be creative;
- Access the outdoors and woodland areas;
- Take risks and experience the reality of the Natural World;
- Experience a range of healthy emotions and build a resilience that will enable them to positively participate in the community in the future;
- Fulfil their potential, grow their confidence and become independent 'thinkers and doers'.

The Forest School environment lends itself to the Ethos perfectly. Means that the children can experience first-hand the changing of Four Seasons the smells tastes noises and textures of our surrounding nature going back to the times when children did not attend school but would be taught the way of a land learning to identify flora and fauna for survival as well as have had to use the land and its provisions for Shelter.

Whilst being 'child centred' the Forest School leader often assists in this process by being the catalyst for self directed play using small short 'led' activities.



## Our aims

In order to promote the holistic development of the children we aim to:

- Promote a feeling of well-being through the use of positive language and praise.
- Build self-confidence and self-esteem
- Promote independence and resilience.
- Support the children's personal social spiritual and emotional growth.
- Develop the children's emotional intelligence.
- Encourage kindness and caring towards the environment and each other.
- Provide 'can do' opportunities as well as challenging ones.
- Inspire the children to support each other and work together to achieve their goals

To provide the children with a better understanding of the Natural World we will:

- Teach the children about the natural world and how to respect it.
- Educate the children about the sustainability of our site and the wider community.
- Demonstrate the benefits of having a healthy relationship with the environment.

Forest School Staff support Ysgol Y Waun by:

- Carrying out observations of children in order to monitor their development, inform planning, and support the children in their learning.
- Allowing time for child-led activities and Free Play during their Forest School session to enhance their development.
- Working alongside the children to support their new discoveries and interests.
- Considering the health and safety of the children and adults at Forest School through continual risk assessments and by following health and safety procedures.

### Play and Learn

Forest School promotes the holistic development of the child, not just the curriculum, although crossovers with school classroom learning requirements often happen anyway.

Forest School helps develop social, physical, cognitive, linguistic, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the child which form requirements of the modern school curriculum as set by the government.

It may look like children are playing and just enjoying themselves but they are actively learning as part of the experience.

Children are encouraged to complete practical activities and small tasks using a variety of different tools and materials. This can be challenging on every level but finishing them is very satisfying and increases their confidence.

It promotes the use of their imagination to use natural resources in ways that are not normally thought of, and they can work horizontally as well as vertically making upright structures and 3D objects.

Their creativity is encouraged naturally through the amount of free time they have to investigate, experiment and problem solve.

They have the opportunity to work on their own or in groups, developing their team working abilities and also learning to be more independent.

They have freedom of choice over their activities and friendships; they can fail as often as they wish without recrimination as adults step back. Most of all they can repeat the experiences they find fun over and over again until it works for them or they want something different. This directly increases their resilience and understanding of practice.

For those children and young people who are not used to being in a woodland setting with less rules than normal, these activities and sessions can increase their confidence in the environment and can form the basis of a lifelong relationship with the outdoors.

### **Staying safe**

Forest school actively encourages children and young people to explore risks in a way that is appropriate to the environment. They may climb trees or use sharp tools under supervision; use equipment for activities which are relevant to the age of the child and their individual abilities; or learn how to make a fire and cook upon it.

At Ysgol Y Waun staff look at the risk benefits of an activity - what can be done to enable something to happen and what the benefits of this activity would be for the child, rather than the reasons why an activity shouldn't be carried out.

If the child or young person is deemed to get some positive learning from an experience regardless of the risk, then staff will do as much as possible to enable this experience to happen.

Forest school enables children and young people to take supported risks which are appropriate to the environment and themselves.

This increases the resilience of children as there are no right or wrong ways of doing things. In fact often the outcomes may be different from what the child has expected. Children do not give up and repetition is encouraged and supported until the child succeeds for themselves or gets bored with the activity.

Every Forest School Session at Ysgol Y Waun is run by a qualified Forest School Practitioner, who has undergone relevant training; holds Outdoor First Aid qualifications with a pediatric element; and completes extra training each year to ensure the safety of the children and adults on site.

At Ysgol Y Waun the Forest School Leaders hold a handbook written specifically for the school, detailing expectations of others, risk assessments, procedures for the use of tools and emergencies as well as a session plan for each session.

Prior to any session taking place a pre-session risk assessment will be undertaken for the site and weather. This includes a complete visual and practical test of any specialist equipment made or available on site, boundary issues, flora and fauna issues with regard to poisons, dead wood and potential hazards from the environment, and an inspection of the weather forecast and the current weather situation.

If it is deemed unsafe to continue with the session, the Forest School Leader will inform the class teacher and, if applicable, the children will return to school. In some instances, other areas of the school may be utilised for the session instead such as the playground or school field.

The following table sets out the details of contingency plans.

Hazard	Issue	Contingency Plan
Strong winds or gusts of Force 6/7 (wind speeds of 25-38 mph)	Branches may break off trees if loose	Move the session to the school field away from the trees.
Gales of force 8 or more (wind speed / gust of over 38mph)	Wind may blow small children over, branches may break, and structural damage could occur	Session to be moved inside or cancelled
Thunder and Lightning	Lightning strikes	Site closed, children return to school. Session may take place inside.
Extreme rain	Clothing may not be adequate to sustain torrential rain and people may quickly become cold and wet.	Return to school and change into dry clothing. Session may continue inside if possible.
Heavy Hail	Hail may cause injury to children	Seek immediate cover and return to school when able

Hazard	Issue	Contingency Plan
Extreme cold temperatures	Inadequate clothing and gear may cause people to become hypothermic if sustained exposure continues.	Provide warm drinks, and ensure extra layers are available. If the weather turns wet in addition to cold then sessions could be transferred to the classroom.

The Forest school Leader will remain on site with the children at all times when there is a session in progress. All unauthorised access to the site is prohibited. This includes parents and visitors unless accompanied by the member of staff, and never when the children are in residence on the site.

Children are expected to wear the correct clothing for Forest School for each session:

Waterproof trousers

Waterproof coat - not their school coat

Thick trousers or layers of trousers - not jeans

Upper Layers including jumpers and tee-shirts

Gloves

Hat

Wellies or walking boots

Thick socks or extra socks

In summer they should bring:

Waterproof trousers

Waterproof coat - not their school coat

Layers including long trousers (even in the sun)

Wellies or walking boots

Suncream and sunhat.

## Care of our environment

At Ysgol Y Waun we are fortunate to have two dedicated sites for Forest School.

### **Lloyds Lane**

This area consists of trees, grass, log piles, rotting tree stumps, and hedges. Most trees have grown naturally on the site, although there are some that have been sympathetically planted in the past. All but one tree is mature.

The site backs onto a private property on one side, the astroturf pitch of the leisure centre on another, Chapel Lane lines a further side and then the site is open onto the school field.

It is planned that the open area to the school playing field will be managed through either a fence or hedge in order to prevent unauthorised access by either school children or members of the public.

### **Chapel Lane**

A more restricted site in size due to the playgroup area, this site has mature trees, a log fire pit area and has been wood chipped for safety. It lines one side of the playground, and is fenced to the road with a hedge and metal fencing lines the next door Public play area past the playgroup site.

There are wooden log piles and a bug hotel made from recycled pallets. In addition there are several bushes, holly and compost bins within the site. There is no natural grass area other than the school playing field.

## Future Plans for the Environment

Ysgol Y Waun is committed to continue to care for this environment and is continually looking for opportunities to expand and enhance the area. In this respect the Forest School Leads will be liaising with Wrexham Council regarding the cutting of grass at Lloyds Lane, and the maintenance of trees on both sites.

Other plans for the Lloyds Lane site include composting, meadow flower area, possible vegetable garden or wild fruit and vegetable/herb area. A three year management plan for Lloyds Lane Forest School is already in place to care for the site in conjunction with plans for the wider school.

In addition to this, the Forest School site will:

- Try to use as much recycled products as possible;
- Remove all debris and rubbish from the site at the end of each session. (A fingertip sweep of the site will be conducted at the end of each term)
- Be aware of the neighbours and adjacent facilities;
- Ensure the area is adequate fenced to prevent dogs from entering the site and defecating on it;
- Remove unwanted or poisonous plants from the area;
- Leave an area to rot naturally to provide nutrients and safety for the insects and animals;
- Sow an area of wild flowers to encourage more wildlife onto the site;
- Look at an area for planting willow for coppicing in the future as a supply of wood for fires.

## **Equality**

At Ysgol Y Waun we believe that all children should be given the opportunity to take part in Forest School regardless of ability, disability, gender, race or culture etc. All other relevant policies, such as the ALN policy, will be taken into consideration during Forest School Sessions.

Where children have a specific need, sessions will be adapted to be inclusive, and individual risk assessments will be carried out for identified children to ensure their participation.

## **Expected behaviour**

- Children are expected to come to school in their Forest School Uniform on their allotted day.
- Children are expected to bring spare clothing on that day in the event that they get very wet.
- Children will change in the Changing rooms in the Junior School and their outside area in the Infants. All muddy footwear will be removed prior to re-entering the building from the Forest School session.
- Noise in these areas will be kept to a minimum when dressing and undressing.
- Children will walk to the site quietly.
- When on site, children are expected to listen to the Forest School Staff at all times to ensure their Health and Safety.
- During the Forest School Session children are expected to adhere to the Forest School Rules which will have been explained to them during their first sessions and re-enforced at the beginning of every session. (Safe, Respectful and Kind)
- On return to school, children will line up and walk quietly behind the nominated adult.
- Wellies and waterproof trousers will be removed outside the door and carried into the changing rooms.

## First Aid

- Forest School Leads hold an appropriate First Aid qualification.
- A First Aid kit and Burns kit is available on the site at any time a session is taking place.
- A Walkie Talkie is taken out on the Forest School Site at all times. The remaining Walkie Talkie will be held by the office staff or another nominated staff member at all times whilst the session is in progress. Walkie talkies will be recharged at the end of each day.
- Emergency procedures are available in the Forest School Handbook.
- All Leaders are aware of any medical conditions of any children in their care.
- All inhalers and medication such as epi-pens are taken to the Forest School site in their appropriate containers.

## Use of tools

- Everyone will be taught the correct use of tools before using on their own.
- Tool work involving sharp tools will be carried out on a tarpaulin under the supervision of an adult.
- Sharp tools in this instance are defined as: Potato peelers, awls, drills, screwdrivers, scissors, bradwals, loppers and secateurs.
- Mallets, ropes and string can be used away from the tarpaulin.
- Axes, saws and knives will only be used in the designated fenced off area with an adult. A maximum ratio of 1:3 will be used for knife work and a maximum of 1:1 for saws, axes and bill hook work (unless duo sawing 1:2) - a blood bubble environment will be observed at all times in this area.

- The fenced off area allocated for axe and saw work is out of bounds to everyone unless directed to enter by a Forest School Leader.
- All tools will be checked after each session and broken tools will be disposed of.
- All tools will be cleaned and maintained weekly and more often if required.
- Knives, axes and billhooks will be sharpened every half term, or more frequently if required. Blunt knives, axes and billhooks will be taken out of action until sharpened to prevent injury.
- Tools will be counted out at the beginning of the session and back in at the end.

## **Fires on Site**

- All fires will be supervised by a Forest School Leader.
- The local fire service in Wrexham will be notified of the controlled burn, leaving a mobile contact number with them, and the time of the burn and expected finish. Should the fire go on longer than dictated to the fire service, then the fire services should be informed of the continued burn and revised time of putting out.
- Fires will be lit within the fire circle unless directed otherwise by a Forest School Leader.
- Children will be taught the correct methods of lighting fires on a 1:3 basis.
- Fires will be contained within a fire triangle and the flame will not exceed the height of the shortest child's knee.
- All children and adults attending a fire will adopt the 'flight or fight position' on one knee.
- Water canisters will be available next to the fire for extinguishing fires.
- When completed, fires will be extinguished and all traces removed.
- If cooking on a fire, the ratio of children will be determined by the Forest School Leader, depending on the activity.

## **Use of Kelly Kettles for Boiling Water.**

- Kelly Kettle use will be supervised by the Forest School Leader at all times.
- Kelly Kettles will only be lit in a fire circle.
- The protocol of using Kelly Kettles in the Forest School Leader handbook will be followed.
- All Kelly Kettles will have their bungs removed prior to the first use.

- All boiling water will be disposed of as soon as it is no longer required.
- Kelly Kettles will remain within the fire triangle until completely cool.

### **Roles and responsibilities of the Forest School Leader**

- Hold a level three Forest School Leader Qualification; DBS and Outdoor First Aid Certificate.
- Hold a level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate.
- Develop a Forest School Handbook detailing the emergency plans for accidents and bad weather, risk assessments, toileting arrangements, pre-session risk assessments, Ecological assessments, site management plans, Landowner agreement (if required), Lost Child Policy, and communication strategy.
- Risk assess the site prior to each session
- Provide risk assessments for all forest school activities
- Plan for each session, taking into account individual needs and previous session observations, incorporating a range of learning styles for inclusivity.
- Provide activities for each session and be ready to adapt as required.
- Get all necessary equipment ready for the session
- Check all tools daily and clean as per regime set out in the Forest School Handbook, and this policy.
- Supervise all major tool activities such as axe work, knife work, and sawing.
- Re-enforce the Forest School Rules - Safe, Respectful, Kind.
- Assess other adults in their ability to use and supervise the use of minor tools appropriately (potato peelers, bradawls, mallets, secateurs, scissors, drills, and screwdrivers etc.)

- Keep the first aid kit up-to-date and taken out to each session.
- Provide First Aid on site if required, and keep an accident book to record accurately any incidents which occur.
- To keep a charged mobile phone on site for emergency use and contacting the fire service.
- Ensure the walkie talkie is taken out the site for each session and is adequately charged.
- Organise an annual rota of classes to attend Forest School, so that each class in Juniors will have a minimum of 10 sessions for the school year. (Based on one session per class per fortnight)

### **Roles and responsibilities of other adults present**

- To act as a good role model for the children and take part in the activities as far as possible.
- To have read and understood the risk assessment policies provided by the Forest School Leader.
- If assessed as competent, supervise the children's use of minor tools as outlined previously.
- Use positive language to provide encouragement and praise at all times.
- Help the children analyse risk and make their own decisions regarding risk management.
- Support the Forest School Leader(s) in activities and decisions.
- Bring out all medical equipment and medication needed by children in that class.
- Inform the Forest School Leader of any issues with a child at the beginning of the session.
- Be aware of any dangers that could arise during the session.

- Make the Forest School Leader aware of any issues or risks that arise during the session and provide feedback as necessary.

## **Insurance**

The school has a number of legal responsibilities under the Children's Act 2004, Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Equality Act 2010. Ysgol Y Waun has both Employers and Public Liability insurance cover appropriate to its duties. Responsibility in most cases lies with the school unless the site is accessed by unauthorised people. In these cases the school accepts no liability. Staff and children using the Forest School site and taking part in activities, are expected to take reasonable care both for themselves and other people who may be affected by their acts or omissions. Risk assessments for all activities undertaken on the site are available.

This policy will be reviewed annually or earlier if necessary.

Policy adopted on:

Forest School Leader(s):

Date:

HeadTeacher:

Date:

Chair of Governors:

Date:

Review Date: