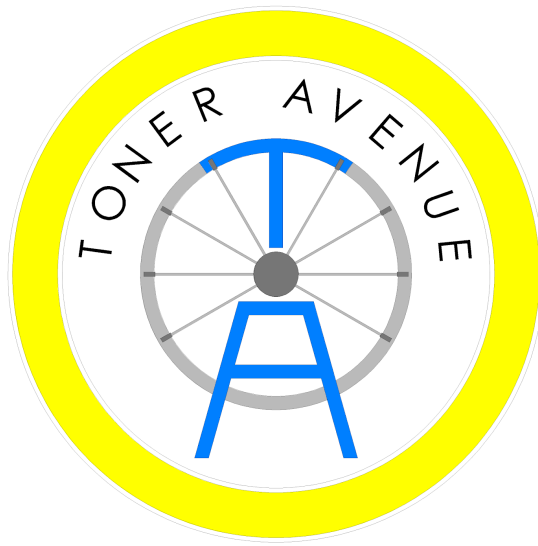




Forest school handbook

September 2025

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Forest School Ethos Statement

At Toner Avenue we value a holistic approach to education, we believe in children's right to play and access the outdoors, the chance to experience risk and the natural world. We believe it is important to address the fundamental links between emotional intelligence, self-esteem, positive behaviour and motivated learning. We believe that this is endorsed through Forest School sessions and that it supports the well-being of individuals who may become inspired to fulfill their potential and be better placed to realise the difference their actions, skills and knowledge can have. This in turn nurtures a sense of belonging, self-worth and resilience and a love for learning which they may take forward into all areas of their lives.

'All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded to the individual' Albert Einstein.

What is Forest School?

Forest School is a child centred, long-term educational process that supports holistic development of children through a mix of child-initiated play, exploration, supported by risk taking and learning in a natural setting.

Through careful observation and positive encouragement, Forest School builds on the skills shown by the children. The Forest school leader facilitates activities with preferred styles of learning which sets children up to succeed. This accelerates learning, develops self-confidence and promotes self-esteem.

The process helps and facilitates more than knowledge gathering, it helps learners develop socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually. It creates a safe non-judgemental, nurturing environment for learners to try stuff out and take risks. Forest school inspires a deep and meaningful connection to the world, and an understanding of how learners fit within it. Our approach to risk means that learners constantly expand on their abilities by solving real world issues, building self-esteem and resilience.

We believe that risk is more than just potential for physical harm, but a more holistic thing, there are risks in everything we do, and we grow by overcoming them. Forest School, therefore, helps participants to become healthy, resilient, creative and independent learners.

Aims of Forest School

- To support the social and emotional development of children through play in a natural outdoor environment.
- To support the physical and mental development of children through active games, tasks and problem- solving activities.
- To build self confidence and self-esteem in children and young people.
- To give children and young people the skills and tools to succeed and be happy.
- To teach children to be tolerant of one another.

Example of types of activities that may take place at Forest School Under close adult supervision*

- Den/ shelter building
- Campfire building and lighting*
- Making hot food and drinks on the campfire*
- Bush craft – Working with Forest school tools*
- Other Bush craft activities
- Nature and wildlife discovery, observation and appreciation
- Nature and wildlife identification
- Learning about code of conduct and respect for the countryside
- Problem solving activities
- Physical challenges (e.g. obstacle courses)
- Teambuilding activities
- Child initiated play
- Nature Art and Craft work
- Music making
- Campfire singing
- Campfire storytelling

All activities aim to support the children's social and emotional development which in turn can help raise their confidence and self-esteem.

Forest School Expectations

- We Do Not Eat anything we find.
- Our hands need to be kept out of our mouths while at Forest School.
- We must stay within the designated boundaries while at Forest School. • We come back to base when called.
- Do not walk through the fire circle
- Do not enter the fire circle unless invited to do so

- children must come to Forest School dressed appropriately for the time of year.
- At Forest school we care for things and take particular care of our special site, we do not pick living flowers or plants.

Role of the Forest School leader

To facilitate learning in order to encourage development of self-esteem by matching tasks and activities to individual children. This process develops through observations and evaluations, and development of relationships founded on trust. The Forest School leader is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the group and risk assesses the site, the daily conditions and all activities before and during the session.

Role of adult helpers

- To support the Forest School leader with tasks such as head counting and ensuring children stay within the designated area.
- It is important adults alert the Forest School leader immediately if a child is missing, seriously hurt or misbehaving in a way that could lead to others getting hurt.
- We ask all adults to praise good behaviour and allow children the freedom to explore and play without adult interruption whenever safely possible.
- Before the session, help check that children are wearing clothing and footwear appropriate for the weather and time of year.
- To assist keeping the children healthy and safe by helping them to recognise and avoid hazards such as harmful plants, germs, trip hazards etc.
- To support children's learning and development as modelled by the Forest School leader.
- To support the children's learning and development through answering and asking questions and responding to activity cues without 'over influencing' the activity.

Forest School Sessions and Routines

1. Before;

- check the weather forecast - Forest School will be cancelled or relocated in adverse weather conditions eg high winds and electric storms
- Check everyone is appropriately dressed
- Equipment check- well maintained and in good working order Emergency contacts and first aid kit
- Risk assessment and Risk/benefit analyses completed

2. Whilst there;

- On-going risk assessment regarding behaviour, engagement, weather
- Regular head counts
- Discuss safety with the learners
- Have fun
- Reflection

3. After the session;

- Ensure all the equipment is accounted for and stored appropriately
- Clear site and leave it as we found it
- Maintain equipment
- Staff evaluation/reflection of session

Procedures and Policies

(*school policies can be found at <https://toneravenue.uk/policies-2/>)

Safeguarding:

Anti- bullying policy

(*same as school policy)

Disclosure policy

What to do if a child makes a disclosure?

- Listen carefully
- Record the conversation in the child's words and note the time
- Sign and date the record you make
- Take it seriously
- Provide support
- Reassure they are right to tell
- Don't promise that you will keep it secret
- Explain what will happen next
- Speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead

A full in depth safeguarding policy can be found on the school website using the link above

Lost/missing child

Boundaries and expectations are made clear to the children and all staff are responsible for maintaining regular headcounts. If a child is discovered missing, the group will retrace steps whilst calling out the child's name. If the child is still missing the Forest School leader will inform senior leaders in school for assistance. The other staff/ volunteer helpers will escort the remainder of the group back into school whilst the Forest School leader and other staff/ adults continue the search.

Behaviour

It is our responsibility to ensure all children feel safe, respected and valued. Praising and drawing attention to good behaviour will be used as the primary behavioural management strategy. Rules and expectations will be made clear at the beginning of the first Forest School session and main points recapped thereafter. As a preventative measure and as a core value of Forest School, all adults shall be made aware of any specific social and emotional needs of the children in the group and 1:1 ratios adopted where necessary. If a child's behaviour puts themselves or other children at risk, we will ask them to stop, if the behaviour does not stop, we will intervene. If the unwanted behaviour continues, we may have to end our Forest School session. All individual risk assessments for children are regularly updated and the behaviour policy altered where needed. We expect the children to follow the Forest School rules and behave accordingly. We expect children to respect the plants and animals and help us to look after the wildlife and our special site.

Health and Safety:

First aid and emergency

The Forest School leader is trained in both outdoor and pediatric first aid and will ensure access is available to first aid. The first aid kit is checked and replenished by the Forest school leader prior to each session.

Clothing policy

To ensure all children are protected from the weather and forest elements we require all children to wear appropriate clothing and footwear.

Children should wear long length trousers and long sleeves and should wear trainers or walking shoes.

Additional items needed:-

In the winter:

- Woolly hat
- Jumper
- Coat

In the summer:

- Sun hat
- Sun cream

Waterproof trousers, jackets and wellies will be provided for all children by school.

Toileting

Children will be asked to use the toilet before they leave school.

Food hygiene

When handling food, hands must be washed and/ or cleaned using antibacterial wipes or hand gel. Food should be stored at the appropriate temperature before the session and transported to Forest School in a hygienic container. Children's hands should be cleaned with water, wipes and/or hand gel before handling and eating.

Food containers should be taken back to be cleaned/ disposed of appropriately and no litter should be left as we always aim to leave the site as we find it.

The Forest school leader does hold a Level 2 Food Hygiene certificate.

Extreme weather

Forest school is an all weather experience and takes place across all seasons and weather conditions including rain and snow.

It is the responsibility of the Forest school leaders to check the weather forecast prior to the session, in order to keep children safe.

If there are strong winds or thunderstorms the session may be cancelled if the leader or senior management believe there to be unacceptable risk due to exposure.

Equal Opportunities

Forest School strives to maintain equal opportunities for all. The Forest School leader will aim to make the sessions as inclusive as possible to any children with behavioural difficulties, learning disabilities or additional needs. Ensuring activities meet the needs of each individual.

Complaints

(*same as school policy)

Tool use policy

The Forest School ethos is to build on skills in small steps, once the children and leaders have developed a trust and the children have shown they are ready, the leader will introduce more advanced skills such as tool use and fire with close supervision.

Tools available for use are:

Handsaw, secateurs, peeler, palm drill and Sheath Knife

- All tools are cleaned, maintained and stored securely by the Forest School leader.
- Prior to use, the Forest School leader will check the tools for any damage or instability and check for sharpness.
- Tools are stored in a locked shed.
- Tools are counted out and in to the locked box,
- Only the Forest School leader's tools can be used at Forest School.
- How to use all tools will be demonstrated on a small group basis and children will then be able to use the tools on a 1:1 ration with the Forest school leaders.
- Only the Forest School leader will decide if the age group/ individual child is ready for a particular tool.
- As part of the process for assessing competence children must be able to learn the 'tool- talks' before being considered capable of using any particular tool.

Fire Safety

Fire Circle Rules:

- We do not run around the Fire Circle.
- We walk around the outside of the Fire Circle to get to the other side.
- We only enter the inner Fire Circle when instructed by the Forest School Leader.

No loose clothing or loose hair in the Fire Circle.

Fire Safety Procedures:

During the Forest School process, a careful regard and respect of fire is reinforced with the children through a step by step process. Strict fire circle rules are enforced at all times. Only when trust has been developed between the leaders and children, a fire in the fire pit may be constructed for Forest School activities and campfire cooking.

Before fires are built, provision for putting out the fire is made with water buckets at hand. The Forest School leader will assess the site for floor debris to avoid fire spread. Fire is never left unattended and the Forest School leader will ensure it is out cold using plenty of water before leaving the area.

In very hot, 'tinder dry' conditions careful consideration needs to be given to the possibility of wind blowing embers and igniting other areas of the woodland. This needs to be assessed as part of the daily operating procedure as fires may not be possible in these circumstances. Fires will not be lit on very windy days.

Cancellation

Forest School will continue in most types of weather with the exception of high winds, thunder or severe cold. If in any doubt, the Forest School Leader will visit the site directly before the session to have up to date information of weather conditions at the time.

Essential equipment

First Aid Kit containing:

- disposable gloves
- wound dressing
- disposable ice packs
- triangular bandage
- hypoallergenic plasters
- hand gel
- antibacterial wipes
- an eye pad
- scissors
- adhesive medical tape
- face shield

Other essential equipment:

- Any necessary individual medication (inhalers etc)
- burns kit
- water

Environmental Policy

Our Forest School Motto is to;

- Take care of yourself,
- take care of each other and
- look after the environment

Every aspect of nature is fascinating. The more you learn about nature the more you learn to respect it. Through educating our learners about nature's wonders we aim to

instil a deep-rooted love and respect for the natural surroundings which in turn will lead to thoughtful conservation behaviour.

We will lead by example and aim to ensure that, where possible we use products that have a low impact on nature. By operating in a way that minimises waste, optimises recycling and promotes the re-use of materials we hope to demonstrate and encourage a wider respect for the environment. We will clear the site of any litter which could be harmful to wildlife and remove all food waste.

Risk assessment

The Toner Avenue complete risk assessments for all offsite activities. In addition to this, risk assessments for specific Forest School sites and activities are undertaken.

Risk assessments are continually reviewed and the Forest School leader will carry the daily operating procedure.

Location:school made forest site (back of field)				Name: Sarah Forster		Date: 12.01.2026		
Description: The purpose built area is at the back of the school field, it lies in an L shape with an uneven surface. There is a large raised hump on one side. The back of the site is lined with large brambles and a few fruit trees. We have three large trees within sight. The area is cordoned off with with a fence and gate at either side.								
Hazard		Harm	People at risk	Probability (1-5)p	Severity (1-5)s	Rating (1-25)p x s	Existing measures	Who to action and when
Site and environment	Wind and rain	Exposure to hypothermia	all	2	2	4	All groups advised to wear appropriate clothing	Leaders aware of daily weather report before session
	Uneven ground/Wet terrain	Trips, slips, twists, strains	all	3	3	9	Ensure all children are aware of slippery sections, small path into main area	Advise awareness at start and care with walking
	Inappropriate footwear/ clothing	Slip, trip, increased risk of cuts and grazes	all	2	2	4	A list of required clothing and footwear issued before the session. School spares available	Change of area or activity if inadequately dressed
	Nettles/ Brambles	stings/ scratches	all	2	2	4	Removal of large areas of nettles and brambles if/when needed. Children made aware of risk and reminded about correct clothing	Forest school leader
	Poisonous plants and fungi	Poisoning , allergy, anaphylaxis	all	1	5	5	All groups were made aware.	Raise awareness not to touch.
	Insects	bites/ stings	all	2	2	4	Check allergies and ensure any	Advise of any that may cause

							medication needed	hal
	Injuries from sticks	Cuts, scratches, piercings	all	3	2	6	Demonstrate correct carrying method of large sticks.	Ensure all dangerous sticks removed
	splinters	Impact, injury	all	1	2	2	Gloves available for tool and woodwork, first aid and warm water available	Demonstrations given, staff supervision
Activity	Tree climbing(see own risk assessment)	Bump, injury	all	2	4	8	Supervision in place, safety demonstration	Activity closed when weather is bad
	Falling from play equipment	Impact, pierce, injury	all	2	3	6	Slack line and swing rules pointed out	Ensure adult in the area at all times
Child	SEN/Behaviour/Learning difficulties	Increased likelihood of other risks occurring or unpredictable behaviour	all	2	3	6	Separate plans for individual children, increased staff ratio	Management to be informed of ongoing issues

Tools, Tree Climbing, Rope Use, Den Building have their own risk assessments attached

Activity Risk / Benefit Analysis

A c t i v i t y	I	L	R i s k	Control Measures	I	L	R i s k	Benefits	Decision
F i r e L i g h t i n g	3	3	9	Adult supervision at all times Children; enter fire circle by entrance walk 1 way round the back of seats stay seated, may change position by stepping back over seat and walking behind seats invited to fire by name can escape smoke behind seats use respect position (one knee) 1m radius exclusion zone (flour) Water bucket available First Aid kit with burns dressing Fire gloves Fire blanket and extinguisher Keep fire small	3	1	3	Sense of community Sense of belonging Achievement Friendship Warmth Cook something Resilience Learn to turn take/share Social development Emotional intelligence	Yes

Acti vity	I	L	Risk	Control Measures	I	L	R i s k	Benefits	Decision
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Tree Climbing	3	3	9	Adult spotter 1:1 supervision Tree check by tree surgeon every 6 months Daily check of tree by teacher Other children supervised by competent helper doing low risk activity Child to climb to agreed height of 2m Child's ability to follow instructions proven Check child's footwear has good grip Avoid during wet weather Avoid tree with slippery lichen	2	2	4	Confidence Self esteem Physical benefits; Strengthening Balance Coordination Gross motor develop Independence	Yes
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Activity	I	L	Risk	Control Measures	I	L	Risk	Benefits	Decision
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Activity	I	L	Risk	Control Measures	I	L	Risk	Benefits	Decision
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Tool Use	3	3	9	Adult supervision at all times High staff:child ratio Leader to monitor learner mood No knives to be used if participants are argumentative with one another or staff. Tools kept in locked tool box Tool talk to instruct learner on how to use including how to unsheath the knife Tool talk available in Handbook Learner kneels with knees together No one to enter blood bubble Work to the side and away from the body. Right handed on Right side and left handed to the left side Wear a glove on the non-tool hand Knife sheathed and left on chopping block at end of use , no walking around with knife Returned to locked tool box at end of session/use Tools maintained & kept sharp and used for intended purpose	3	1	3	Achievement Creativity Fine motor skills Sense of pride Resilience Learn to turn take Building trust	Yes
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The Forest School leader will complete a daily risk assessment before each Forest School session. Factors such as the weather conditions, and changes to the Forest School site such as fallen branches, litter etc. are considered and risk controls are put in place to minimise risks. If the session involves the use of tools, the Forest School leader will check the tools for safety before the session. Safety checks include checking the blades are sharp and sharpening or replacing if necessary, checking there is no damage to the tool or handles, visually and manually by flexing the tool.

If there are any changes to any risks, the appropriate controls are put in place and the risk assessments are reviewed and amended.

The Forest School leader will lead the session, ensure the group are safe and happy, and observe the children's interests and learning styles. The Forest School leader and teaching staff will reflect and evaluate the session to aid planning for the next sessions with the help of support staff.

After the session, the Forest School leader or deputy leader will carry out cleaning and maintenance of tools, using oily rags, sharpening or replacing if necessary and storing away safely.

Forest School Communication Strategy

Groups to communicate with	what information is required	when	how
students	what to expect, What to wear, When it will take place	prior to session, weekly reminder	verbally
parents	what Forest school is about, Where and when they will be doing it, What they will need to wear/bring	prior to sessions, Weekly reminder	initial letter, Dojo post,
Head teacher and senior leadership team	benefits of Forest school, Where it will happen, The Forest school hand book, Termly programme Risk assessment (evolve off site risk assessment),	beginning of the term, Updated if pupils leave or new ones join	Face to face meeting, Email follow ups

I can confirm that all staff have read the Handbook prior to the Forest School sessions beginning.
Signed S Forster

