

## Curriculum Statement

### Forest School

*Hooked on Thinking*

Working With and For Local Families



#### **Intent – Forest School at Hindhayes**

Recent research used to inform practice: **A number of research studies have been conducted relating to the effect of the natural environment on children’s resilience, confidence and wellbeing.** In a research study examining the behaviour of children, Hinkley, Crawford, Salmon, Okely and Hesketh found that children always seek physical challenges in their play, an observation attributed to the children’s need for extending their physical abilities and their independence. This observation is also linked to the children’s inclination to taking risks and eagerness to learn on how to deal with various hazards, which are understood to be important life skills.

Children and young people are stimulated by the outdoors and typically experience, over time, an increase in their self belief, confidence, learning capacity, enthusiasm, communication and problem-solving skills and emotional well-being. Children are physically active a lot of the time and their stamina improves as they go through their Forest School sessions. Their experience can also help to lead to the development of healthier lifestyles as children ask parents to take them on trips to woodlands and green spaces outside of school times. As the children gain confidence and improve their self-esteem this can impact on their emotional and mental well-being. (Research from Forest School Association)

#### **Developing Forest School at Hindhayes:**

Forest Schools is an innovative approach to education based on outdoor play which aims to enrich children’s learning through motivation, risk taking and team work. Children experience an environment that is totally different from the classroom, with freedom to take risk and explore in a natural landscape with adult support. We encourage personal skills such as communication, as well as develop physical and emotional wellbeing. Students to gain an understanding of the natural environment whilst developing the Forest School ethos, namely, development of self esteem, confidence and social skills.

#### **Implementation**

All children in YR and Year 1 attend Forest School once every 2 weeks, regardless of the weather. In order to comply with the principles of Forest School it is important to go all through the year to experience the changing seasons. We began taking year 2 children to Forest School after Covid lockdowns in order to give them the opportunity to catch up on missed y1 sessions and also to support their journey through the school, as well as offering outdoor opportunity to children who may not have access to the outdoors in their home life. Whenever possible Year 2 children now attended Forest school for half a term at a time although this is reliant on the availability of staff.

Children participate in a wide variety of activities, including nature study, creative art using natural materials, responding to stories, and using tools such as bow saws and sheath knives. All activities are done in small groups in order that the children have more adult interaction than they would have in the classroom, again to comply with the principles of Forest School:

**Principle 1: Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.**

**Principle 2: Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.**

**Principle 3: Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners**

**Principle 4: Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.**

**Principle 5. Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.**

**Principle 6. Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning**

#### **Developing Cultural Capital**

Children are given regular opportunity to develop a relationship between themselves and the natural world. Here they foster resilience, confidence, independence, creativity and problem solving through activities which offer the children the opportunity to take managed risks appropriate to the environment and themselves. The children often concentrate for prolonged periods and become fascinated by things they discover, leading to enhanced knowledge. Children are able to access tools such as bowsaws, secateurs and sheath knives, and work safely and creatively. The Forest School leaders model skills and techniques and enhance with appropriate language and vocabulary. Exceptional levels of engagement and concentration are regularly observed; accompanied with persistence and perseverance. Through being empowered to

#### **Impact**

Through our program of regular attendance at Forest School the first thing we see is a growth in children’s confidence to try new things, as well an extension in their vocabulary as make discoveries. They also see their ideas being valued as session planning allows for their interests and curiosity to be expanded and discussed. This in turn improves their ability to try new things in the classroom and extends their executive function as decision makers. They are able to make their own risk assessments (is that a good branch to climb on? Do I feel safe carrying this log?) and begin to solve their own problems with gentle encouragement from adults, as well as helping each other with the many chosen tasks and activities.

