

Oxford Primary Forest School



Explore, Discover, Fly High



A Parent's Guide to Forest School

What is Forest School?

'THE BEST KIND OF CLASSROOM'

**'This is the best kind of classroom,
No walls, just sky and trees,
This is the best kind of classroom,
No radiators, just a gentle breeze.
This is the best kind of classroom,
It's a journey through time and space,
From the smallest seed to the largest tree,
This is a forest and a learning place.
This is the best kind of classroom,
Where seasons don't happen in books.
Where learning is watching and thinking and talking,
And everyone notices, everyone looks.'**

Ian MacMillan

Forest School is not a conventional school. In the forest there are no levels, tests or pressures. There is only the personal growth of each individual child. Forest School's aim is to provide the children with a number of experiences that will give them new skills, bring them closer to nature and help them understand themselves.

Children will immerse themselves in high quality, outdoor activities that have a lasting impact on the way they approach learning. Risk-taking, problem-solving and collaboration are all part of the philosophy that supports the Forest School approach. It also allows practitioners to step back and observe the children in order to then encourage and inspire individuals to achieve through careful scaffolding and facilitating.



The Scout Area

Where does Otford Primary Forest School take place?

The area that we use for our Forest School sessions is the Scout Area and the Chalk Pit, to the east of Otford Station. Sometimes we will stay in the Scout Area for a whole session; sometimes we will go to the Chalk Pit for some or all of a session.

Both areas will feel quite different to the areas where the children usually play and learn and together offer a secure and nature-rich environment for the children to explore.

The Scout Area is fenced and has a grassy area and small area of woodland. We will also have access to the hut which has toileting facilities. The Chalk Pit is public land with a large, grassy clearing surrounded by woodland which is home to a wide range of animal life as well as a variety of trees and other plant life.

We are conscious of the risks associated with the Site and have conducted risk / benefit assessments which will be continually updated as appropriate.

Who will be staffing the Forest School?

Mr Grobel is one of our teachers who has been trained in Forest School delivery. Each session will also be supported by a TA.

What benefits will my child get from participating in Forest School?

Forest School supports the holistic development of the child:

- **Health and fitness:** being active in an outdoor, natural environment.
- **Increased emotional wellbeing:** increased confidence through child-led, achievable activities; the positive 'nature effect' of just being outdoors among trees.
- **Social development:** communicating, sharing, negotiating and problem-solving.
- **Skills development:** developing fine and gross motor skills, coordination and some useful practical skills.
- **Gaining knowledge and understanding:** multi-sensory, real-life learning; learning to care for our green spaces and wildlife.
- **Individualised learning:** careful observation allows adults to tailor support to children's own interests and stage of development.
- **Curriculum Links:** Forest School supports many areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum, National Curriculum and the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.



The Chalk Pit

When will Forest School be taking place?

The sessions will take place on Thursday and Friday afternoons. Each class will be taken out once a week for 6 weeks.

How should the children be dressed?

- The woodland floor is often muddy, uneven and slippery so suitable footwear, with tread, is essential (wellington boots are fine)
- Sessions take place in **nearly all weather conditions** so suitable clothing should be worn for the time of year: for example, in **hot weather** – a sunhat; in **wet and cold weather** – a warm and waterproof coat, waterproof trousers, extra layers, a hat and gloves
- Long sleeves and trousers all year round to protect from stings, scratches, ticks etc.
- It is highly likely that your child will get dirty so please provide them with clothes you do not mind getting dirty or damaged

How can I help?

- Make sure your child has the right clothing for the weather
- Listen to what your child is learning and feedback to us if you would like
- Volunteer (but please note it won't be at your own child's session)

Health and safety

The health and safety of all participants is central to everything undertaken within a Forest School programme. Mr Grobel is fully trained in risk assessment and paediatric first aid. The Forest School operates under the school's Health and Safety policy as well as policies regarding safeguarding and confidentiality. Alongside this the following are in place:

- a seasonal and daily risk assessed site;
- risk assessments for activities;
- informed adult helpers;
- first aid and emergency equipment.

Some of the activities the children may participate in are 'higher-risk activities' (such as campfire cooking or tool use). However, these activities are not available to the children until certain behaviours and boundaries are established. Children are encouraged and supported in recognising and managing risk for themselves, through real life situations and experiences.

What sort of activities will go on at Forest School?

The first sessions will focus on core skills and safety. Other activities may include:

- Games
- Storytelling
- Natural art activities
- Use of tools (if skills and behaviour indicators secured)
- Exploring, nature-watching and bug-hunting
- Climbing, rolling
- Practical woodland skills (eg. willow weaving)
- Building dens
- Time to be quiet, reflect or talk

As children grow in confidence, they will be encouraged to set their own projects, applying skills they have already acquired and experimenting with new ones, under appropriate supervision.

