



Foresteers Outdoor Preschool

Learning and Development Policy

Reviewed January 2026

Reviewed by Hayley Smith -Preschool Manager

Introduction

- We believe that children should be given the time, space and environment to explore, investigate, experiment, set their own challenges, play, learn and develop.
- We have high expectations of our children and believe they are capable of high-level problem solving, assessing risk, creating and imagining their own challenges and objectives and developing resilience and persistence through their learning.
- We believe that if children set their own challenges and direct their own learning they will be more motivated and engaged and their self-esteem will flourish.
- We believe children should be listened to and spoken to with respect, in a way that values their opinions, understanding and feelings.
- We believe that children are individuals and should be given the opportunity to learn at their own pace.
- We believe children should learn how to play and work collaboratively with each other and how to be strong independent individuals.
- We strive to develop an understanding and respect of the natural environment in all our children.

How our approach achieves this

At Foresteers Outdoor Preschool, our learning and development is guided by Forest School pedagogy, which places the child at the centre of their learning through regular, meaningful experiences in the natural environment. Quality Forest School play in the early years is characterised by rich, child-led exploration where children are deeply engaged, curious, and motivated to learn through first-hand experiences. Children are given time and space to investigate, create, problem-solve, take appropriate risks, and revisit ideas, supported by skilled practitioners who observe, scaffold learning, and extend thinking sensitively. This approach drives our delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), as children naturally develop across all seven areas of learning through active play, collaboration, communication, and reflection, building confidence, resilience, independence, and a strong connection with the natural world.

Adult-led and child-led activity

At Foresteers Outdoor Preschool much of the learning is child-led, with sensitive interactions from our skilled practitioners supporting the children in setting and working towards their own goals. The daily routine at Foresteers Outdoor Preschool is structured so that the children are interrupted as little as possible. In this way we give children the time needed to invest in developing their own ideas and achieving their own aims. As well as developing their ability to think critically and creatively, this leads to greater self-esteem, confidence and motivation to learn.

We also provide adult-led learning opportunities; these are carefully planned to meet the children's individual needs, develop skills and follow interests. We aim as much as possible to develop skills that the children can go on to use independently when setting and solving their own challenges. We encourage all children to participate in adult-led activities and ensure that all children take part in a range of activities during their time at Foresteers Outdoor Preschool. However, the children are not obliged to take part in every adult-led activity we plan. We believe that children who learn in this way develop key skills that will enable them to succeed at school and beyond.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

We follow the EYFS, which is the Government's statutory framework that sets the standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. In terms of learning and development, the EYFS has two main strands – the first concerns the children's learning, defined as prime and specific areas. The second strand concerns *how* children learn, and is defined as the characteristics of effective learning.

The Seven Areas of Learning and Development

All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected. The first three are defined as the prime areas - they are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning and for building the capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive. At Foresteers Outdoor Preschool we focus on these three areas in the child's first term with us (although many of the areas overlap providing lots of opportunities for cross-curricular links).

➤ Personal, social and emotional development (PSED):

We recognise that children need to be happy and relaxed at the setting before they can learn. Children find the natural environment less stressful as there is more space and it is quiet and calm. We help them develop a positive sense of themselves and others; form positive relationships; develop respect and understanding for others; celebrate diversity; develop social skills; learn how to manage their feelings; understand appropriate behaviour in groups (see Positive Behaviour policy) and to have confidence in their own abilities.

➤ Physical Development (PD):

This happens naturally and to a very high level at our preschool where we provide opportunities for children to be active and interactive and to develop their coordination, control and movement. Our children spend much of the day running, climbing trees and hills, rolling down hills, balancing, digging, carrying... We also provide plenty of opportunities to develop fine motor control development by tying knots, threading, using tools, mark making, moulding clay, etc. Children must also be helped to understand the importance of physical activity and make healthy choices in relation to food. We support this by teaching the importance of exercise, healthy diet and ways to keep healthy and safe.

➤ Communication and Language (CL):

Language development in the Early Years is fundamental. It underpins learning in all other areas and is crucial to the development of Characteristics of Effective Learning. At Foresteers Outdoor Preschool we have created a provision which gives children the very best opportunity for language development. Our high staff ratios and calm,

low-noise environment mean that children can hear and be heard more easily, providing the best environment to develop their listening and attention, and speaking. This, coupled with the high degree of child-initiated, creative activity, means that they develop their ability to hold proper conversations and use language to help them achieve their own aims. Our practitioners understand the importance of proper conversations and selective questioning to stretch the children and develop their understanding and language skills, to encourage critical thinking, and to provide a secure setting in which they are valued.

The Framework defines four specific areas of learning and development through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied.

➤ Literacy which is split into *Reading* and *Writing*:

- Reading is developed through telling, re-enacting and sharing stories every day. Hearing stories and learning how stories are structured is one of the best ways to support the children to learn to read themselves.
- The wood is the perfect place to develop early writing skills as it is a blank canvas for mark making (the first stage of writing) - on the ground, on the bark of a tree or even on a large leaf. Sticks, clay, mud and water are perfect writing materials and the children are presented with many opportunities to use them, with support and guidance from our practitioners.
- We develop the children's phonic knowledge and understanding through songs and games, encouraging children to link sounds and letters and to begin to read and write.

➤ Mathematics: which is split into *Numbers* and *Shape, Space and Measures*:

- Concrete, real examples of size, quantity and shape are the best way to give children a good grasp of mathematics. At Foresteers Outdoor Preschool we develop mathematical understanding by encouraging the children to use practical maths and problem solving in their everyday activities.
- There are many opportunities for counting and early number work in our activities. We look closely at the shapes of trees and leaves and the pattern on bark and the children use them to identify the different trees in the wood. Outdoors, in the woods, the passing of time throughout the day and the changing of seasons are very evident. We encourage the children to notice the signs of change and they develop a good understanding of time and seasons.

➤ Understanding the World:

At Foresteers Outdoor Preschool we learn first-hand about the natural world around us: animals, plants, the weather, the water cycle, evaporation, shadows, forces etc. We guide the children to make sense of their physical world and their community through opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment.

We incorporate technology into our learning where appropriate through the use of a preschool iPad which the children can use to extend their learning. However, technology does not only relate to digital devices - we use other forms of technology that the children may not have access to at home such as real tools (saws and hand drills), pulleys and binoculars. Use of this type of technology is excellent in developing the children's Characteristics of Effective Learning – the unusual and exciting nature of the tools, and the fact that they can be tricky to master, means that success has a positive effect on self-esteem, confidence and resilience. The technical skills they acquire and the results they can produce lend themselves well to being applied in the children's own creative and problem-solving activities for example, using a saw to make a stick the right length.

➤ Expressive Arts and Design;

We believe that the natural environment is the very best place for children to express themselves artistically. Because of our wealth of open-ended resources, the children are not only free to be creative and use their imaginations, they are required to do so. Choosing to not provide closed resources and toys that usually have specific purposes means that the children must create with what they have and decide the purpose for the material or object they select. In role play, for example, a fallen tree in our camp can be a spaceship, a builder's yard, a pirate ship, a factory, different shops and restaurants with leaves as money or tickets, and many other things which the children decide for themselves. Visual art and design is also much more creative, as the children use found and selected objects and materials to create works of art in the woods. Sometimes this is adult-led, for example clay modelling of tree spirits or making journey sticks, but more often it is child initiated and truly creative with the children starting with sticks, mud, leaves, stones, string etc. This in turn encourages the design and planning aspects, as the children work out how to achieve a particular result without pens or brushes.

The Characteristics of Effective Learning

At Foresteers Outdoor Preschool we believe the development of these fundamental Characteristics of Effective Learning brings huge benefits in terms of how the children feel about themselves and how they continue to learn and develop in the future, and will ensure that they are ready for school and beyond. The Framework outlines three *characteristics of effective teaching and learning* which must be reflected on through the practitioners planning and guidance.

➤ Playing and Exploring - Engagement

Children learn through finding out and exploring, playing with what they know and being willing to 'have a go'. Activities, relationships and the environment at the preschool encourage children to explore, using a variety of resources, carefully providing support when it is needed. Staff use the children's experiences at preschool to enhance development providing suitable learning opportunities to support and engage children through their interests.

➤ Active Learning - Motivation

The opportunities planned at the preschool provide stimulation to the children who choose to investigate them through support from staff. Children become motivated by being involved and concentrating, keep trying and enjoying and achieving what they set out to do. Through praise, recognition and interaction staff help children become aware of their own goals, learning together and from each other. The environment is

regularly reappraised, reflecting on resources, their purpose and the children's choices.

➤ Creating and Thinking Critically – Thinking

Thinking is a natural process all individuals experience and supports decision making. Children are encouraged to have their own ideas and express them openly within the preschool. Staff encourage children through interaction and discussions to make links with their environment, use different forms of communication and explore all available resources. Activities provide opportunity to plan, consider ideas and for feedback to be given by both adults and children.

We encourage children's independence, allow them to lead their own learning and make their own decisions as far as possible, and give them an environment full of open ended natural resources and the time and space to make the most of them. The children are used to solving problems, finding new ways to do things, being resilient when things don't go to plan the first time, and assessing their own risks. These are things that they do all the time, every time they come to the preschool.

Planning

- We follow the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, underpinned by the Forest school pedagogy to ensure we provide a curriculum which promotes teaching and learning, ensures children are "school ready" and gives children a broad range of knowledge, skills and experiences; providing the right foundation for good future progress through school and life.
- We view all aspects of learning and development as equally important and ensure a flexible approach is maintained which responds quickly to children's learning and development needs. This is achieved through a balance of adult led and child-initiated opportunities within the outdoor environment.
- We acknowledge that children learn in different ways and at different rates and plan for this accordingly through both child and adult led activities, this ensures all children make good progress and no child gets left behind.
- Learning and development opportunities are planned based on an individual child's needs and interests and are regularly reviewed and assessed through informal observation and discussion, which in turn, informs future planning and next steps for individual children, groups of children and the preschool as a whole.
- We recognise the importance of working in partnership with parents/carers as they are, after all, the children's first and most enduring educators. When parents/carers and practitioners work together in early year's settings, the results have a positive impact on children's learning and development.
- We provide an online individual learning journal for each child, evidencing their abilities and progress, matching this to the curriculum and identifying next steps of learning. This is always accessible to parents/carers who are also encouraged to contribute thus providing the "bigger picture" of learning.

Support for children

Staff use observations, assessments and partnerships with parents to identify areas where a child may require additional support for their learning. Hayley Smith is the named Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) for the preschool and works closely with staff and families to support them through the processes. The following strategies are used to support staff in early identification of children needing additional support: formative and summative assessments, regular drop in sessions for staff and parents to share concerns and information, identifying next steps in learning, tracking development, observations and interactions with children, multi-agency working and sign posting parents to other services who may be able to offer guidance and additional support.

Monitoring and reviewing the Curriculum at Foresteers Outdoor Preschool:

Foresteers Outdoor Preschool values the importance of reflective practice and the benefits this can have on the children's learning and development as well as enhancing the provision at the preschool. The following practices support this: staff meetings, feedback from staff, parents and children, sharing information freely with the whole staff team, supervisor meetings, reviewing regularly both local and central changes in policies regarding the Early Years sector, meeting with other childcare professionals to share ideas of good practice.

The preschool community

We support children to work and play co-operatively and develop an empathy for others. We encourage the children to participate in reflection time at the end of each day, to talk about what they have enjoyed and what they would like to do next time. We encourage a sense of community through group activities, and a respect for all children and adults in the preschool.

In summary

Our aim is that all children who have been to Foresteers Outdoor Preschool leave as confident and resilient children who are creative and imaginative problem solvers, high-level thinkers and talkers, who show a respect of the natural environment, and who are motivated to learn and ready for their next adventure.

**This policy was adopted
on**

1st January 2026

**Signed on behalf of the
preschool**

Hayley Smith

Date for review

December 2026