What is Forest School?

According to the Forest School Association, Forest School is "*an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem, through hands on learning experiences in a local woodland or natural environment with trees.*"

Forest School is a child-centered way of learning that aims to nurture children's physical, emotional and spiritual well-being and support their emotional and social development through various activities, experiences, play, exploration, crafts, and the learning and applying outdoor skills, all tailored to each child by themselves and the Forest School leaders.

Children will be encouraged to take and manage acceptable risk in activities that will help them to develop problem solving and personal responsibility in a safe, positive and supportive environment. Children will have the opportunity to develop skills and activities that interest them and to apply their skills and knowledge in meaningful ways over time while developing a positive relationship with the outdoor environment during this uncertain time when this has never been more important.

In Forest School, the nature of the activities will develop according to the interests and abilities of each child, creating achievable challenges in directions each child chooses to explore when they are at a stage when it is safe for them to do so. The kind of activities and experiences that your children may encounter in Forest School include:

- **Willow weaving**
- **Shelter building**
- **Green wood crafts**
- **Knot tying**
- **Mud play**
- **Whittling**
- **Climbing**
- **Use a variety of saws and other tools**
- **Planting and plant care**
- **Toy making**
- **Nordic weaving**
- **Fire lighting**
- **Tree identification**
- **Forest art**
- **Cooking over a fire**

Some of these things will take time and be things that we build up to but we also expect the children to go way beyond this list and even find activities and experiences that we have not thought of yet.

March Wood

Over the past months, we have been transforming the far end of our playing field into a fantastic woodland space for Forest School and other outdoor learning throughout the school, which we have named **March Wood**.

We have planted some semi-mature trees to kick-start our woodland, 420 broadleaf hardwood saplings and literally thousands of willows in the form of living willow domes and tunnels, living willow fences and plenty of willow thickets. This Autumn we will be planting another 315 broadleaf saplings on the South East side of March Wood and will be continuing the willow planting using cuttings from this year's massive growth since March.

In addition to the wonderful, seasonal willow domes (they will burst into leaf again next Spring), we have a secure Forest School resource store with a wood store attached, a fantastic, rustic sweet chestnut roundhouse with a firepit as our Forest School base and outside classroom, and a series of outdoor activity and craft areas such as the large geodesic dome (which will be covered in foliage in just a year or two). We even had a composting toilet built over the summer so we can stay in nature when nature calls.

March Wood is looking amazing. It has been an incredible transformation in such a short time and it is wonderful to see it changing day by day. We see more and more

birds coming to visit, all manner of insects and if you blink you are sure to miss something.

March Wood is still just a baby woodland and we are really looking forward to your children experiencing its moment by moment, month by month and year by year journey with us, to become a dense and beautiful legacy woodland for the whole school to enjoy.

Staying warm and dry

Forest School is not just for Summer and sunny days. Forest School is an all year round experience including getting close up and personal with Britain's variable weather and changing seasons. As long as it is safe to be outside in the woods, we will be there!

"***There's no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing.***"

- Alfred Wainwright, A Coast to Coast Walk

It is important that your children stay safe and healthy and a part of that is that they remain warm and dry even on the wettest days or in chilly winds. When your children are taking part in Forest School sessions (which you will be told about in advance) children are invited to wear home clothes to school for the day that are appropriate to the weather and being outside in nature.

There will be information on places to buy suitable wet weather gear at the end of this section.

Footwear

Wellington boots are a **must** when the ground is wet, and remember it does not have to be raining for the ground to be wet on the playing field or in March Wood. Almost any Autumn or Winter day will see the long grass thick with dew and feet will get wet very quickly.

Wellington boots do **not** keep feet warm so thick warm socks are essential on chilly days. Having cold feet is miserable so please make sure your child has suitable socks for half a day outside whatever the weather.

When the ground will be dry, children will still need strong, sensible shoes for running around and moving about on uneven surfaces. In dry conditions these are better than wellies.

Waterproof top layer

Whenever there is any risk of rain on Forest School session days, your children will need to have a good waterproof (and preferably breathable) jacket **and** trousers. As you know, when we get wet in cold weather, we quickly get a chill and your children's safety comes first in Forest School sessions.

Waterproof trousers

Although a waterproof jacket is the most obvious thing to get, we have found that waterproof trousers are even more important and get more use. Children need to be able to sit, and kneel wherever their Forest School journey takes them and in autumn, winter and spring this is always going to involve getting wet knees, legs and bottoms.

Gloves

In the cold weather, a pair of warm gloves is really important but best of all is a pair of waterproof gloves. Wool gloves are lovely until they get wet, which they will at Forest School, and then they just keep your fingers cold. Keeping hands active in waterproof gloves is the most suitable for keeping warm on wet winter days as anyone who ever had hours of snowball fights knows.

Outdoor clothing suitable for the weather

Suitable clothing to be outdoors in the woods, playing and exploring are clothes such as long trousers and long sleeves tops that will give some protection from insects, scrapes, sun and wind. Clothing needs to be chosen according to the expected weather but we would always recommend long sleeves and remember that this is an outdoor learning adventure and not a fashion parade. Avoid dressing your children in their, or your, favourite clothes.

On hot, sunny days of course, children will need a different kind of protection such as a sun hat. You know how to dress your children but please help us to keep your children safe in Forest School by being aware of the days when they have Forest School sessions and sending them to school ready for the great outdoors.

Where to get your children's wet weather gear

The school is not able to recommend any particular brand or suppliers but will let you know what we buy and list a few suitable suppliers here to help you decide what is best for you to get for your child. Our own limited supply of Forest School clothing comes recommended by Haringey's outdoor centre, Pendarren House, in Wales, and is from a shop called Up & Under.

Wellies are always waterproof and are widely available. Just make sure your child comes to school with thick, warm socks, even if they are going to be wearing school wellington boots. The wellies that we have in school are Dunlop Dull Junior wellies which do the job they are supposed to do just fine.

The waterproof tops and trousers that we were recommended are made especially for outdoor centres so they are hard wearing, completely waterproof and good value. The cagoule jackets are Centre Cag Junior 2 and the trousers are Centre Overtrouser Junior 2. Unfortunately their website does not currently have images of these items but they are the red trousers and jacket shown in the above picture.

These jackets and trousers are branded specifically to Up & Under but similar clothes are available from other retailers, some of whom are specifically marketed towards Forest School, including:

- Muddy Puddles
- Muddy Faces
- Little Trekkers
- Forest School Shop
- Waterproof World

This is not an exhaustive list so please feel free to look at other suppliers.

In our experience, having a separate jacket and trousers means much more flexibility than an all-in-one rainsuit.
Children get hot when they run around so it is useful to take your jacket off but keep the waterproof trousers on when it is wet on the ground, or wear just a jacket in light rain. It is also strongly recommended to have an uninsulated waterproof jacket separate warm layers