

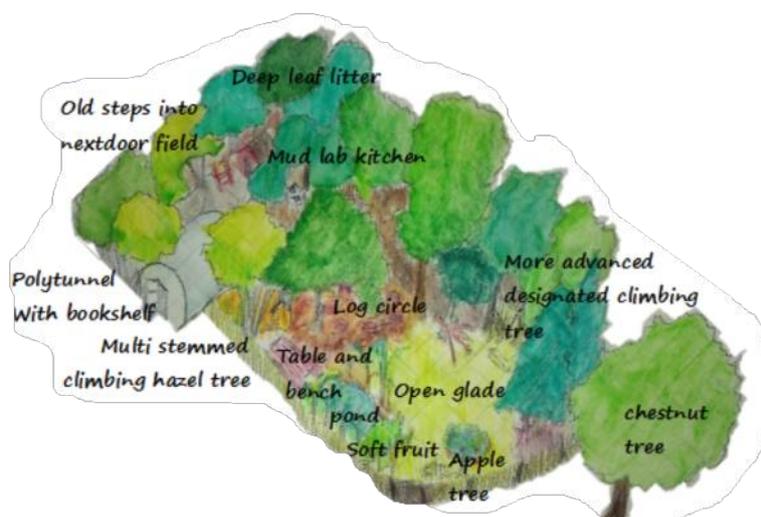
## Forest School and Outdoor learning at Harrowbarrow School



Recognising the importance of physical activity, Forest School or outdoor learning sessions at Harrowbarrow include lots of different types of physical activity and development opportunities. Below are excerpts from the Physical education Curriculum guidance for key stage 1 and 2 (in purple) with how they take place in Forest School at Harrowbarrow school.

*The national curriculum for physical education aims to ensure that all pupils:*

- *develop competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities*
- *are physically active for sustained periods of time*
- *engage in competitive sports and activities*
- *lead healthy, active lives*



Being in wooded outdoor environment, Forest School provides activities often require the children taking part to be continuously moving. Whether it is navigating a log and plank obstacle course they have created or sourcing ingredients for their mud plant concoction. Using hand tools, building structures, climbing trees, playing games or exploring.



*Master basic movements including running, jumping, throwing and catching, as well as developing balance, agility, co-ordination, begin to apply these in a range of activities and combining them.*

The Forest School area is stocked with lots of loose parts. Loose parts in the form of different sized sticks, logs, planks, a couple of tyres, stones and rocks of various sizes. These are moved around and used by the children throughout forest school and outdoor learning sessions for their play or activities.

*a broad range of physical activities and are physically active for sustained periods of time*



Carrying back large sticks and logs from the whole of the school play field back into the Forest School area. Often carried out by the children with lots of enthusiasm and therefore running to complete the task, working as a small team for larger objects.

Children are free to move as they feel they need to during forest school sessions. Including when we are talking together as a group; if they want to crouch, stand, perch or move a log for a better position they can.

*play competitive games, modified where appropriate and apply basic principles suitable for attacking and defending*



With the wealth of loose parts, activities and games such as the Woodland Olympics – where small groups of children use natural resources of different sizes to invent a sport or game.

*Pupils should develop fundamental movement skills, become increasingly competent and confident and access a broad range of opportunities to extend their agility, balance and coordination, individually and with others.*



Many other games are included in Forest School sessions, that help support children that may find competitive games difficult but encourage physical activity. Hungry little birds is a favourite, where lengths of coloured wool (worms) are placed all around the school play field, including in trees, where children have to collect certain colours. Problem solving and stretching their physical abilities to climb, balance and reach (safely).

*Take part in outdoor and adventurous activity challenges both individually and within a team*

*develop flexibility, strength, technique, control and balance*



Suitable trees are allocated as climbing trees, there are a number of children at Harrowbarrow School that feel they have not really had many opportunities to climb trees before. A multi stemmed Hazel within the Forest School area is perfect for beginners.

Learning to take on assess and manage risky activities, is an important part of Forest School and a really important for children to develop in a supportive environment. These risks may be:

- Physical, gross or fine motor – climbing, swinging or tool use.
- As well as risky socially and emotionally - making new friends, trying out new activities or games and voicing their ideas.

*compare their performances with previous ones and demonstrate improvement to achieve their personal best.*



Learning to reflect on different activities, including physical games, is a really important part of Forest School.

Encouraging experiential learning.

Exploring different ways of evaluating activities, including timing and measuring achievements.

Gaining practical skills and tool use is an important part of Forest School at Harrowbarrow. Building shelters with different sized materials, learning to use different hand tools and different knots.



Many of the activities have been led and included due to children's own interests. Children therefore are much more intrinsically motivated to complete tasks that may need to challenge themselves, physical hard work and effort.

The maintenance and the plan for improving the school ground's ecology and biodiversity is physically carried out by as many children as possible, including the children who take part in Forest School. This is currently includes digging to plant new trees, coppicing willow or hazel to build, maintain outdoor features, regularly protecting young saplings from rabbits digging and watering in drier months.

A number of children who attend Forest School Club do not take part in other current sport after school clubs offered. Some children can find the competitive aspect of some physical activities difficult, Forest School offers an alternative physical activity with a range of purposes. Whilst the children's confidence, self esteem, mental and physical well being are all supported and nurtured.

Physical activity of all different kinds takes place very naturally during the Forest School sessions. Any role play will take place with the children using the whole area. Moving from one end of Forest School area, navigating the many obstacles in the form of logs, trees, roots and balancing planks. A quick jump onto a log and swing on a branch is often part of their role play games.

All of these activities at Forest school require all sorts of physical movement and development. Encompassing gross motor skills, fine motor skills, hand eye coordination and team working skills. Often being a multi- sensory experience within a natural environment, including our proprioceptive and vestibular senses.

## **Research papers**

Different research papers looking into the benefits of Forest Schools in terms of physical activity and skills are able to state that participating in Forest School benefited:

*Physical skills – these improvements were characterised by the development of physical stamina, gross and fine motor skills.*

*For gross motor skill development the children use their entire body or several parts of their body at the same time. Improvements in this area might include a better range of movement, improved quality of movement or increasing muscle strength.*

*The role of Forest School in physical development has health implications and should not be overlooked. Forest School could be one of the effective ways in which schools that are part of the Healthy School Standard (a government initiative to promote pupils' emotional and physical well-being) could meet the requirements of the scheme in an interesting and innovative way.*

*(Dr Liz O'Brien, Forestry Commission 2005)*

Research funded by the Forestry Commission and the Central Scotland Forest Trust, carried out by Rebecca Lovell, University of Edinburgh, titled: Physical activity at Forest School sessions concluded:

*The physical activity during specific activities on both Forest School days and typical school days (the walks to the Forest School site, an active game played at Forest School, and the PE lesson and break times of the typical school day) were compared, and again it was shown that Forest School resulted in greater amounts of activity and at a greater intensity.*

*This research indicates that Forest School could contribute to the public health agenda as the physical activity was of sufficient duration and intensity to be of benefit to the participants' health and well being. Forest School may also represent a relatively novel way of introducing greater amounts of physical activity into the school day; the Forest School learning experiences are inherently active, this contrasts with the more traditional approach of discrete periods of learning and physical activity during the typical school day. This research has also highlighted the potential value of Forest School as an approach to reducing the inequality in levels of physical activity between boys and girls. Finally Forest School provided positive experiences, for both the boys and the girls, of physical activity in their local green spaces, places which were otherwise feared and little used. It is possible that these positive experiences in childhood may track through to adulthood and promote greater use of forests and woodlands as a context for physical activity (Ward Thompson, et al. 2008).*

Figure one: Average levels of activity on the normal, the PE and the Forest School days.

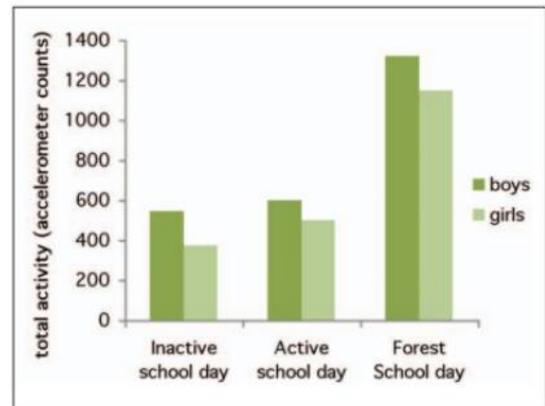
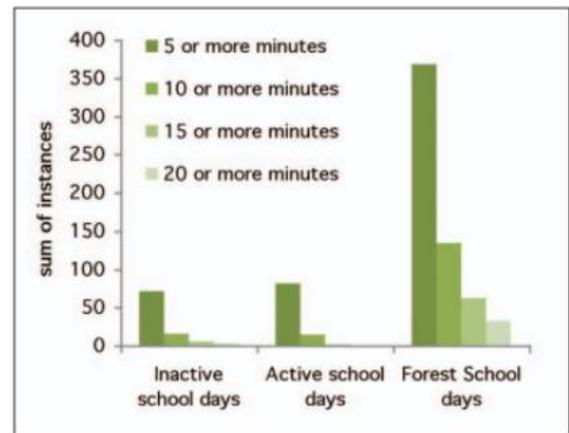


Figure two: Total number of bouts of sustained moderate and vigorous physical activity on the normal, the PE and the Forest School days.



[https://owlsotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Physical\\_Activity\\_at\\_Forest\\_School\\_Research.pdf](https://owlsotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Physical_Activity_at_Forest_School_Research.pdf)

So far, we have mainly looked at how Forest School and outdoor learning relates to Physical education. How Forest School can compliment children to have more opportunities to be physically active along side Physical education and sports in school.

Forest School is able to bring additional opportunities for physical activity that can relate to the Physical Education National Curriculum guidelines. As well as include links to other curriculum areas.