8.11 Forest School Policy

1. Introduction

Our Forest School provision aims to offer high-quality outdoor learning experiences for children aged 0 to 9 years. Through exploration, play, and supported risk-taking, children develop confidence, independence, resilience, and a connection to the natural world. Safety, supervision, and respect for the environment are central to our practice.

2. Aims of Forest School

- To provide child-led outdoor learning that promotes curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving.
- To encourage respect for nature, wildlife, and the outdoor environment.
- To provide opportunities for safe, supported risk-taking appropriate to children's ages and abilities.
- To build social, emotional and physical development through hands-on exploration.

3. Staffing and Ratios

- Forest School sessions are led by a trained Forest School Leader and experienced educators.
- Staff must be competent in outdoor safety, risk assessment, and child supervision.
- Ratios follow nursery safeguarding guidelines, with additional adults provided where needed depending on activities.

4. Fire Safety

- Fires are only lit under the supervision of the Forest School Leader.
- The fire pit must be positioned at least 1.5 metres away from any structure, seating, trees, shrubs, or flammable materials.
- A designated fire circle with clear entry and exit points will be used and checked and maintained.
- 2 water buckets and fire blanket must be available at all times.
- Children are taught safe behaviour around fire, including:

    - Walking around the outside of the fire circle
    - Sitting safely and not crossing the boundary line
    - Only approaching the fire with adult guidance
- No child will tend or add to the fire without direct adult supervision.

5. Knot Work/ropes

- Knot work is introduced gradually and age-appropriately.
- Only safe, simple knots (e.g., reef knot, figure of eight, lashing) are taught.
- Children learn to use rope and string safely and appropriately.
- All knot activities are supervised to ensure ropes are not wrapped around bodies, necks, or used in unsafe play.
- Ropes and tools are checked regularly for wear and replaced when necessary.

6. Woodwork

- Woodwork activities (e.g., hammering, whittling, sawing) are supervised at all times.
- Tools are age-appropriate and introduced through clear demonstration.
- A work area is set up with enough space for safe use of tools.
- Children wear appropriate protective equipment where needed (e.g., gloves).
- Only one child uses a tool at a time unless otherwise supported by staff.
- All tools are stored safely in a locked or inaccessible area outside of sessions.

7. Pond Safety

- The pond area is a supervised, no-running zone.
- Children may explore the pond edge only with an adult present.
- Pond dipping equipment is provided and shown how to be used safely.
- No child may kneel or lean directly over the water without supervision.

- Slippery edges are identified and risk assessed prior to sessions.

8. Bees, Insects, and Wildlife

- Bees, wasps, and insects are treated with respect as part of natural learning.
- Children are taught to stay calm around bees and to observe from a safe distance.
- Known allergies are risk assessed and relevant medication must be available during sessions.
- Staff monitor for nest activity and adjust the environment if necessary.
- Children are encouraged to understand the importance of bees and other pollinators in the ecosystem.

9. Boundaries and Site Safety

- Clear physical or visual boundaries are set before each session.
- Children are reminded of boundaries and expectations regularly.
- Regular site checks ensure hazards (e.g., fallen branches, slippery surfaces) are managed before children enter the area.
- Protective clothing is worn according to weather (waterproofs, hats, gloves, sun protection).

10. Risk Assessments

- Daily risk assessments take place before each session.
- Children are included in simple risk discussions to build understanding of safe behaviour outdoors.

11. Environmental Care

- Children learn to care for the Forest School area by:
    - Using materials responsibly
    - Understanding the impact of their actions
    - Taking part in conservation activities

- Activities are designed to be sustainable and respectful of the local ecosystem.

12. Cooking at Forest School

Cooking activities enrich children's outdoor learning experiences and help develop independence, food awareness, and life skills. All cooking sessions are carefully planned to ensure safety, hygiene, and inclusion.

- Any adult supporting cooking activities must hold up-to-date food hygiene training.
- Food is transported from the nursery kitchen in appropriate, sealed, and labelled containers to maintain freshness and safety.
- All food is prepared, cooked, and served on clean, suitable, and sanitised surfaces.
- Children handling food are supported to wash hands thoroughly before and after participation.
- Staff ensure safe use of utensils, heat sources, and cooking equipment, following tool and fire policies.
- All allergies, dietary needs, cultural requirements, and parental permissions are checked in advance and clearly communicated to all staff.
- Separate utensils, containers, or serving systems are used where needed to prevent cross-contamination.
- Leftover food is disposed of safely following nursery food safety procedures.

13. Inclusion

Forest School is inclusive and accessible to all children. Activities are adapted where needed so that every child can participate safely and meaningfully.

13. Review of Policy

This policy is reviewed annually or sooner if changes in practice, staff training, or new risks arise.

This policy was adopted by: Meadow Lane Children's Nursery

On: November 2025

Date to be reviewed: Annually

Signed on behalf of the provider: S.Covill

Name of signatory: Sophia Covill

Role of signatory (e.g. chair, director or owner) S.Covill, Owner/Manager