



# Local Area Risk Assessment LARA Forest Schools New Site

**See also: safeguarding policy; health and safety policy, curriculum policy**

Our vision is to provide students with the confidence, skills and ambition to achieve a successful and productive life. We aim to ensure they leave us with the opportunities and are able to become positive members of their communities. To do this, we have 3 principles that underpin our policies, practices and everything we do:

- Everyone can learn, achieve and has the potential to be successful
- Positive relationships are key to success and are underpinned by mutual trust, respect and caring for one another
- We have high expectations in everything we do

**W**onderful  
**E**xcellent  
**L**ovely  
**C**lever  
**O**utstanding  
**M**agnificent  
**E**nthusiastic

(Acronym created by White Trees pupils)

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## INTRODUCTION

A Forest School is a long-term outdoor education process that is holistic and learner led. It allows pupils to develop themselves through healthy engagement with risk, problem-solving and self-discovery, all within a natural environment in a hands-on and thoughtful manner. All forms of outdoor education are valuable, but Forest Schools have their own philosophies and ethos that benefit children in unique ways. At White Trees, Forest Schools is delivered through several regular sessions over an extended period of time – primarily weekly over the academic year, to incorporate different seasons.

The vision of Forest School is to enable each participant to have the opportunity to develop themselves in an inquisitive manner and have a positive relationship with the natural world. Forest School places an emphasis on self-reflection, which equips learners with emotional and social skills that can stay with them into adulthood and permeate into other areas of their life.

What makes our Forest School different to other forms of outdoor education – such as outward-bound days, general outdoor lessons, bushcraft workshops – is that we at White Trees adhere to six guiding principles which are agreed by the UK Forest School community.

### 1. Sessions are delivered on a long-term basis

Forest School sessions are supposed to be regular and over a long enough period – not just a few one-off workshops. At White Trees the pupils access forest schools at least once a week throughout the academic year. This length of time is required to allow for the establishment of boundaries to feel safe and secure, the development of trust, and the deeply rooted process of observation and self-reflection that is critical to all forest school sessions, for both practitioner and learner.

### 2. Sessions should be risk-aware, not risk-averse

Forest School has an emphasis on learning through play, where children have the freedom to try things out. Practitioners suggest playful, meaningful activities which nurture the instinctive human ability to learn through overcoming a risk, challenge or problem. Pupils are also be taught how to safely use tools like knives and axes for whittling or chopping wood, and how to light and safely be around campfires. However, risk in the context of Forest School is about more than just physical danger of using sharp tools or campfires – it also includes social and emotional risk; for example, through embracing something new or confronting the fear of looking silly.

### 3. Forest School is invested in holistic development of the participants

Holistic means 'whole' – at White Tress Forest Schools the focus is on enabling the development of the whole person. This includes:

- **Emotional development.** Periods of reflection are important parts of all forest school sessions and help pupils to expand their emotional vocabulary and understand how they feel (emotional intelligence).
- **Spiritual development.** This is not necessarily religious but refers to having a sense of belonging to the wider world, being part of something bigger than yourself, and your connection to nature.

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- **Intellectual development.** Knowledge is provided in context with situations as they arise and creates a thirst for learning.
- **Social development.** Consistent meetings with the same group of pupils means that social connection is gained through shared experiences and goals. Pupils are able to choose whether to work together or separately.
- **Physical development.** Both fine motor skills and gross motor skills are developed in the outdoor environment, as well as stamina and positive experiences in 'bad' weather.
- **Communication and language development.** Working together encourages communication and develops skilful expression of thoughts and ideas, as well as the ability to listen to others. Reflection activities increase a child's ability to understand and describe their internal state, wants, and needs.

At White Trees we aim to develop these aspects in a low-intervention manner rather than instructing the children to think or act in a certain way. The development is encouraged instead by measures such as raising interesting questions, being a role-model for behaviour, and allowing pupils to self-discover and self-regulate.

**4. Forest School should take place in a natural wooded environment where possible**

Embedded within Forest School is awareness and appreciation of the natural world. Our sessions are intended to take place in a natural environment, ideally with trees, enabling use and interaction with natural materials in activities. The outdoor environment is key to providing a different situation for pupils, where the space is contained but not constrained.

**5. Forest School should be run by qualified Forest School practitioners**

Facilitating the complex learning opportunities of Forest School and providing supported risk in the outdoor environment to a group of children is a difficult thing to do. Therefore, Forest School sessions need to be run by an appropriately trained individual.

The FSA states that practitioners should hold a properly endorsed Level 3 Forest School qualification, which equips them with the skills required to provide good quality sessions. These include practical skills, first-aid, teaching skills, risk-benefit analysis, how to perform site checks and environmental impact awareness. It also trains leaders in the fine art of balancing guidance and structured activities with the self-learning ethos of Forest School. Practitioners are also required to be very reflective themselves, to continually adapt and change with their group and learn from experience. At White Trees we have a qualified Forest Schools leader who has a qualified outdoor education teacher in support.

**6. Forest School is learner-centred with learner-based outcomes**

Learning at Forest Schools is primarily intended to be a co-operative process between the practitioner and the participants through a system of observation, reflection, and communication. This system enables the discovery and development of unique outcomes which are specific to each learner and may cover any part of the holistic development. One key message is that **progress in Forest School is process-based, not goal-based.**

**Why is it Beneficial for Children to Attend Forest School?**

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The benefits of Forest School are linked to the long-term, regular sessions, and echo the holistic development aims in the six guiding principles. Research has shown that children can benefit in a multitude of ways ranging from confidence to social, emotional, intellectual, physical and language development (Murray & O'Brien, 2005).

### **Case studies have shown children can:**

- Develop self-regulation skills.
- Cope with and learn from failure.
- Build resilience (the skill of coping with risk and failure).
- Gain a sense of achievement.
- Increase motivation and concentration.
- Improve problem solving.
- Expand their vocabulary and communication skills.
- Feel empowered and have new perspectives.
- Build positive relationships with adults and peers.
- Have overall improved wellbeing and mental health.

Forest School can increase a child's confidence and self-esteem through exploration, problem solving, and being encouraged to learn how to assess and take appropriate risks depending on their environment. The use of learner-led outcomes means information is retained better and also generally increases curiosity and motivation to learn in general. This motivation can have a positive impact on attitude to learning in school.

Previously 'quiet' children have been shown to improve in their confidence and communication to work with others, and children who were initially un-cooperative learnt that sharing and working together had positive consequences – and increasingly did this (Murray & O'Brien, 2005). Sessions with mixed ages or year groups can allow interactions between older and younger children that do not normally come into contact – allowing opportunities for children to learn from and teach each other.

Learners also gain a respect for nature through many small interactions and noticing changes around them through the seasons. Providing pupils with an opportunity to appreciate the wider, natural world encourages a responsibility for nature conservation in later life.

### **Forest School as Intervention.**

Forest School sessions can be successfully used as an intervention strategy for children and young people who are at risk or disadvantaged in social, behavioural, or economic ways. Research has shown that disadvantaged pupils who attended Forest School had increased academic attainment and attendance at school in comparison to those who did not attend the sessions (McCree, 2018). Taking a child outside of their normal setting and working on a long-term basis under the Forest School principals gives the child freedom to redefine themselves and try new things.

Additionally, increased communication skills can reduce friction in other aspects of life, and an increased sense of self-awareness allows a child to understand and communicate their needs and wants effectively to others rather than using undesirable behaviour.

### **Benefits for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).**

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Case studies have shown that children with complex learning difficulties including autism, behavioural difficulties, speech and language difficulties and problems with hearing and vision can benefit from Forest School. A book '**Forest School and Autism**' by Michael James details the benefits and gives practical advice on this subject.

SEN children tend to respond well because of the multi-sensory and enabling environment of Forest School, where children can explore and take supported risks. Benefits include gaining more independence, reducing anxiety and creating a sense of belonging.

### **Role of the provider**

The school has a well-equipped team to make judgments about local risks, manage challenging behaviour, and keep children safe is an important element. Staff training, support and knowledge is therefore critical to this success – with staffing ratio levels being appropriate and proportionate.

It is acknowledged that there are limitations of mapping in capturing a 'dynamic picture' but considers that such mapping could play a useful part in the wider assessments of risk. The forests location assessment should be kept under review and amended to consider any new risks as these are identified. The annual update will need to be proportionate and will not usually need to be carried out at the level of the initial assessment.

### **Location assessments will need to address two issues:**

- 1.** Safeguarding concerns
- 2.** Accessibility of local services

The school's Leadership Team has a broad understanding of the characteristics of the area where the school is located. The team has an in-depth understanding of potential influences for an already vulnerable child to be a victim of crime, such as being targeted for sexual exploitation.

- Whether there is a likelihood of children placed in the school becoming drawn into gang crime or anti-social behaviour in the local area.
- The suitability of the local neighbourhood as a location to care for children who may have already been victims of abuse and neglect; and
- Whether there are environmental factors that would represent a hazard to children, such as locations near busy roads.

Location assessments also consider any positive features in a local community that would offer benefits to children attending White Trees. For example, assessments could include evidence about opportunities for children to participate in leisure, sporting or cultural activities, or links with services that could support the child's ethnic or religious identity or work experience placements in the locality.

## **CONSULTATION WITH APPROPRIATE LOCAL SERVICES**

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White Trees School has links within the local authority to consult about any local issues or individual circumstances with students. The key links for local services is detailed below and their responses to consultation on the location report.

Local Service	Key Individual and contact details	Feedback for assessment
Safeguarding (including Missing, CSE)	Hatfield Heath policing neighbourhood, under the Essex Police force area. Hatfield Heath Police Station BASBOW LANE CM23 2NA Bishop's Stortford - Hatfield Heath Hertfordshire England 0845 33 00 222 Email: BraintreeandUttlesfordCPT@essex.ppn.police.uk  Telephone: 01279 730388 (Hatfield Heath Police Station) for non-urgent enquiries. Force Website: <a href="https://www.essex.police.uk">https://www.essex.police.uk</a>	If any concerns are raised about a pupil or about a location, the head teacher ensures this is passed on where appropriate through the correct channels. A member of the residential service management and the service/homes manager sit on a scheduled meeting.
Crime	As above	School to be visited by Police/other public services prior to new academic year September 2022.
Local Probation / YOT	West Essex YOT Yot.epping@essex.gov.uk  Essex YOT Suite 4, Empire House Victoria Road Chelmsford CM1 1PA yot.essexHQ@essex.gov.uk 03330 138926	Pupils who have a named YOT worker from their funding authority, with whom the school will work with to reduce anti-social behaviour.

## SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

There are no major concerns about the location in which the forest schools site is situated. There are very low levels of crime - the area is not highlighted as an area of concern.

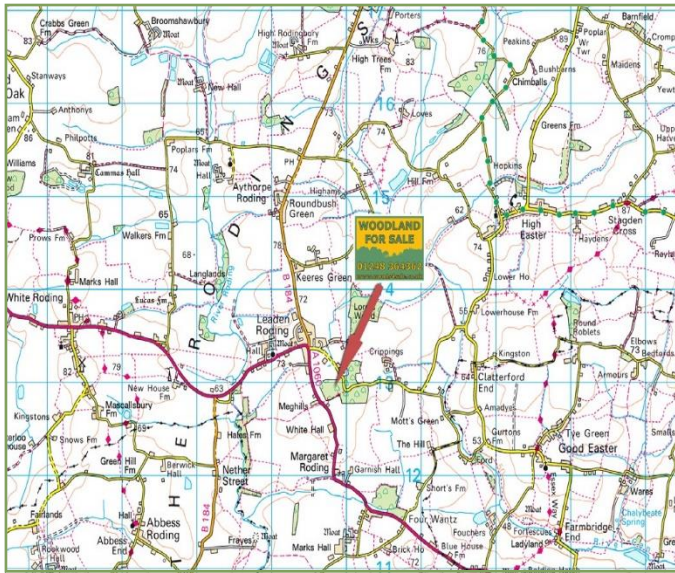
There are no concerns of young people being drawn into gang crime or anti-social behaviour in the area because of the locality of the school. The forests location does not increase the potential for pupils to be targeted for sexual exploitation. The area in which the forest is located has not been an area of concern at any local multi-agency CSE, Missing and Trafficking operational groups where information is collated.

Current areas of identified risk are low to medium risk. The overall risk of the location of the forest schools is assessed as being Medium risk due to the nature of the students that may be on role and their potential behaviours.

**Location/Address:** Little Dunmow Wood, Leaden Roding, CM6 1QQ

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White Trees Forest School LARA



- Legend**
- Motorway
  - A Road
  - B Road
  - Minor Road
  - Unclassified Road
  - Railway
  - Watercourse
  - Hard Track
  - Unsurfaced Track
  - Bridleway
  - Public Footpath
  - Public Byway
  - Path
  - Wall
  - Woodland For Sale
  - Other Woodland
  - Paddock/Meadow
  - For Sale Sign
  - Manager's Sign
  - Gate
  - Broadleaf
  - Conifer

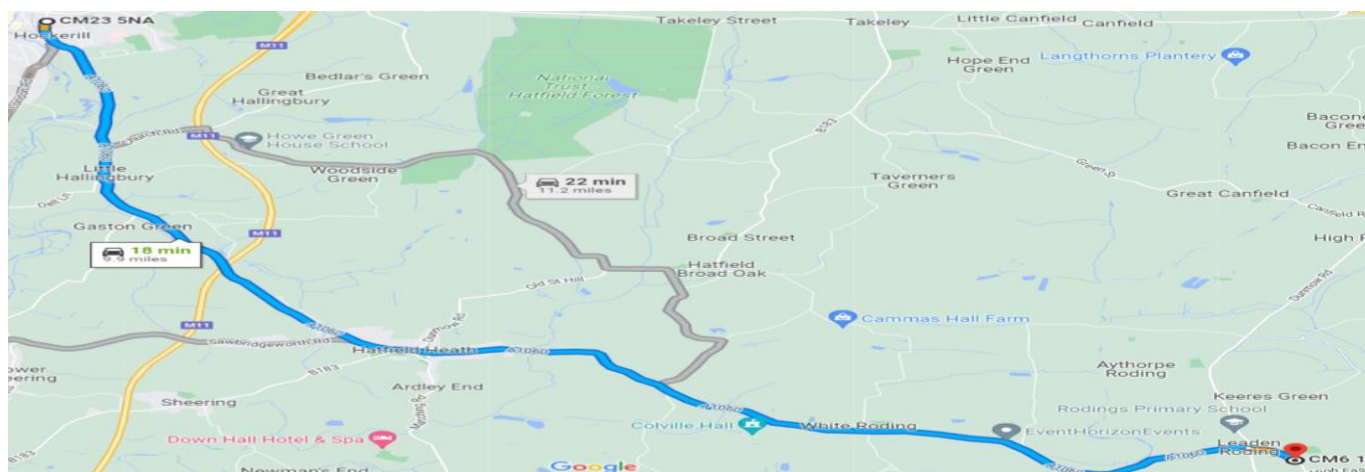
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**Services Located Near Braintree Forest Schools:**

Service	Distance	Contact
<b>Chelmsford Police Station</b>	7.8 Miles	New Street, Chelmsford, CM1
<b>Chelmsford and Essex Hospital</b>	7.9 Miles	New London Road, Chelmsford, CM2 0QH
<b>Leaden Roding Fire Station</b>	0.4 Miles	Leaden Roding, Dunmow, CM6 1QA
<b>Parking</b>	Parking is available by the entrance	Little Dunmow Wood

**Facilities/roads/building around the Forest school’s site:**

Little Dunmow Wood is part of a larger wooded area situated a short distance south from the village of Leaden Roding in rural Essex, and not far from the historic market town of Great Dunmow. Access is through a locked gate.

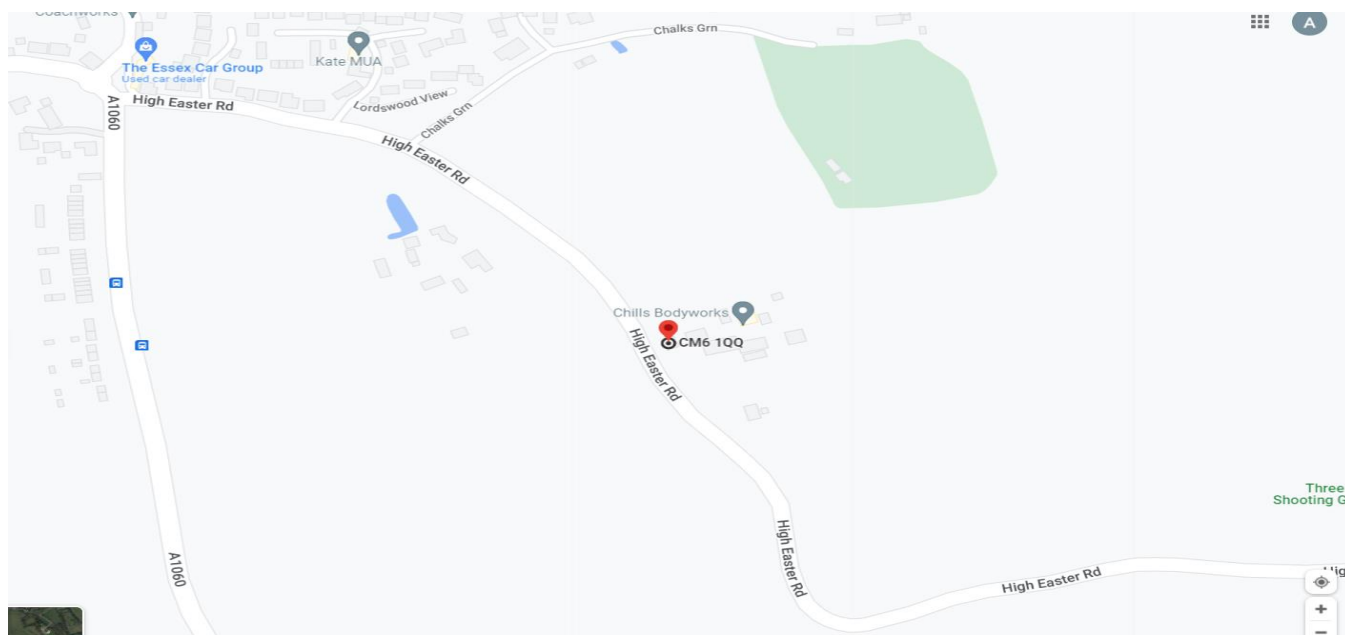


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There are few businesses close by to the Forest School site, there is however a car bodyworks shop, and a shooting ground around a mile away. There is parking by the gate to the entrance of Little Dunmow Wood.

The woodland area is private and extremely secluded. The site is away from busy roads and includes a private right of way up to the lockable gate



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<b>RISK – Risk Factors – Risk Heightening Factors</b>	<b>Risk Management Strategies Protective Factors</b>	Probability of harm occurring (1-3)	Extent of current harm/hazard	Overall risk rating (1-9) 1-3 low 3-5 Med 6-9 High
On site Vehicles	The road leading to the site is a private road. The gate that is padlocked to prevent vehicle access. Ensuring the cohort know what to do if a motor vehicle is approaching. Ensure that rest of group is aware and follow the same procedures. The Forest school leader must ensure that the group know what to do if a vehicle approaches.	1	3	4
Litter and debris	Bin close to car park, minimal litter in the woods. The area is closed off and has a fence line around the boundary so students know what part of the forest they can access. Forest School Lead to ensure students and staff take all rubbish with them to ensure the preservation of the woodlands.	1	1	3
Paths & Tracks	Ensure people take care and do not run. Leader to monitor on site changes to tracks and paths, ensuring there is room for students to safely access the Forest School Site.	1	1	2
Exposed roots & other hazards off main paths	If going off main paths ensure the leader is at the front to assess routes appropriateness for group. The leader must warn of potential dangers from uneven ground. Students to be aware of the Boundary and what part of the Forest they can access.	1	2	3
Broken, steps & steep paths	Ensure the group are aware of any path gradient changes in advance. The leader must ensure that the gradient of path is appropriate to the group. The majority of the land at the site if relatively flat.	1	2	3
Holes, animal burrows, ditches Falling Getting trapped	Ensure the group are aware of any path gradient changes in advance. The leader must ensure that the gradient of path is appropriate to the group.	1	2	3
Broken walls, fences & boundaries	Ensure groups are aware of the broken fences and move a safe distance around them. Leader must be aware of all broken fences and ensure group do not pass close to them. Any broken fences must be reported to the SLT immediately.	1	1	2
Low branches on paths	The leader must ensure that the groups stay on the paths Ensure the groups stick to paths	1	1	2
Dead trees & branches	The group will clear the immediate area around the site during initial site development.  FS leader to ensure that the group move safely past dead branches  FS leader to ensure safety of group during clearance	1	1	2
Dogs	Due to the secluded Location of the Site it is very rare that Dogs or members of the public walk through the private land, however if they do FS Lead to ensure students do not stroke the Dogs and to ensure good communication is had between the owner.	1	3	4
Members of the public	Due to the secluded and quiet area of the Forest it is unlikely that members of the public will be walking through, however Staff to ensure students adhere to Whitetrees expectations of behaviour. Encouragement to make the right choices and Staff to have ID badges on show.	1	1	2
Absconding	Staff will have knowledge of the local area – so staff have a geographical advantage over YP's The Forest School Location is situated within an area in which SLT can support if required in a timely manner. Students will be fully supervised at all times.	1	3	4

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**This is a working document which will be reviewed annually or as required due to any other areas being identified which are felt to pose a risk which will be added and Risk Assessed as required.**

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By – Aaron Shead	
Chair of Gov Sig/Date	
Head Teacher Sig/Date	

Staff read and acknowledged:

Name -	Sig/Date -

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