



Local Area Risk Assessment

LARA: Forest Education

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

Our vision is to provide pupils with the confidence, skills and ambition to achieve a successful and productive life. We aim to ensure they leave the school with a 'new day, new opportunity' ethos and are capable of becoming 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

Wonderful
Excellent
Lovely
Clever
Outstanding
Magnificent
Enthusiastic

(Acronym created by White Trees pupils)

Document owner	White Trees School	Last review	February 2023
Date Created	September 2021	Next review	February 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Our Forest Education 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 Education has their own philosophies and ethos that benefit children in unique ways. At White Trees, Forest Education 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 Our Forest Education 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 Education 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 Education 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. Our Forest Education Sessions are delivered on a long-term basis

Our Forest Education 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 the Forest 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. Our Forest Education Sessions should be risk-aware, not risk-averse

Our Forest Education 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 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 Education 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 failure

3. Forest Education is invested in holistic development of the participants

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

- **Emotional development.** Periods of reflection are important parts of all Forest Education 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.
- **Intellectual development.** Knowledge is provided in context with situations as they arise and creates a thirst for learning.

Document owner	White Trees School	Last review	February 2023
Date Created	September 2021	Next review	February 2024

- **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 Education should take place in a natural wooded environment where possible

Embedded within our Forest Education 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. Our Forest Education Sessions should be run by Qualified Forest Education practitioners

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

Our Forest Education Sessions are run by a Level 3 Forest School Lead, 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 Education. Practitioners are also required to be very reflective themselves, to continually adapt and change with their group and learn from experience.

6. Our Forest Education 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 Education is process-based, not goal-based.**

Document owner	White Trees School	Last review	February 2023
Date Created	September 2021	Next review	February 2024

Why is it Beneficial for Children to Attend Our Forest Education Sessions

The benefits of Forest Education Sessions 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 Education Sessions 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 Education as an Intervention

Forest Education 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 Sessions 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 key principles 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.

Document owner	White Trees School	Last review	February 2023
Date Created	September 2021	Next review	February 2024

Benefits for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

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 the Forest. 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 being in the forest, 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.

Document owner	White Trees School	Last review	February 2023
Date Created	September 2021	Next review	February 2024

CONSULTATION WITH APPROPRIATE LOCAL SERVICES

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: https://www.essex.police.uk	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 2020.
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 Education 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 forest's 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 Education is assessed as being Medium risk due to the nature of the students that may be on role and their potential behaviours.

Document owner	White Trees School	Last review	February 2023
Date Created	September 2021	Next review	February 2024

Services Located Near Braintree Forest Education Sessions

Service	Distance	Contact
Braintree Police station -	2.4 Miles	Blyths Meadow, Braintree, CM7 3DJ, England
Braintree Community Hospital	1.1 Miles	Chadwick Drive, Braintree, Essex CM7 2AL, England
Essex County Fire and Rescue Service	1.9 Miles	Fire Station, Railway Street, Braintree CM7 3JD, England
Parking	Parking is free on the Estate	Blackwell drive, Braintree, CM7 2PU

Facilities/roads/building around the Forest school's site:

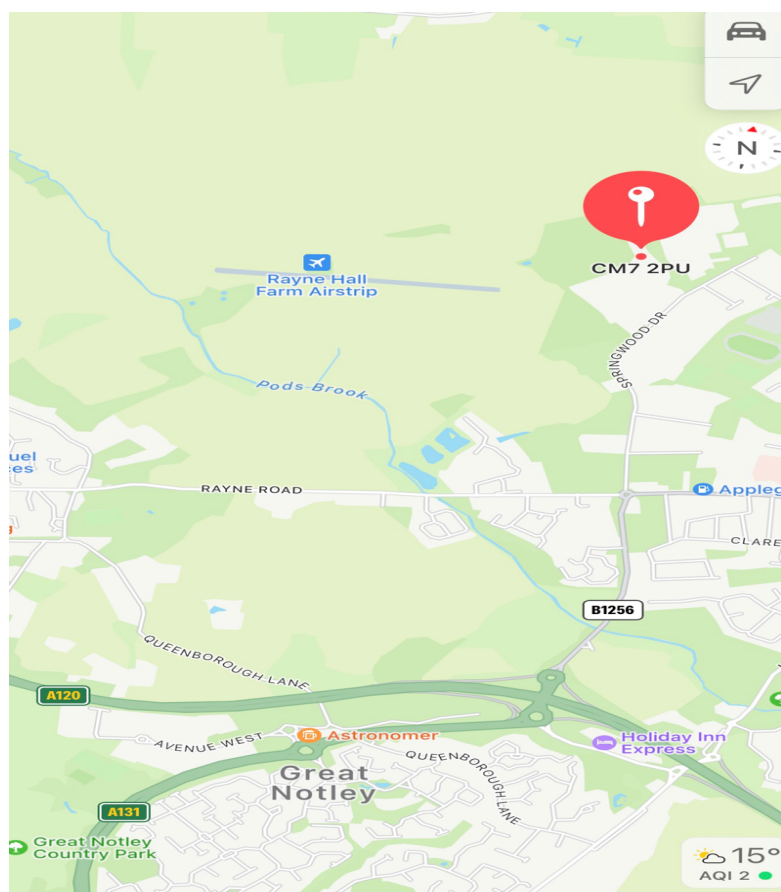
The Forest Education sites sits in a secluded woodland area which is situated within Braintree. Braintree is a Historic Town in the county of Essex, in the north-central part of the county. The Town lies on the Roman road known as Stane Street. The district also includes the other old market towns of Halstead and Witham, which are set in rich farmlands. Braintree have a local football Team that play in the sixth tier of English Football and play at nearby Cressing Road. The site is approximately 18 miles from the School Site in Bishops Stortford.



Document owner	White Trees School	Last review	February 2023
Date Created	September 2021	Next review	February 2024

Various businesses are close by to the Forest Education site, which includes an Industrial estate consisting of an Auto repair centre, Castle Glass, Central Electrical Distributors, Ab Salute Gym and revolution Signs. There is parking alongside the Industrial Estate which staff can use to access the Forest.

The woodland area is private and extremely secluded. The A120 is a 4- minute drive away and connects Braintree with the M11. There is a local air strip on the other side of the field to the Forest. Students will be briefed on what areas of the woodland they can use, and appropriate staffing will be implemented.



RISK – Risk Factors – Risk Heightening Factors	Risk Management Strategies Protective Factors	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	Restrictive barriers and gates that are padlocked to prevent vehicle access. Ensuring the cohort knows what to do if a motor vehicle is approaching. Ensure that the rest of the group is aware and follows the same procedures. The Forest Educational leader must ensure that the group know what to do if a vehicle approaches.	1	3	4
Litter and debris	Bin close to the 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 Education	1	1	3

Document owner	White Trees School	Last review	February 2023
Date Created	September 2021	Next review	February 2024

	Lead to ensure pupils and staff take all rubbish with them to ensure the preservation of the woodlands.			
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 pupils to safely access the Forest Education 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 the group. The leader must warn of potential dangers from uneven ground. Pupils 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 is aware of any path gradient changes in advance. The leader must ensure that the gradient of the path is appropriate to the group.	1	2	3
Holes, animal burrows, ditches Falling Getting trapped	Ensure the group is aware of any path gradient changes in advance. The leader must ensure that the gradient of the 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 the group does not pass close to them. Any broken fences must be reported to the Owner of the Land 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. FE leader to ensure that the group move safely past dead branches FE 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 FE 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
Pond & Stream	There is a pond on the outskirts of the Forest Education Boundary, Students to be made aware of the dangers of this, good staff to student ratio to be had and water danger videos to be shown to all pupils prior to visiting FS.	1	3	4
Absconding	Staff will have knowledge of the local area – so staff have a geographical advantage over YP's The Forest Education Location is situated within an area in which SLT can support if required in a timely manner. Pupils will be fully supervised at all times.	1	3	4

Document owner	White Trees School	Last review	February 2023
Date Created	September 2021	Next review	February 2024

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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