

## Forest Schools

### 1. Introduction:

Forest School principles are based on outdoor learning and engagement with the natural environment.

They differ from normal school learning by being based in a woodland setting and relying on regular contact with the forest setting over a significant period of time, instead of one off visits.

An overview; In Britain, Forest School is being used with a range of groups from early-years children to those with special needs, and young people and adults with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Forest School setting is adaptable and allows for a flexible approach to learning, which can accommodate a range of learning styles. Learning styles are the different ways in which children best absorb and process information: kinaesthetic (learning by doing), linguistic, interpersonal, mathematical and visual. Forest School is an approach that can allow practitioners to shape teaching methods to an individual's learning style. Research in America (Taylor *et al.*, 1998; Fjortoft, 2004) has found that children who play in natural environments undertake more diverse, creative and imaginative play, forming an important part of a child's development. It is also important and beneficial for health and wellbeing.

The Forest Schools principles are set out in Appendix 1.

In Southwark the schools require a resource that is often self-contained and may be used daily, so the sites are subject to high levels of disturbance. Fires are often part of the forest school activities. We give priority to state schools and only accommodate Schools in the borough. We do not provide places for schools outside the borough or commercial Forest Schools.

## **2. Policy:**

Forest schools are support by council policy. The Council Plan 2018 -2022 sets out eight key commitments.

### **2.1 A greener borough**

This policy commits to protecting biodiversity and making nature accessible to all. This is woven into the Southwark Nature Action Plan (SNAP). The SNAP includes the following detail.

### **2.2 Engagement through education:**

A study of schools in Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, and Southwark in 2008 found that only half of the schools surveyed took students out of the classroom, with Key Stage 3 students making predominant use for the school grounds, and Key Stage 4 students making greater use of their local parks. The study found that ecology was thought to be the most appropriate way to link the use of parks in to the curriculum.

The Natural Environment White Paper 2011 noted that Children are becoming disconnected from the natural environment and spending less and less time outdoors. It was found that the likelihood of children visiting any green space at all had halved in a generation.

The natural environment also offer opportunities for life long learning.

The SNAP will support education by;

- Providing forest school opportunities within our capacity
- Providing environmental education through third sector ecology management agreements
- Provide 'after school nature clubs' through the third sector ecology management agreements

### **2.3 A great start in life**

We believe that interaction of children with the natural environment is crucial to their development and health and wellbeing.

This commitment sets out a number of actions for education. Forest Schools contribute to this objective.

### **3. Sites unsuitable for Forest School activities**

The Local Nature Reserves managed by Southwark Council are sensitive sites set aside for nature conservation. Forest schools activities have a potential impact on sites due to the regular use and type of activities such as fire lighting. Therefore the following sites are not included in the opportunities section.

- Nunhead Cemetery
- One Tree Hill
- Russia Dock Woodland

These sites can be used for field trips.

### **4. Activities unsuitable for Forest School sites in Southwark**

- Fires unless specific permission is granted in writing by Southwark Council
- Pulling up of whole plants – collection of seeds and leaves is permitted in moderation
- Removal of frogs spawn from ponds
- Disturbance to nesting birds – Care should be taken during nesting season, March to August annually
- Unsupervised play in the areas
- Please keep to existing paths
- Please take your litter home
- Use of parks for regular large scale lessons without consent from Southwark Council

## 5. Current status:

There are a number of Forest Schools that currently operate in Southwark. These sessions are held in our parks and nature reserves. See table 1 below.

Park name	Area - if specific	Name of school/operator	Session information	Other information/comment
Southwark park	Nature area	Rotherhithe Primary	4pw up to 2pd	North area-
Southwark park	Nature area	Southwark Park	4pw up to 2pd	-
Tabard Gardens	Nature area	London Christian School	Regular sessions	Not booked
Peckham Rye Park	Nature Garden	Goodrich	Monday and Tuesday pm	South area-
Peckham Rye Park	Nature Garden	Ivydale	Wed pm	-
Peckham Rye Park	Nature Garden	St Johns and St Clements	Thurs am	-
Peckham Rye Park	Nature Garden	Nell Gwyn	Wed am finish at 1pm	-
Russia Dock Woodland	Whole Site	Unknown	TBC	Regular use by school without agreement
Burgess Park	Cobourg Nature	1st Place Children Centre use Cobourg Nature area	3 times a week Monday, Wednesday and Friday	Central Area

Table 1, Current forest schools activity in parks

## 6. Opportunities:

The Parks service has received a number of requests for forest schools. Following an audit of the current status table 2 below, identifies availability of sites for forest schools and potential new sites. Table 3 lists sites that could provide forest school work is undertaken to make them suitable.

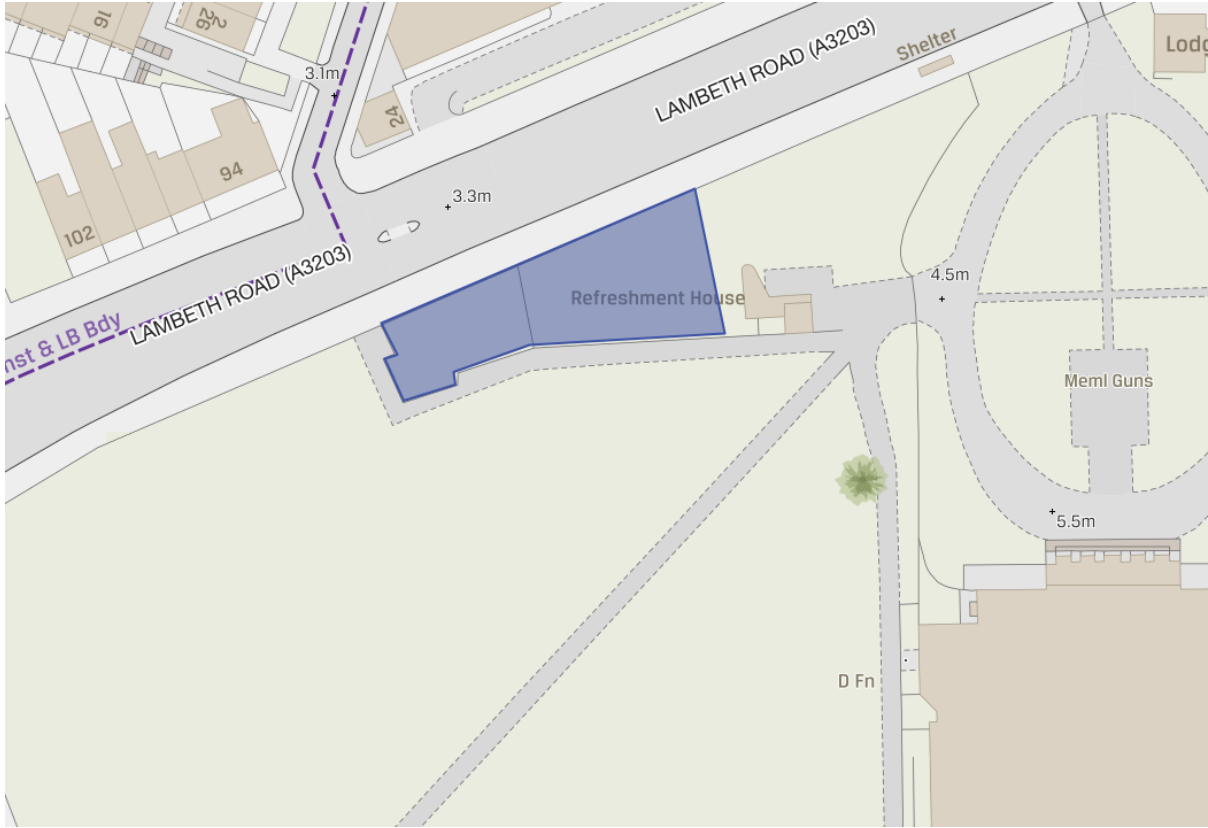
Park name	Area - if specific	Availability	Other information/comment
Peckham Rye Park	Nature Garden	Monday and Tuesday am Thursday pm Friday all day	limited availability
Burgess Park	Cobourg Nature	Monday to Friday am + pm	Availability depends on First Place usage
Southwark Park	Nature Area	No current capacity	-
Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park	Nature area close by Cafe	Monday to Friday am + pm	North area Not currently in use Self contained area

Table 2, Forest school opportunities in Southwark Parks

Park name	Area - if specific	Availability	Other information/comment
Dulwich Park	Nature area	Monday to Friday am + pm	South area Not currently in use Self contained area  Tree issue oaks need making safe
Durand's Wharf	Whole of the site	Monday to Friday am + pm	Could link activities with Surrey Docks Farm No defined area
Belair Park	Nature area	Monday to Friday am + pm	No defined area
Brenchley Gardens	Whole site	Monday to Friday am + pm	No comfort facilities No defined area
Kirkwood nature Garden	Whole site	Monday to Friday am + pm	No defined area Suffers from ASB
Greendale Fields	Old Tennis Courts	Monday to Friday am + pm	Could link to woodland in Dog Kennel Hill

Table 3 parks that could accommodate forest schools in the future but are not suitable yet.

## 7. site locations of potential Forest Schools



Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Forest school area



Dulwich Park Forest school area.

## 8. Booking

Booking are limited to a term at a time.

A maximum of 4 slots can be booked by a school per week.

Bookings are on a first come first served basis

We do not accept booking for schools outside Southwark or commercial Forest School services.

For availability and bookings please by Southwark Schools please contact the area parks teams:

- North area – Nicola Cheetham, 020 7525 4117
- Central area – Peter Golding, 020 7525 3645
- South area – Will Walpole, 0208 299 0861

For enquires contact Parks: [Parks@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:Parks@southwark.gov.uk)

## 9. Other resources:

Southwark Parks has three downloadable self guided trails available.

[https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/2277/Southwark\\_Park\\_Trail\\_2011.pdf](https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/2277/Southwark_Park_Trail_2011.pdf)

[https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/2275/Dulwich\\_Park\\_Trail\\_2011.pdf](https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/2275/Dulwich_Park_Trail_2011.pdf)

[https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/2276/Peckham\\_Rye\\_Park\\_Trail\\_2011.pdf](https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/2276/Peckham_Rye_Park_Trail_2011.pdf)

Several Third Sector organisations offering environmental education operate in Southwark. The organisations are listed below.

They can be contacted directly for enquires regarding outdoor education sessions at their sites.

London Wildlife Trust

<https://www.wildlondon.org.uk/about/outdoor-education-london>

The Conservation Volunteers

<https://www.tcv.org.uk/learning>

Bankside open Spaces Trust

<https://www.bost.org.uk/>

Surrey Docks Farm

<https://www.surreydocksfarm.org.uk/school-visits/>



# Appendix 1: Forest School Principles

Source; Forest School Association

**Principle 1: Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.**

- Forest School takes place regularly, ideally at least every other week, with the same group of learners, over an extended period of time, if practicable encompassing the seasons.
- A Forest School programme has a structure which is based on the observations and collaborative work between learners and practitioners. This structure should clearly demonstrate progression of learning.
- The initial sessions of any programme establish physical and behavioural boundaries as well as making initial observations on which to base future programme development.

**Principle 2: Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.**

- Whilst woodland is the ideal environment for Forest School, many other sites, some with only a few trees, are able to support good Forest School practice.
- The woodland is ideally suited to match the needs of the programme and the learners, providing them with the space and environment in which to explore and discover.
- A Forest School programme constantly monitors its ecological impact and works within a sustainable site management plan agreed between the landowner/manager, the forest school practitioner and the learners.
- Forest School aims to foster a relationship with nature through regular personal experiences in order to develop long-term, environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices in staff, learners and the wider community.
- Forest School uses natural resources for inspiration, to enable ideas and to encourage intrinsic motivation.

**Principle 3: Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners**

- Where appropriate, the Forest School leader will aim to link experiences at Forest School to home, work and /or school education
- Forest School programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of the learner.

**Principle 4: Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.**

- Forest School opportunities are designed to build on an individual's innate motivation, positive attitudes and/or interests.
- Forest School uses tools and fires only where deemed appropriate to the learners, and dependent on completion of a baseline risk assessment.
- Any Forest School experience follows a Risk–Benefit process managed jointly by the practitioner and learner that is tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.

**5. Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.**

- Forest School is led by qualified Forest School practitioners, who are required to hold a minimum of an accredited Level 3 Forest School qualification. Find more information on Forest School qualifications [here](#).
- There is a high ratio of practitioner/adults to learners.
- Practitioners and adults regularly helping at Forest School are subject to relevant checks into their suitability to have prolonged contact with children, young people and vulnerable people.
- Practitioners need to hold an up-to-date first aid qualification, which includes paediatric (if appropriate) and outdoor elements.
- Forest School is backed by relevant working documents, which contain all the policies and procedures required for running Forest School and which establish the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers.
- The Forest School leader is a reflective practitioner and sees themselves, therefore, as a learner too.

**6. Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning**

- A learner-centred pedagogical approach is employed by Forest School that is responsive to the needs and interests of learners.
- The Practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote during their programmes through careful planning, appropriate dialogue and relationship building.
- Play and choice are an integral part of the Forest School learning process, and play is recognised as vital to learning and development at Forest School.
- Forest School provides a stimulus for all learning preferences and dispositions.
- Reflective practice is a feature of each session to ensure learners and practitioners can understand their achievements, develop emotional intelligence and plan for the future.
- Practitioner observation is an important element of Forest School pedagogy. Observations feed into 'scaffolding' and tailoring experiences to learning and development at Forest School. F