



FOREST EDUCATION INITIATIVE



FEI FOREST SCHOOL SCOTLAND CASE STUDY

BLACKFORD PRIMARY FOREST SCHOOL, PERTSHIRE

Key points: external FS Leader, school timetables and time constraints, developing resilience and practical skills, working with fire, self-selected groups

When? This Forest School programme has been operating since 2009.

Forest School Leader: Karen Yearsley, licensed Level 4 Forest School trainer, (Archimedes). Karen offers Forest School training sessions independently and also through Archimedes. She works part time as a Clackmannanshire Countryside Ranger. Karen is also an active parent volunteer at Blackford Primary.

Context: Blackford is a small rural primary school situated in Blackford village in lowland Perthshire. The school roll has approximately 51 pupils across three composite classes. None of the school staff are Forest School trained so Blackford Primary relies on Karen Yearsley to lead their Forest School programmes, with support from class teachers and assistants. Karen tries to ensure all classes have access to the Forest School experience. The 6/7 class has had two sessions run twice to accommodate this bigger class. The other classes have come out as a whole class as there are fewer pupils. Each Forest School is run as a 6 week (minimum, longer if possible) block programme, one day a week. Each programme will run twice across two terms for both the P6/7 class and the P4/5 class. The school has run a Forest Kindergarten for the P1/2 class independently.

Forest School session: Thirteen P6/7 pupils took part, with 3 adults. The Forest School Leader was supported by 2 assistants, the Support for Learning teacher at Blackford, and a Blackford Primary pupil parent/ Support for Learning Assistant (Braco Primary).

Forest School Site: This is a small coniferous (mainly Scots Pine) plantation on a grassy hillock accessible on foot from the school. It is a short (approximately 10 minute) walk from the school via a grassy track, led by the other adult assistants (2) from the school staff. Access by a minor road alongside the wood allows the Leader to bring in heavier equipment and meet the group on site. Permission for use has been granted by the local farmer owner. Some local pupils use the wood for informal activities out of school hours, including den building sparked off by Forest School.

Programme costs: As a parent at the school, Karen Yearsley currently runs these programmes at no cost to the school. A similar Forest School programme run by Karen at nearby Braco Primary School is paid for by the school, funded by the [Ardoch Development Trust](#)

Issues/ constraints: The Forest School Leader has grappled with whether it is better to offer more in depth Forest School sessions over a shorter period to fewer pupils, or create Forest School access for all but with less time available for each session. The school timetable is particularly busy with transition activities organised for the P6/7 class. This means that afternoon Forest School sessions are constrained, with less than 1.5 hours in the woodland itself. This limits the time to practice skills, have free exploration and time for reviewing at the end of the session. The FS Leader is very aware of these limitations.



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Further opportunities: The FS Leader feels morning sessions would work better but this has to be negotiated with the school. She had tried to get Forest School sessions tied in with the PE timetable to create more time available but this was not possible. Further opportunities may exist in being creative with the school timetable and the recently appointed Head teacher may be receptive to Forest School training for staff.

**SNAPSHOT OF A FOREST SCHOOL SESSION
BLACKFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL PERTSHIRE**

The Forest School Leader was Karen Yearsley. This session took place on 24th May 2012.



Start

After a 15 minute walk to the site, the group gathers at their log fire circle for welcome and introductions.

This is their third session. Safety protocol was reinforced (don't move around inside the fire circle!)

Safety procedures review

The whole group was given choice of whether they take part in the den building group or fire lighting group, depending on what they had done the previous week.

Warm up

They move to the adjacent open space for warm-up activities.

The 'Zombie game' was fun and helped to share names and involve everyone.



Fire – getting started

A lockable mobile tool chest on wheels is used to store and bring fire lighting kit into the wood. Karen reviewed the respect (kneeling) position with the group, and what to do in case of a fire (remove oxygen, heat or rake the fuel) or deal with a burn. She pointed out the location of the fire blanket and water bucket. The fire triangle concept was introduced, and



Kelly kettle bases were used for practice fires as the woodland floor was very dry. Pupils formed groups of two, each pair with a practice fire bowl (Kelly kettle base). After each small step the group reformed to discuss the next stage.

A pupil asked (indicating arm) - *“What happens if we burn all the way up here?”* Karen replied *“Your fire is too big. We’re building tiny fires today”*.



Developing fire sites and removing wood litter

Each pair squared off each of their practice fire sites and cleared the area of any debris that could allow fire to spread.



Introduction to tinder, the fire steel and spark making

After re-grouping, Karen shows how to fluff up the cotton wool balls or ‘fairy pillows’ and how to use the fire steel to make sparks.

She prepares everyone for the task ahead. *“Teasing this out is really important....but don’t be disappointed if your cotton wool doesn’t catch fire”*.



Making sparks

Everyone takes turn to practice in their pairs. Most find this really tricky and there is lots of mutual support and encouragement within pairs.



The Forest School Leader provides support and encouragement such as *“keep going...don’t give up”* and *“give it some welly!”*

The group re-groups to share tips. This includes turning the Kelly kettle base over for easier access to the cotton tinder.



Success!

It’s a great feeling of achievement to get a flame after many failed attempts.

Lots of perseverance means everyone succeeds eventually.



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One child who at first doesn't succeed comments "I hate fire!" Her partner (who has managed it) says "I love them!"

Feeding the flames

The group is shown how to add suitable kindling such as bits of bark ("... if you tear the wee strips off it curls up") for a 3 minute fire.

A few reminders are needed about the respect position.

All fires are then extinguished safely.



Making dens

Meanwhile the 'den' group have different degrees of success. The assistant has consciously stood back and let this self-selected group organise themselves. She said it was fascinating how this compared to groups selected by adults.

It had been fairly chaotic until natural leaders developed and then there was mutual support and co-operation. The assistant commented "This way they've learned". At Forest School the pupils "learn skills they don't have".

With thanks to Blackford Primary School and Karen Yearsley

For other Forest School case studies see www.foresteducation.org resources