

OUTDOOR & FOREST SCHOOL · ALL AGES

Forest School Without Woods

Playground & field adaptations

Why this matters

Forest School is a brilliant model. But the popular image — children with whittling knives, fires, dens in mature woodland — sets a bar most UK primaries can't clear. Many schools have a tarmac playground, a small field, perhaps a few trees against a fence. Some have less. This is fine. The benefits Forest School research demonstrates — confidence, resilience, problem-solving, regulation, social learning — come from the APPROACH, not the trees. You can replicate 80% of the value on a school field. Even 60% on a playground. What follows is a practical guide for adapting Forest School principles to ordinary primary settings.

What Forest School Really Is

| Common belief | What the research actually shows |
|--------------------------------|--|
| You need woodland. | You need a regular outdoor space children can return to. Trees help — but a corner of field works. |
| You need a Level 3 leader. | For accreditation yes. For the principles, any teacher willing to learn the approach can apply them. |
| It's all about fire and tools. | Fire-lighting is one optional activity. Most sessions involve no fire and no tools. |
| Children must be free to roam. | Boundaries are essential. The freedom is within a clearly-set space, with clearly-known rules. |
| It's only for nice weather. | Cold and rain teach the most. Wet kit and clear boundaries make it work. |
| Children won't focus outside. | After 3–4 weeks of regular sessions, focus typically improves — the routine becomes the regulator. |



The four essentials

The minimum bar for Forest-School-style sessions: 1. **Regular** — same time, same place, weekly or fortnightly. Repetition is what builds the regulation effect. 2. **Bounded** — children know exactly where they can and can't go. Visible markers if needed. 3. **Child-led within structure** — adults set up, then step back. Children choose what to do within the activities offered. Don't direct constantly. 4. **Reflective** — close every session with a circle. 'What did you notice? What did you make? What was hard?' With those four things in place, almost any space works.

Adapting to a PLAYGROUND

Adapting to a SCHOOL FIELD



Building a session corner over time

Kit list for any setting

Three rules to start with

