

# The Breeze Forest School Project

The Breeze Project 2018-21  
Evaluation Report

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## Abbreviations

ARC- additionally resourced centre

CYP – children and young people

EHC Plan - education, health and care plan

FS – forest school

FSA – Forest School Association

TA – teaching assistant

YP – young person/people

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## Introduction

This report details three years of co-produced research between Newcastle University, Scotswood Garden and four schools in the North East of England between September 2018 and July 2021. The research evaluated the impact of the Breeze Project, which uses a Forest School (FS) approach to work with schools to support the needs of children and young people (CYP) with social and emotional difficulties.

FS is a learner-centred pedagogical approach based within woodland or a natural setting. It focuses on providing a supportive and enjoyable environment and on the holistic development of learners through play and managed risk-taking. Learners choose their own activities which might include den building, fire lighting and cooking, exploration of nature, tool use such as whittling and craft projects, games and imaginative play. FS practice often varies but is based on six principles (FSA<sup>1</sup>):

1. *Forest School is a **long-term** process of regular sessions, rather than one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.*
2. *Forest School takes place in a **woodland** or natural environment to support the development of a lifelong relationship between the learner and the natural world.*
3. *Forest School uses a range of **learner-centred** processes to create a community for being, development and learning.*
4. *Forest School aims to promote the **holistic development** of all involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.*
5. *Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take **supported risks** appropriate to the environment and to themselves.*
6. *Forest School is run by **qualified Forest School practitioners**, who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.*

There are three levels of FS accreditation (Levels 1-3), with Level 3 required to lead FS sessions.

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<sup>1</sup> \* <https://forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school/>

Building upon the Breeze Project's pilot year (2017-2018), which worked with two schools and identified a number of impacts for CYP including increased engagement, improved social relationships and skills, behaviour and home-school communication (Tiplady, 2018; Tiplady & Menter, 2021), a three year project was planned that would incorporate five schools, the existing two pilot schools and three additional schools. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions a number of adaptations were necessary which included focusing the research on a total of four schools that were able to continue, albeit in a variety of ways. Case studies of the four schools provide detailed information about how the project was enacted, how theory of change articulated the anticipated impacts and how the research data evidenced those impacts for CYP and the schools over time. Findings from across the four schools are discussed, with reflections and recommendations for schools and on-going research.

### **The Breeze Forest School Project and Scotswood Garden**

Scotswood Garden<sup>2</sup> is an award winning independent charity in the North East of England. It is located in one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK, classified in the highest 10% for income, education, skills and training, health and crime deprivation (DCLG, 2019). The 2.5 acre garden was established in 1995 and today provides woodlands, ponds, heritage orchards, fruit and vegetable gardens, wildflower meadows, bee hives and attracts a range of wildlife including small mammals, birds, insects, fish and amphibians, including the rare Great-crested Newt, in the heart of the city. The garden offers a range of community projects and services including open days, a volunteering scheme, older people's services, FS training and a range of education and youth work.

The Breeze Forest School Project was conceptualised by Harriet Menter, the Education Manager at Scotswood Garden, in response to a growing local need for services to support CYP with mental health and wellbeing needs. The project was designed to work in collaboration with local schools who identified small groups (5-12) of CYP experiencing social and emotional difficulties, who attended Breeze weekly over a school year. It was intended that in the first year of Breeze, the FS practitioner from Scotswood Garden would begin by planning, delivering and reviewing sessions in collaboration with school staff and that concurrently two members of school staff would complete the FS training (one at Level 1 and a second at Level 3). By the end of the school year, schools would take over the delivery of the project with Scotswood

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<sup>2</sup> For further information see: <https://scotswoodgarden.org.uk/>

Garden providing distanced support whilst also supporting a new school to get started the next year. In practice, some staffing changes and unforeseen circumstances, including the Covid-19 pandemic, meant that the following happened:

**2017-2019 (Pilot Year):** schools A and B work with Scotswood Garden to co-deliver Breeze and concurrently staff engage in Level 1 and Level 3 FS training.

**2018-2019 (Year 1):** school A has two staff trained in FS (one Level 1 and one Level 3) and continues to deliver sessions weekly at Scotswood Garden with original group plus some new class members, distance support from Scotswood Garden.

School B only has one staff member trained in Level 1 FS (second Level 3 leaves the school before completing qualification) and so while a staff member engages with Level 3 training, the school delivers a range of outdoor learning sessions and co-delivers some FS sessions with a FS practitioner (funded by Breeze).

Schools C and D work with the Scotswood Garden FS practitioner to co-deliver Breeze weekly and concurrently staff engage in Level 1 and Level 3 FS training.

**2019-2020 (Year 2):** Schools A, B, C and D all deliver their own FS sessions with distanced support from Scotswood Garden. School E begins co-delivery with Scotswood Garden with one member of staff starting Level 3 FS training (the school already has a number of staff who have completed FS training).

March 2020 – first national lockdown, schools are closed for all children apart from key worker and vulnerable children; school A continues weekly FS for six children in school (2 of which are from the Breeze group), schools B and C continue outdoor learning and FS inspired sessions for those children in school and schools D and E suspend FS sessions. In all cases the original Breeze groups are disrupted due to CYP not being able to attend school.

**2020-2021 (Year 3):** In September schools re-open to all children, School A continues to deliver FS sessions weekly at school with 12 children; some adaptations to practice to accommodate sharing the outside space with other school groups. During third national

lockdown (Jan-March 2021) when schools again close to all but key worker and vulnerable children, children in the ARC are offered part-time places and FS sessions continue for those attending school.

School B delivers weekly FS sessions at Scotswood Garden, break during national lockdown although continues to offer outdoor learning sessions to vulnerable children attending school.

School C delivers weekly FS sessions to eight students October to Nov 2020 for three hours and then again weekly from January until July 2021. A second group of five students attend for an afternoon session (for approximately 1.5 hrs) weekly from January to July 2021.

School D co-delivers three individual FS sessions to four groups of CYP during November 2020 to April 2021 and seven weekly sessions to two groups May to July 2021 (these two groups contained the children who had previously accessed the 3 sessions so they experienced a total of 10 sessions Nov 20 to July 21). Sessions are led by Scotswood Garden FS practitioners as the FS trained school staff are no longer available due to school bubbles and staffing issues.

School E did not return to the Breeze project and did not update us with any progress at school.

A Breeze Advisory Group met termly to review and advise on the on-going delivery of the project; members included the Education Manager from Scotswood Garden (Menter), the researcher (Tiplady), staff from all participating schools (usually a member of the school leadership team and a member of staff delivering the project), Dr Wilma Barrow (Newcastle University), Joanna Hume (Northumbria University) and Professor David Leat (Newcastle University). As part of the Froebel Trust funding for the project, the Education Manager at Scotswood Garden and the researcher completed *Element 1 Introduction: principles and practices of the Froebelian approach to early childhood education* and *Element 4: Play and the symbolic life of the child (representation and the expressive arts)*. Forest School pedagogy draws on the work of a

number educators<sup>3</sup> including Froebel and these principles informed discussions, particularly Froebel's focus on developing the whole child, the importance of play and learning through nature, and the importance of the adult-child relationship and interaction<sup>4</sup>.

## Evaluation methodology

### Evaluation design

The evaluation was designed to work in co-production with Scotswood Garden and the participating schools; to understand and document their experiences, to collect evidence of impact and to use the research findings to inform the delivery of the project as it progressed. Regular meetings with Scotswood Garden and school staff, alongside the researcher attending and observing Breeze sessions, meant that pre-pandemic, research observations frequently fed into weekly evaluation and planning of sessions. This together with termly Breeze Advisory Group meetings meant that the research, alongside the knowledge and experiences of the schools, Scotswood Garden and the advisory team, informed the project as it developed.

The evaluation used a *theory of change* methodology to articulate the anticipated pathways to impact for each school, drawing upon practice, research and theoretical knowledge and through detailing individual steps of change and how each step may lead to future steps. Once a theory of change is constructed, data is identified that may confirm or refute an individual step of change; data may be quantitative and/or qualitative and one individual step may have a number of identified data sources. Theory of change further allows us to track change as it happens, rather than waiting for long-term goals that can take many years to come to fruition (Dyson and Todd, 2010; Laing and Todd, 2015).

A theory of change was developed through in-depth interviews with each participating school and Scotswood Garden at the start of each school's involvement in Breeze; as these theories were formed through shared conversations, experiences and knowledge, there are similarities between each school's theoretical model. The theories of change were revisited over the project to assess whether or not change was happening as anticipated and where new knowledge suggested adaptations to the model these were made on a school basis. The focus in

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<sup>3</sup> For further information see: <https://forestschoolassociation.org/history-of-forest-school/>

<sup>4</sup> For further information see: <https://www.froebel.org.uk/about-us/froebelian-principles>

theory of change is to clearly articulate and evidence how change happens over time. Each school's model can be seen within the case studies in the following sections.

Data collection was decided in collaboration, with the schools, Scotswood Garden and the researcher all participating in collecting data. It was important that all participants in the project felt comfortable and able to play an active part in the research and further that the research did not place an unnecessary burden on the project or participants. With these parameters in mind, individual data collection plans were developed for each school, please see following case studies. Wherever possible multiple sources of data were identified for individual steps of change; being able to triangulate data allows us to examine the likelihood of an action from a number of perspectives and gives confidence in findings. This is particularly important when looking to evidence outcomes that are not easily measured, for example whether children develop positive self-narratives can be assessed by examining testimony from children, school and FS staff, parents/carers and researcher observations.

However, 18-months into the project the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a number of changes to the project and research with the majority of CYP unable to attend Breeze during the first UK national lockdown (March - June 2020). As schools began to gradually re-open to all children their involvement in Breeze varied according to circumstances and adaptations continued over the coming year as they responded to further lockdowns and restrictions. The research has necessarily also had to adapt to changing guidance and advice; all research field visits were suspended from March 2020 until May 2021 but schools continued to collect data themselves, kept in regular email contact with the researcher, along with regular on-line meetings and interviews. Observations of Breeze sessions were resumed May – July 2021 for three of the participating schools. Further detail can be seen in each of the school case studies.

## Ethics

The research was granted ethical approval from Newcastle University; this involved obtaining informed written consent from adult participants and parents/carers for child participants, with each child/YP giving verbal consent on a session-by-session basis. The researcher was aware of the importance of Breeze as a time away from everyday pressures the YP may have been feeling and so it was important that the YP were comfortable with her presence and that they only contributed to the research as they wished. The research ethics were reviewed in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and new protocols and permissions put into place to incorporate interviews taking place online and by telephone. When the researcher returned to observe sessions in 2021 appropriate risk assessments were completed and approved.

## Analyses

Qualitative data was analysed thematically and quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics (for example group means); this was then assessed against the individual school's theory of change to make a judgement on whether individual steps had been 'substantially evidenced', 'partly evidenced', 'not evidenced' or 'evidence to refute'. Judgements were based upon the strength of data, how verifiable it was and the likelihood of alternative explanations. This was followed by a more open thematic analysis of qualitative data in order to make comparisons across schools and to look for any unanticipated impacts of the project.

## Case studies

### School A – Hillhead Primary Additionally Resourced Centre (ARC)

#### Context and engagement with the Breeze Project

Hillhead ARC is a specialist provision for primary aged children who are currently unable to access full-time mainstream education due to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The ARC supports up to 12 children with a high staff to pupil ratio (usually 3-4 members of staff). Children most often have diagnosed or undiagnosed special educational needs and/or disabilities and many have a history of low attendance and disengagement from school. Children typically spend 18-24 months in the ARC (although children may also attend for shorter periods) with the aim of reintegrating into mainstream education; where mainstream is not appropriate children transfer to specialist schools. The roll within the ARC is subject to changes throughout the school year with children often joining or leaving the class mid-year.

Hillhead ARC took part in the pilot year of the Breeze Project with research evidencing a number of benefits for pupils including increased enjoyment and engagement, a more positive perception of self and improved relationships, social interaction and behaviour (Tiplady, 2018). FS subsequently became an integrated part of how the ARC supports the social, emotional and mental health of pupils, with the explicit intention of helping children to develop essential skills that can be transferred back into the classroom and in their home lives. There is also a wider awareness of FS across the school, with an additional member of staff being Level 3 FS trained and taking mainstream classes for FS inspired sessions once a half term using a wooded area within the school grounds; this forms part of the school's approach to learning outside of the classroom. During the time of the Breeze Project the school was also expanding its outdoor learning across the school with the ARC teachers leading a whole school professional development session on FS and the development of an Edible Playground with areas for each class with whole school training and an outdoor classroom area; in the final year of the project there was an expectation that all classes spend at least one lesson a week outdoors.

#### *Year 1*

At the start of the 2018/2019 school year Hillhead ARC had one teacher who had completed Level 3 FS training and a second who had completed Level 1. After a year of support from Breeze, the class teachers now felt confident to plan, lead and review sessions independently; they continued to access the FS site at Scotswood Garden for one day a week and received some distanced support, particularly in advising

and helping to fund the development of their FS equipment and resources, which the school also invested in. Seven children were enrolled in the ARC (from Years 2 to 5) with three members of staff typically supporting at FS sessions.

### *Year 2*

In the 2019/2020 year weekly FS days continued, due to staffing changes the Level 1 teacher was no longer available but additional teaching assistants (TAs) completed Level 1 training and sessions continued to be led by the class teacher (Level 3 trained) with 8 children from the ARC. In early 2020 it was decided to move from Scotswood Garden to the school FS site as the ARC had four new children, one of whom was a persistent flight risk, and whilst the school site was not as rich in natural resources as Scotswood Garden it was more secure and so the class teacher began to adapt sessions. This prior experience and the fact that the school did have a suitable FS area meant that FS continued throughout the lockdown period with two children from the ARC and four additional mainstream children taking part March to July 2020.

### *Year 3*

With the full class (12 children on roll, six involved in the research) returning to school in September 2020, the ARC resumed their weekly FS day on school-site; some adaptations were necessary as they were required to share the site with other classes who were also being encouraged to engage in more outdoor learning, this meant that at times they would have to return to the classroom for short periods, but the FS ethos and approach was continued as much as possible with the continuation of crafts and games led by the children. During the January to March 2021 lockdown the ARC children were offered part-time places as vulnerable children, during this time weekly FS sessions were maintained and continued throughout the school year.

### **Theory of change and data collection**

Figure 1 below displays the co-produced theory of change for Hillhead ARC and Table 1 the data collection. The data collection was adapted from March 2020 as school policies meant that the researcher was unable to observe sessions or interview children but the school took on some of this data collection as detailed below. 21 children from the ARC attended FS sessions over the three years of the project but with many attending over shorter periods and large periods of disruption due to national lockdowns, the research focused on 8 children who each experienced at least one full school year of weekly FS sessions; five of these children were enrolled in the ARC over the full three years of the project, meaning that excluding lockdown periods they received weekly sessions for about two and a half school years.

There are three strands through the theory of change that relate to improving children's emotional and behavioural regulation, social interaction and communication skills, and resilience in learning; these lead to two intended outcomes that:

- Children develop the emotional and behavioural skills necessary to be ready to learn
- Children experience an improvement in their emotional wellbeing

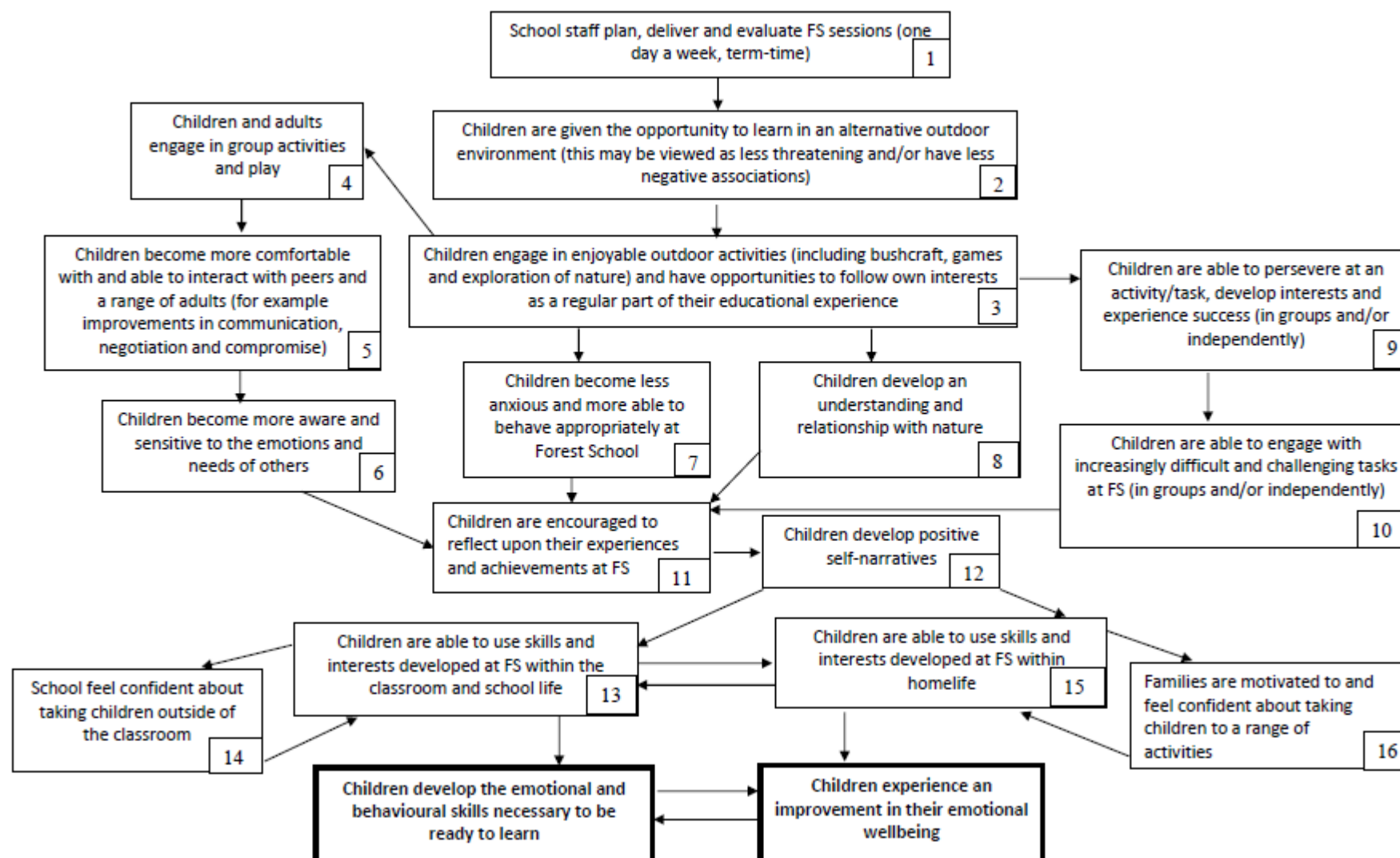
**Table 1: data collection for Hillhead Primary ARC and person responsible**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Collected by</b>
9 observations of FS sessions (September 2018 – February 2020)	Researcher
11 interviews with school staff (September 2018 – July 2021) <sup>5</sup>	Researcher
Children's reflections during sessions	Researcher (September 2018 – February 2020), school staff (March 2020 – July 2021)
Parental/carers comments	School staff
Pupil attendance data	School
Pupil exclusion data	School
School planning, timetabling and evaluation documents	School

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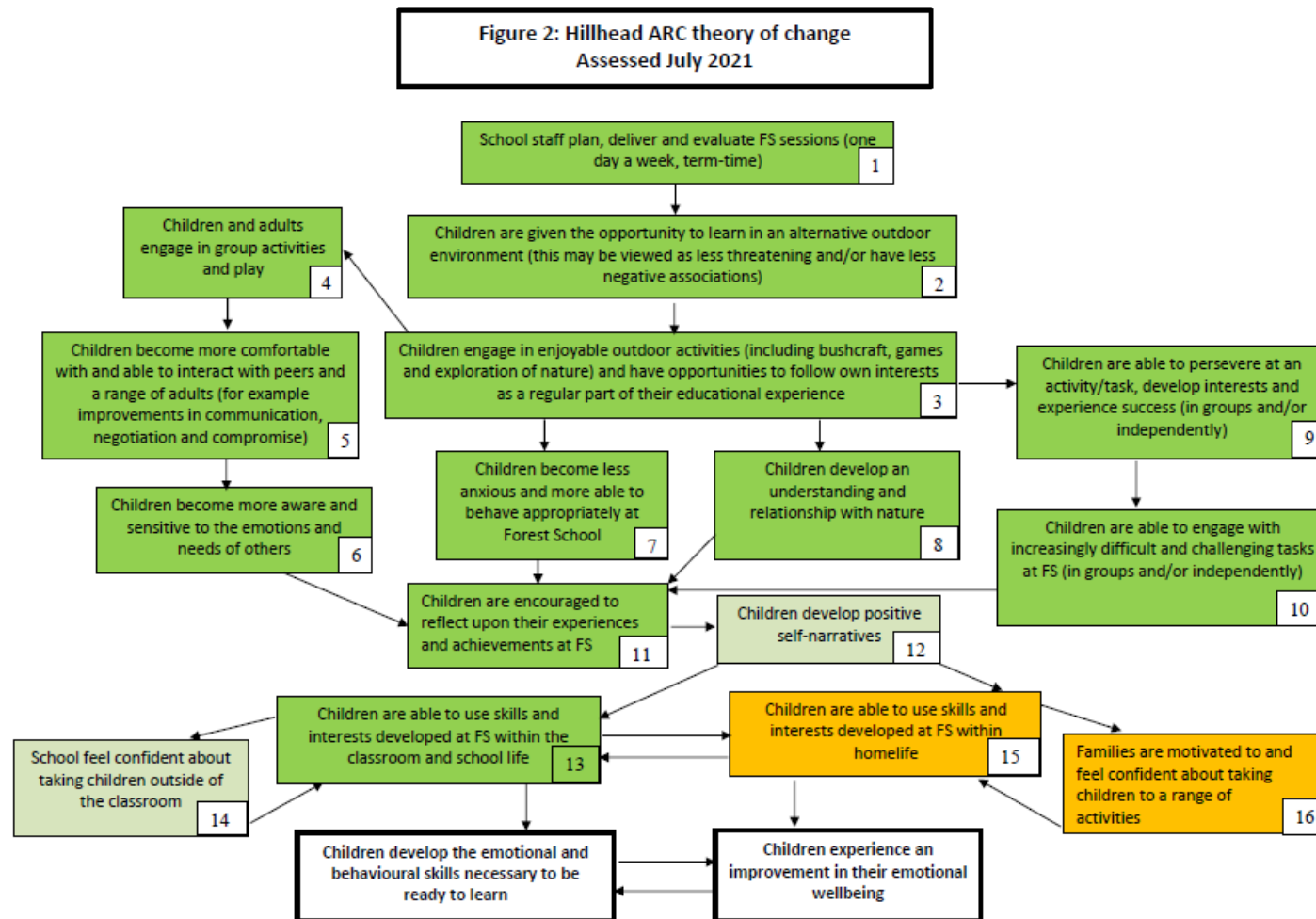
<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 5 for examples of school staff interview questions

**Figure 1: Hillhead ARC theory of change**



## Findings

The evaluated steps of change can be seen in Figure 2 and shows substantial evidence to support the majority of the steps of change.



Bright green =  
substantial evidence to  
support

Olive green = partly  
evidenced: evidence to  
support but either  
incomplete at this stage  
or substantially  
evidenced for particular  
children only

Amber = not evidenced  
in this period but no  
evidence to refute

Red: evidence to refute  
step of change

Examples of data for  
each step of change can  
be seen in Appendix 1

### *Steps 1, 2 & 3*

Hillhead ARC were successful in continuing to plan, deliver and evaluate FS sessions throughout the three years of the project despite the extremely challenging context of the Covid-19 pandemic. There were times when children could not access sessions due to national lockdowns, but for those children in school Breeze continued, giving children the sustained opportunity to learn in this alternative environment as part of their regular school experience and which was welcomed by all of the children: *'I love being out here'; 'I love a Thursday'* (FS day); *'Thursdays always go so fast'* (YP comments reported by school).

*The children continue to see Thursdays as their favourite day and lots of parents have said that they have no difficulty in getting their child ready for school on a Thursday and they are enthusiastic to come to school. This is often a huge improvement especially with children who have previously been at mainstreams on reduced timetables.* (School, Jan 2021)

FS was experienced as both environmentally and pedagogically different to the classroom, enabling the children to learn in different ways and to respond to their own needs.

*The forest school set up really suits Katy, that child-led learning style where she can move around and select her own activities, she's very much driven by what she wants to do and she finds it very easy to be creative, she loves the whittling, the woodwork, that day with the painting, and her confidence in things like tree climbing has massively improved ... In school she finds the structure difficult ... I think it's what she needs and although she's a Year 2 she's still very much learning at that Reception level and it is the only day in the week when she gets that style of learning.* (School, June 2019)

*He loves to climb and playing chasey games, the fact that he can be free and move about as much as he likes at forest school, I think that suits him really well.* (School, June 2019)

*He gets a lot out of being in the forest in the sense of wandering around and the flapping. He finds sitting in the classroom and following the classroom day tricky, forest school is a bit of a release, it's freer and he can regulate with the flapping and things and sit down in a hammock if he wants to, so it does suit him well.* (School, June 2019)

The children were able to choose their own activities and games which led to an enthusiasm that school staff told us was rarely seen within the classroom environment: *'Come and see my den, I made this, it's my secret place'* (YP, 2019); *'You can run around, we play hide and seek and eagle eyes'* (YP, 2019).

#### Step 4

During the 2018/2019 school year many of the children chose to focus on group games and play (planning and evaluation documents, researcher observations), this enabled the children to develop essential social and emotional skills, such as being able to communicate effectively in games, compromising, negotiating any disagreements and being able to successfully join or leave a game without conflict. The FS environment provided lots of opportunities for the young people to develop these skills and also for individuals to develop at different paces and stages according to their needs.

*This year the children are playing more imaginatively, developing social skills and beginning to manage their relationships better.*  
(School, Nov 2018)

*He's more involved with the other children at forest school than he is in the classroom, at forest school you see a lot more of him wanting to join in, whereas he's happy to be on his own here (in the classroom) ... before he would happily sit in a den with an adult and let the games go on around him and never once interact with the others, he didn't even seem to notice that the games were going on, now he has that desire to play with them even if the game isn't really his idea of fun.* (School, June 2019)

#### Steps 5

The combination of opportunities to interact with peers and a range of adults, together with the children feeling more comfortable and at ease during sessions, appeared to allow them to take risks and develop.

*His confidence with the other kids too, at forest school he's much more willing to say 'do you want to do this with me', whereas he wouldn't necessarily do that in class.* (School, June 2019)

*At forest school he speaks to you and Harriet, at his old school he wouldn't talk to any adult, even the adults in his own class never mind others. He wouldn't even ask his key worker if he wanted the toilet, but to come over to you, rather than wait for you to ask him, that's huge. (School, June 2019)*

This emphasis on relationships was also seen to be beneficial following lockdown periods when many of the children were again re-adjusting and developing skills.

*After the second lockdown it was like re-introducing them to one another again and with really basic skills like sharing and looking after each other and we're able to do that through forest school. (School, July 2021)*

*We've had a very high turnover of staff this year and forest school has been that chance for the staff to get to know the children and the children to know the staff in that more informal, working together time ... forest school has been a really nice chance to sit and complete an activity one-to-one with someone who's maybe a new adult and it means that in other opportunities during the week they've already started to build on those relationships ... they (the children) like to show the adults, come and I'll show you how to put up a hammock, because actually they are the experts (School, July 2021)*

Conflict was commonplace within the ARC but the FS environment enabled the children to manage their behaviour more effectively; school staff reported a reduction in the number and intensity of conflicts on FS days and this was also noted by senior leadership.

*At forest school they are a lot more willing to walk away from conflict and be distracted whereas in class they might refuse that support whereas at forest school they are much more willing to go and do something else. (School, July 2021)*

*Our head teacher really sees the benefit, she often says Thursdays (FS day) are our calmest day, there's less behavioural challenges so she'll say Thursdays is when I book my meetings because I know I'm not going to be called upon to go to the ARC, we're not seeing the same sort of difficulties where we might need to call upon senior leaders to help. (School, July 2021)*

## Step 6

There was evidence of children becoming more sensitive to the emotions and needs of others whilst at FS, often in relation to playing fairly 'You're not allowed to victimise anyone' (YP), looking after one another if someone was hurt, making sure everyone was offered food at snack

times and praising one another's efforts and achievements, *'You've done really well Luke'* (YP). The children also regularly made gifts for others, particularly around special occasions such as birthdays. As the class teacher was also the FS leader she was able to remind the children of these positive experiences at other times when they were experiencing challenges and frustrations, *'At forest school they are really caring with one another and again that's nice to be able to refer back to'* (School, July 2021), and school also began to notice the children using their new skills in class:

*They get a lot from playing together, learning to be together ... in the classroom too we are seeing that they are using words first to try and resolve issues.* (School, March 2019)

*In the forest school sessions they really are much more aware when someone's upset and more responsive to that in the classroom than they had been.* (School, July 2021)

#### Step 7

The school believed that children were more relaxed in the FS environment and that this could be seen in a reduction of anxious behaviours:

*In school when he's anxious he barks, it can be quite a lot when he's anxious but we hardly hear that at all at forest school, it's not never but it's a lot less frequent. Today I didn't hear him at all, which says a lot about how he's feeling and suggests that he's feeling less anxious, more comfortable.* (School, June 2019)

#### Step 8

Children also developed an understanding and relationship with nature, *'I've seen newts sleeping ... come and see'* (YP, 2019), *'I love it here, it's so peaceful'* (YP, 2019) and this has also been seen to have an impact within the more general school environment:

*Out on the yard you often hear some of the children talking about looking after nature, they have brought that back to school. I've heard them telling other children within the school and they are thinking about the impact that they're having.* (School, June 2019)

*They've developed their bug hunting and identification and which trees to use, they are much more aware of what resources we've got in terms of plants and trees and how to look after them.* (School, July 2021)

### *Steps 9 & 10*

All of the children within the ARC have struggled to engage in learning within the classroom; typical reactions to finding a task difficult would be to give up, withdraw or reactive aggressively. FS provides a number of opportunities that require perseverance but many CYP also find intrinsically motivating and all of the children were able to persevere at increasingly difficult and challenging tasks and achieve success over time.

Everyone is putting up tarps but Hugo is struggling, becoming frustrated and shouting that he can't do it. After some time he calms down enough to be able to work with Mrs Coates and as he finishes the knot at the end declares '*Look Mrs Coates, I'm actually doing it, I'm finally doing it*', later he tells another adult '*Look what I did with Mrs Coates*'. (Researcher observations, April 2019)

*His confidence has massively increased. It was that fear of failure that sometimes stops him, that is something we see in school if he feels like he's got something wrong, that can be a trigger for shutting down, but at forest school he's taking more and more risks, he perseveres at things. Like last week when making the hot chocolate with the kelly kettle, he could not light it and if it was something in class and he couldn't do it after a couple of attempts, not even that, he would give up, whereas the fact he kept going, kept going.* (School, June 2019)

*Henry with the fire, over the course of the last few months he keeps coming back to the same activity and we are seeing each time an increased level of independence and what he can do with it, he keeps coming back to it and extending the experience so now he'll set everything up, collect the sticks, he know the safety things, will make quite a good attempt at laying everything out and once he gets it going, cooking on it. He will now see that whole activity through to some sort of conclusion, he's finally got that sense of purpose ... in class he finds independence incredibly difficult.* (School, June 2019)

### *Steps 11*

These positive experiences were always celebrated at FS and the school staff would encourage the children to reflect on their experiences both at FS and back in the classroom.

*School staff often encourage the children to reflect on their experiences during FS sessions, 'how did that go?', 'remember when you ...' Children and staff also celebrate one another's successes, particularly when it has required perseverance. The YP find it hard to engage*

*in reflection activities as a group so it is usually done either with an individual or small group as occasions arise rather than at the end of the session. (Researcher observations)*

*We've been able to draw upon his successes at forest school, that's how we introduced him to integration, his first integration was a forest school session so he would be that little bit more confident ... we're seeing Terry managing more and more with his anxiety, he's actually experiencing successes and he's seeing times when he doesn't get it right first time and it doesn't matter. I think the Terry that we're seeing now is getting more and more able to cope when things go wrong. (School, June 2019)*

*On a Friday, in the morning, we've been doing a reflection of what they've been up to at forest school and that's working as a reflection ... the end of the session had always been quite fraught and that's been a sticking point across the project, this reflection at the end of the session but Friday mornings have been working. They talk about the things they like doing, some weeks we talk about something where it might have gone wrong and they have to persevere or cope with new strategies. We also talk about what they have planned for next week so that helps me get what we need. (School, July 2021)*

*Seeing the children really engage in activities and that's nice to refer back to when we're back in class and a way to prove to them actually you can sit and do something. (School, July 2021)*

## **Step 12**

During sessions children would show delight at their achievements: *I built that with Harriet!* (YP); *I got the certificate for the 10 minute fire challenge,* *I did it all myself!* (YP). Later in the project, some of the children were also able to take on the role of experts in demonstrating the skills they had developed to newer members of group.

*During lockdown two of our children continued forest school with a small group of key worker and vulnerable children in school. They had that opportunity to be experts and show the others their skills which has been really beneficial for them, taking that role that they wouldn't normally have with mainstream children. (School, June 2020)*

*There's been times when some of them that have been with us longer have been able to take the lead in teaching the newer ones how to build a fire and helping the others, and with the likes of Timmy and Albert they are very confident at forest school now. (School, July 2021)*

These successes and achievements were very important to the young people who have had many unsuccessful experiences at school and towards the end of Breeze there was evidence of children internalising these and recognising the skills they have developed at FS.

*The children have been asked to think about skills they have developed this year and I would say 90% of their examples were times at forest school, things like teamwork, creativity and problem solving, they can really see those skills in the things they do at forest school ... I think that shows that they are unpicking what they are doing at forest school. (School, July 2021)*

### Step 13

As the project progressed there was increasing evidence that the positive experiences the children were having at FS were also impacting on the children's wider experience of school.

*Well they are generally more prepared to give things a go, they all took part in the KS2 performance at Christmas, previously we would maybe have one prepared to do that, and half of the children now integrate into mainstream classes at some point over the week. That's the highest number integrating we've ever had ... Last year we mainly saw the impacts at forest school but this year we are seeing the impacts back at school too. (School, Jan 2020)*

*Parents have commented that the increased interest in school and pride in their photos (from FS) has helped create a more positive view of school for the children. This in turn has helped the parents as they feel that they are not having to struggle to get their child to attend school. (School, Feb 2021)*

*A lot of them do have a lot of baggage about being in class so it can be a big hill to climb but we're seeing there has been an increase in their willingness to give things a go, to work with one another and mediate difficulties with one another and willingness to move on from things and that has massively changed. (School, July 2021)*

Furthermore, both attendance and exclusions data showed considerable improvements for these children during the Breeze project (see Table 2 below), with the mean attendance improving from 90% in 2018/2019, to 94% in 2019/2020, to 97% in 2020/21, whilst exclusions reduced from 54 sessions (am or pm) in 2018/2019, to 17 in 2019/2020, to 10 in 2020/21.

**Table 2: Attendance and exclusions data for Hillhead ARC children**

	Mean attendance for group	Total number of exclusions
<b>2018/2019 (7 children)</b>	90%	54 across 4 children
<b>2019/2020 (8 children)</b>	94%	17 across 2 children
<b>2020/2021 (6 children)</b>	97%	10 for 1 child

Note for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 the percentage given is the percentage of possible attendances for each child, ie discounting lockdown periods if school was not available

#### *Step 14*

In articulating Hillhead's theory of change at the start of the project, school staff stated that educational opportunities outside of the ARC classroom were limited due to the volatile and unpredictable behaviour of the children. Through Breeze, they were able to successfully attend FS sessions at Scotswood Garden from Sept 2018 until Feb 2020, when a sudden increase in numbers and a persistent flight risk caused them to relocate to school site, followed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, they continued FS sessions throughout the project and reported fewer and less severe behavioural incidents at FS compared to the classroom. Before the pandemic the school reported that for the first time all of the children had taken part in the school Christmas performance and that half of the class were integrating into mainstream for some of the week; these achievements demonstrate that the children were able to increasingly manage their behaviour outside of the classroom, however, the pandemic and all of its restrictions meant that opportunities to further develop these opportunities were not possible.

#### *Steps 15 & 16*

Children were often keen to share their FS experiences with parents and families and took craft projects home, with parents reporting to school staff that FS is one of the few things the children discuss about school at home and which the school further developed through sharing pictures with families on their home learning app.

*We have been posting photos and updates of forest school on the app Seesaw which was intended for home learning. Children have been going home and telling parents about what they have been doing at forest school and encouraging their parents to look at the photos of the day on Seesaw. This has helped us engage parents in home learning and helped improve parents' engagement in the app. On this lockdown we have had a much higher uptake in home learning because parents were all already using the app. (School, Feb 2021)*

However, the research was unable to establish whether or not the children had been able to transfer their skills and interests developed at FS into home life and whether or not this led families to feel motivated and confident about taking children to a range of activities. Opportunities for activities have been significantly limited over the pandemic, together with the additional burdens on families leading to difficulties in engaging parents and carers in research.

Nevertheless, despite the extremely challenging context of the pandemic which the children were all living through during Breeze, there is significant evidence from the school setting that all of the children in this research group had countless positive experiences whilst at FS and were able to develop social, emotional and behavioural skills that improved their relationships and aided them in their learning and engagement in school.

## **School B – Northgate School**

### **Context and engagement with the Breeze Project**

Northgate is a secondary specialist school for young people (YP) who are unable to attend mainstream provision due to social, emotional and mental health difficulties; many have a history of poor school attendance and/or have been school refusers and placements vary from a few weeks or months to long-term with a high number of in-year transfers. Northgate was involved in the pilot year of Breeze (2017/2018) and saw impacts in relation to integrating new students and developing relationships, student engagement, overcoming anxieties and achieving success (Tiplady 2018). However, the staff member completing the Level 3 Forest School (FS) training left before the end of the school year and so it was necessary for the Level 1 trained member of staff to engage in the Level 3 training during the following school year and whilst the school engaged in regular outdoor sessions, it was not until September 2019 that weekly Breeze sessions were again established and the research period began.

#### *Year 1 (2018/2019)*

Northgate staff member completes Level 3 FS training and school engages in a range of outdoor learning sessions including FS inspired activities and some FS sessions delivered by an external FS practitioner. Additional staff member completes Level 1 training and school continues to attend Breeze meetings.

#### *Year 2 (2019/2020)*

September 2019 Breeze is re-established as a weekly all day FS session at Scotswood Garden, students aged between 12 and 13 years; numbers fluctuate between 5 and 12 due to variability in student numbers across the year. Sessions are led by the school FS lead and supported by school staff and for periods a FS practitioner funded by Breeze; planning and evaluation is completed by the school FS lead with support from the FS practitioner and researcher where they attended sessions. In March 2020 sessions are suspended as schools close due to the pandemic; as Northgate opens to key worker and vulnerable young people, outdoor learning and FS inspired activities form an integrated part of the curriculum.

### *Year 3 (2020/2021)*

In September 2020 weekly Breeze sessions are resumed at Scotswood Garden with Covid-19 mitigations in place (for example students are given backpacks containing their own resources and shared items are cleaned after each use). During the January to March 2021 lockdown Breeze is once again suspended but outdoor learning sessions continue on school site for those accessing school. Breeze resumes in March 2021 as schools open again to all CYP and continues to the end of the school year. The level 1 FS accredited member of staff completes level 3 and an additional staff member completes Level 1 training.

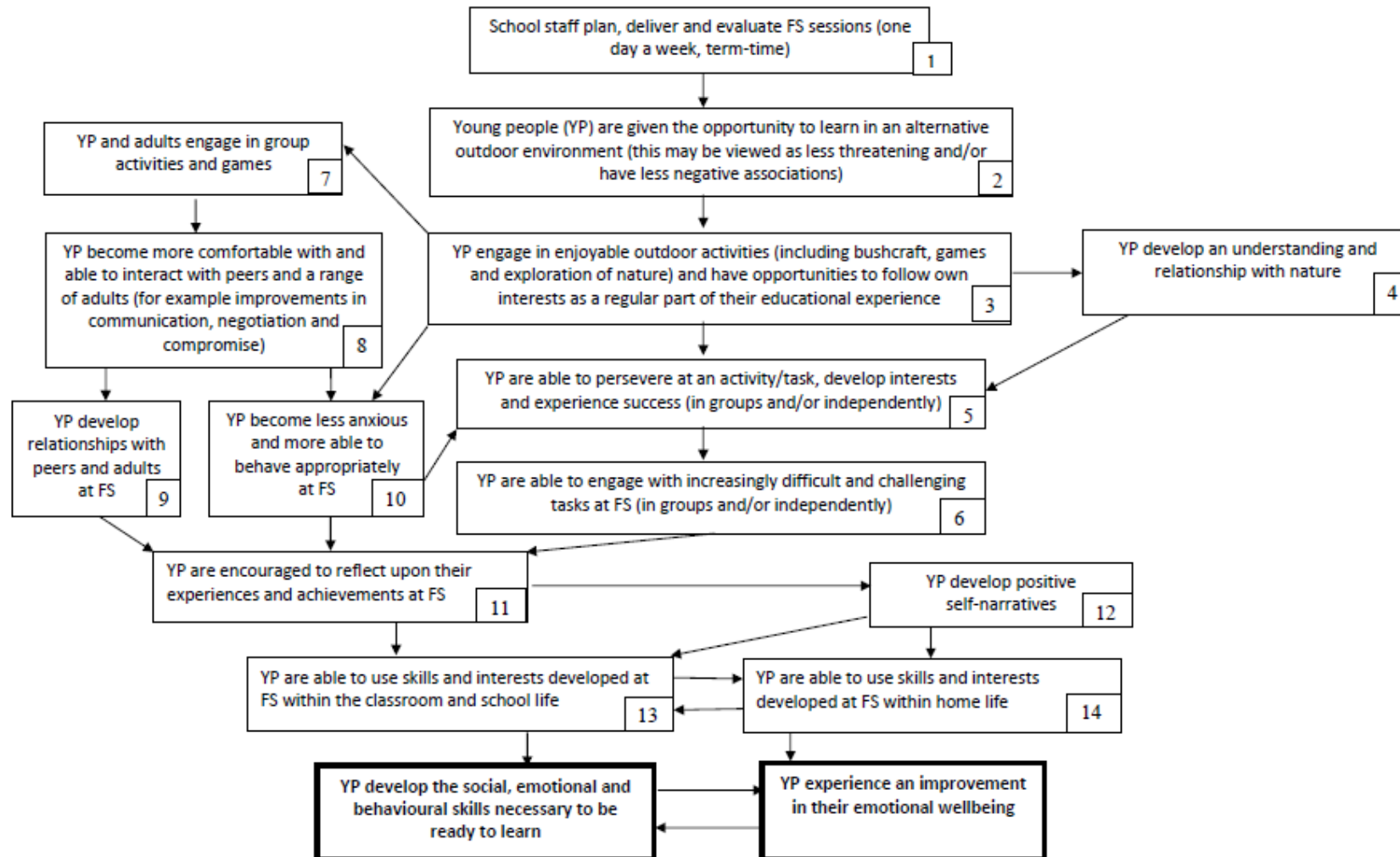
### **Theory of change and data collection**

Figure 3 below displays the co-produced theory of change for Northgate School in September 2019 and Table 3 the data collection (this includes adaptations made due to the Covid-19 pandemic). Twelve young people took part in Breeze sessions over this period but as some only participated for shorter periods (due to disruptions caused by the pandemic and short-term nature of some enrolments), the research focused on six young people who took part in weekly FS sessions for a minimum of nine months (equivalent to one full school year) over the research period.

There are two strands within the model; the first is focused on YP developing interests and skills for engagement and the second on developing social, emotional and communication skills necessary for relationships and emotional regulation. These strands lead to two intended outcomes that:

- YP develop the social, emotional and behavioural skills necessary to be ready to learn
- YP experience an improvement in their emotional wellbeing

**Figure 3: Northgate theory of change**



**Table 3: data collection for Northgate School and person responsible**

Data	Collected by
School planning, timetabling and evaluation documents	School
3 observations of sessions (September 2019 – February 2020) 2 observations of sessions (June – July 2021)	Researcher
10 interviews with school staff <sup>6</sup> (September 2018 – July 2021)	Researcher
YP's reflections during sessions	Researcher (September 2018 – February 2020) Researcher (June - July 2021)
4 parental/carers interviews <sup>7</sup>	Researcher

## Findings

The evaluated steps of change for Northgate can be seen in Figure 4 below and shows that the majority of steps of change had substantial evidence to support.

### *Step 1*

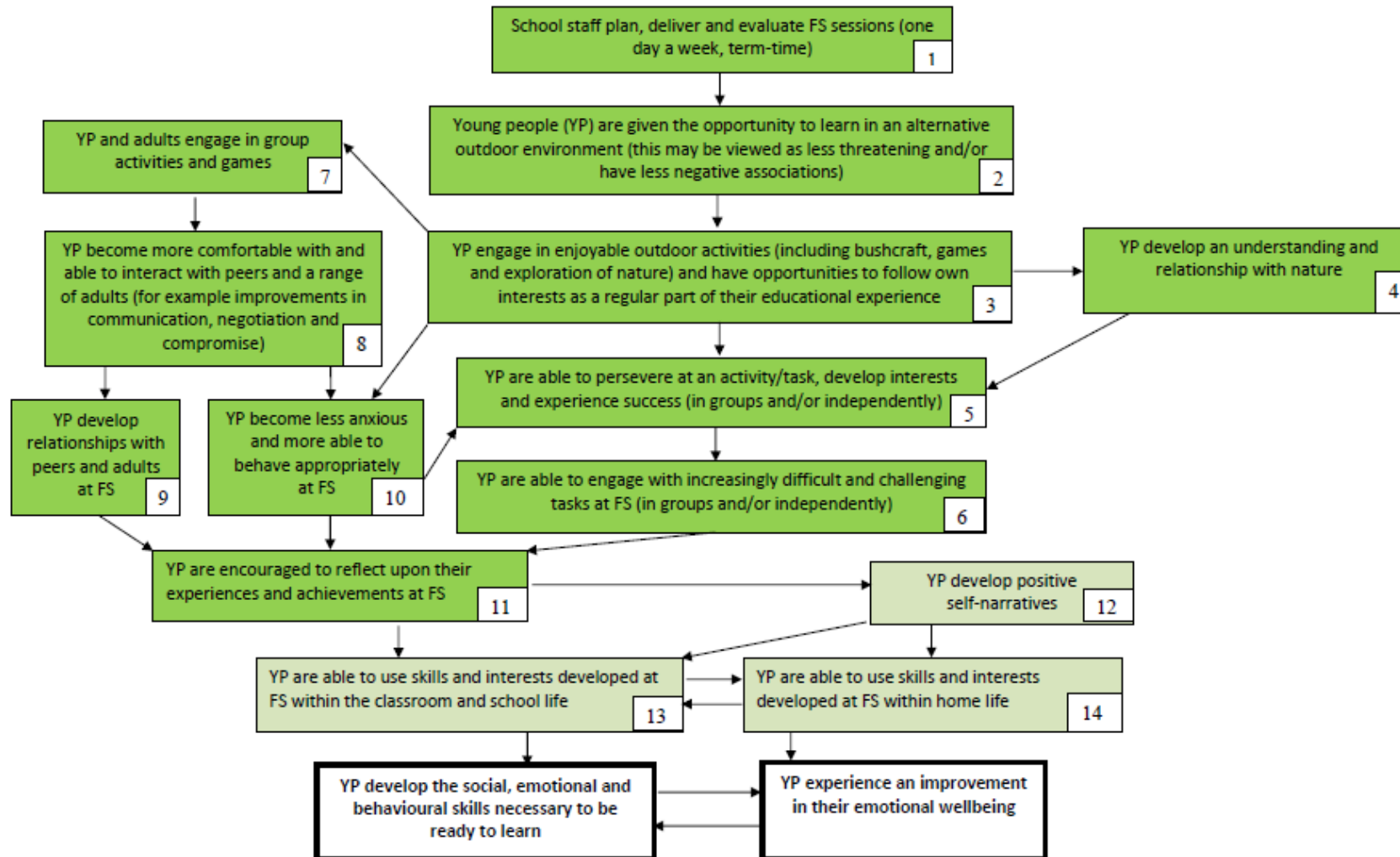
Over the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 school years Northgate planned, delivered and evaluated weekly FS sessions at Scotswood Garden (lasting approximately 4 hours) during term time; Breeze was suspended during the two lockdown periods in 2020 and 2021 but outdoor learning sessions were continued on school site for those attending school and Breeze was reinstated as soon as schools reopened for all YP.

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 5 for examples of school staff interview questions

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 6 for parental/carers interview questions

**Figure 4: Northgate theory of change  
Assessed July 2021**



Bright green =  
substantial evidence to  
support

Olive green = partly  
evidenced: evidence to  
support but either  
incomplete at this stage  
or substantially  
evidenced for particular  
children only

Amber = not evidenced  
in this period but no  
evidence to refute

Red: evidence to refute  
step of change

Examples of data for  
each step of change can  
be seen in Appendix 3

### Step 2

Northgate recognised FS as an important opportunity to support students' wellbeing and development and during the pandemic as part of their recovery curriculum in supporting the YP to re-connect socially and develop relationships with peers and staff:

*The central feature of the Enrichment programme in Key Stage 3 is the school's involvement in a forest school project ... The sessions are designed to develop confidence and resilience through a hands-on learning experience in a woodland or natural setting. (School curriculum documentation)*

*Many of our young people haven't left the house throughout lockdowns so it's a readjustment period for them, especially with that social aspect (School, Jan 2021)*

There was a commitment to providing the YP with this regular experience in an alternative outdoor environment despite the extremely challenging context of the pandemic with the school developing risk assessments including measures such as providing each young person with their own backpack of resources and developing protocols for shared equipment to enable sessions to restart when schools reopened. The benefits were recognised by school staff and YP:

*Outside it's more relaxed and you have that space, it's nice to be able to talk to them and they can open up more if others aren't too close ... they might ask for help with something when they wouldn't usually in the classroom (School, Jan 2021)*

*In a classroom it's full of tension but out here it's really calming (YP, June 2021)*

### Step 3

There was a commitment to supporting the YP to engage with outdoor activities that they found enjoyable and to support individual interests and choices within the group.

*They often take on different roles within the group according to their interests and abilities, so one might be the chef and another lead on building structures. (School, Jan 2021)*

Parents and carers have commented on how much their children have enjoyed and benefitted from FS:

*He absolutely loved it, loved every minute, he was on a high when he came in (after FS) (Parent/carer Feb 2020)*

*Luke thoroughly enjoyed forest school especially whittling and being outdoors. He enjoyed making fire, building dens, navigating with a compass and using a knife in woodwork, as well as cooking outdoors (Parent/carer Feb 2020)*

YP valued the learner-centred approach and time away from curriculum and attainment focused constraints: *I like it because you can choose and there's quite a lot of choices (YP, July 2021); In school it's all about work but here we have free time (YP, June 2021).*

#### *Step 4*

There was further evidence of YP developing an understanding and connection with nature; some of the YP were initially reluctant about the outdoors, some had had very little experience of the outdoors and others had concerns about mud and insects but very soon all the YP became comfortable within the environment and showed an interest in nature:

*A crow joins the group and the YP discuss what it might be doing and thinking, they call him Tommy, 'he's here for his lunch, he wants your lunch', 'here comes Tommy again, I wonder what he's doing', 'he's after your spot, this is his patch', 'he wants to join in'.*  
(Researcher observation, June 2021)

*I started noticing the tiny details that other people take for granted and how nice it looks (YP talking about taking photographs of nature, July 2021)*

Some YP relished the space the woodland afforded to run around, some developed their knowledge of trees, plants and animals and others spoke about how nature impacted upon their mood and state of mind, *'I've also learnt that nature can be very calming'* (YP, June 2021).

#### *Steps 5 & 6*

Researcher observations from the autumn/winter of 2019 showed many of the young people finding it hard to settle on an activity and becoming easily frustrated, but over time the YP were supported to develop skills in activities of interest to them, for example for one young

person fire lighting and cooking, for another photography, for some tool use and others knots and building structures. Over time the YP were able to engage in increasingly complex and challenging tasks:

*I've learnt quite a lot like fire, when I first came I didn't know anything about fire, it was really hard to get it started but now it's getting easier ... you have to collect the wood and check for hazards and then start building the fire like this, sometimes I rush it a bit ... when a new teacher came she couldn't get the fire going and I showed her, I got it going straight away (YP, June 2021)*

*Adam shows me his bee sculpture, it's made out of a tin can, which he's painted with a face and with strings and bells attached. 'I've been working on this for three weeks, I did this bit first and then added the bells, I want to add some wings next' (Researcher observation and YP, June 2021)*

*Billy and Leo work together to put up their hammocks and build a den around them, they work independently and quickly, I ask them about the knots and Leo tells me 'this one's a half-hitch'. Their teacher tells me that when they started forest school they were often reluctant to tie any knots themselves and would rely on staff but that over time they had built their skills and confidence and could now design quite complex dens independently. (Researcher observations, July 2021)*

### Steps 9 & 11

In addition to developing perseverance and practical skills, these positive and successful experiences helped to boost the YP's confidence and school staff supported YP to internalise these successes through providing positive feedback and encouragement and through reminding the YP of their successes if they found something difficult later on. The high staff to student ratio enabled the YP to be supported in their activities and interactions and for the staff and students to develop close and trusted relations.

*Recently we've done more tool based projects, developing the skills and confidence that they can do some of these things on their own, having that experience and skills they can use in their future lives. Extending projects and the students' ideas. (School, Jan 2021)*

In 2019, school staff commented upon how the FS context enabled students to show a different range of skills and be seen in a new light:

*Seeing them in a totally different context, a group of young people with different skills that we don't necessarily see in the classroom, it gave me more insights into individuals and potential that we don't always unlock in school because of the drive towards the curriculum and attainment. (School, 2019)*

Researcher observations in the summer of 2021 showed staff and students interacting with ease with one another, conversations were friendly, often joking with one another in a good-humoured manner, with students appearing happy to ask for help or advice when needed and school staff encouraging and celebrating the students efforts, 'that's right, keep going, you managed that well last week', 'that's funny, you're so talented, I love reading your stories'.

#### *Steps 7, 8 & 9*

FS typically involves lots of group activities and games and this was certainly the case at Northgate too, where games of manhunt and hide and seek tag were frequently enjoyed as well as card games such as Uno and group activities such as den building. All these involved the YP developing their communication and social skills; for some this was about being able to communicate and stick to agreed rules of the game, as well as developing abilities to negotiate when things don't go to plan, for others it was developing skills to enter a game with others and retain involvement. Over time there was evidence of YP developing all these skills, becoming more comfortable with their peers and developing relationships:

*He can be socially awkward, doing the right thing can be difficult for him, he's got autism and ADHD. But working alongside peers, developing social skills, team work skills, that's been good for him. (Parent/carer Sept 2021)*

*We see them developing those interpersonal skills, teamwork and personal and social development ... Being able to engage with one another and the task they have chosen, as they often find that difficult in class. (School, Jan 2021)*

*Playing Uno has helped him to get involved with the others, before he would always take himself off but it's helped him to get involved. Now they will all play games of tag and they include him, if it gets a bit silly he will take some time out but then he'll be back again later on. They really feel like a group now, they've managed to gel together in their different ways. (School, June 2021)*

### Step 10

YP, parents and school staff all recognised FS as an escape from some of the pressures the YP experience, with reported reductions in anxiety and behavioural incidents and increased positivity:

*It's lovely to see them so relaxed here, they're very happy. They're a great class but some of them can struggle in the classroom but not here* (School, June 2021)

*I like it here because it's relaxing, I just watch the nature ... it's nice to know that we'll be coming here on a Friday* (YP, July 2021)

*He loved it, would always talk about it before and afterwards. Felt it was so good for him to have some fun ... forest school helped him to smile again* (Parent/carer Sept 2021)

*He really enjoys being hands on when using the kelly kettle and the responsibility, he also enjoys his surroundings and taking photos of what he finds ... he suffers from anxiety and finds if some situations get a bit much, that taking himself off to take photos has really helped him* (Parent/carer, Oct 2021)

### Step 12

There was evidence of some YP recognising their achievements, expressing feelings of pride and achievement, with parents and carers also commenting on the YP's increased confidence:

*I'm proud of myself, that I did that!* (YP after putting up a hammock independently for the first time, Dec 2019)

*He developed in leaps and bounds, his confidence, doing something new, the fire, hammocks, bushcraft* (Parent/carer Sept 2021)

*The benefits are that he's in the outdoors, doing things that he wouldn't usually be doing. It gives him more confidence in himself and independence.* (Parent/carer, Oct 2021)

*Building up good habits, outdoor experiences that capture his imagination ... building his self-confidence.* (Parent/carer, Sept 2021)

However, since this data was not available for all YP in the group and it more often came from parent/carer observations than from the YP themselves, it was assessed to be 'partly' rather than 'substantially' evidenced. Establishing evidence of positive self-narratives can prove challenging when the YP involved have experienced years of negative experiences and are still developing their social and emotional awareness and ability and/or desire to articulate that, however, as shown there was a wealth of evidence of all YP having positive experiences at FS and displaying positive behaviours.

#### *Step 14*

There was some evidence of FS interests and experiences impacting within the home environment but again this could only be evidenced in some cases:

*We have pictures from forest school at home on the fridge, we look at them every day* (Parent/carer Feb 2020)

*I've started growing things, I've got an onion and a sunflower in pots at home* (YP, June 2021)

*I'd like to go to more places like this in the future* (YP, June 2021)

#### *Step 13*

Finally, school staff told us how the overwhelming positive impacts of the Breeze FS project had driven expansion of their enrichment and outdoor learning curriculum throughout the school, with outdoor learning opportunities now being available to all year groups in the school:

*We wanted to take that forest school ethos and skills and continue to develop that with the students, to provide that balance, life experience and therapeutic quality alongside the academic. So as well as forest school, we're now offering outdoor learning and the John Muir award to develop our Key Stage 3 curriculum. At Key Stage 4 we're offering Environmental Studies and John Muir ... We've invested in staff training and some have previous experiences too, outdoor learning is now an integral part of what we offer and we've continued that for our students coming into school over the lockdowns.* (School, Jan 2021)

Northgate undoubtedly recognised the many and varied benefits of the project and this underpinned their commitment to Breeze throughout the pandemic and expansion of outdoor learning opportunities across the school.

## School C – Summer Grove School

### Context and engagement with the Breeze Project

Summer Grove School is a secondary specialist school for young people (YP) aged 11 to 19 years with significant learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and complex learning difficulties and disabilities; all students have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Due to the high needs of students, typical class sizes are between seven and ten, with a minimum of one class teacher and one teaching assistant. The school has large accessible outdoor spaces that are available for learning and social activities, including a small wildlife pond, greenhouse, small horticulture area and a multi-use games area, but had no previous experience of FS. The school chose to participate in Breeze in order to widen their offer of curriculum provision designed to support the social and emotional needs of students.

#### *Year 1*

In the 2018/2019 school year eight students aged 12-16 years attended weekly Breeze FS sessions at Scotswood Garden for a full school day; the school selected students with social and emotional needs relating to their disability, home-environment and/or experience of trauma, two of the YP were care experienced and two had recently experienced parental deaths. Three members of staff attended sessions along with the FS practitioner; one member of staff engaged and completed Level 3 FS training and a second completed Level 1 training over the school year.

#### *Year 2*

In 2019/2020 Summer Grove moved their sessions to a site adjacent to their school and in order to allow more students to experience FS senior leaders decided to reduce the duration from one school year to termly. Sessions were planned, delivered and evaluated by school staff, with the Level 1 trained member of staff also completing Level 3 and an additional member of staff completing Level 1 over the year. One group of eight YP participated from mid-September to December 2019 and a second group of nine from January to mid-March 2020 when Breeze was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### *Year 3*

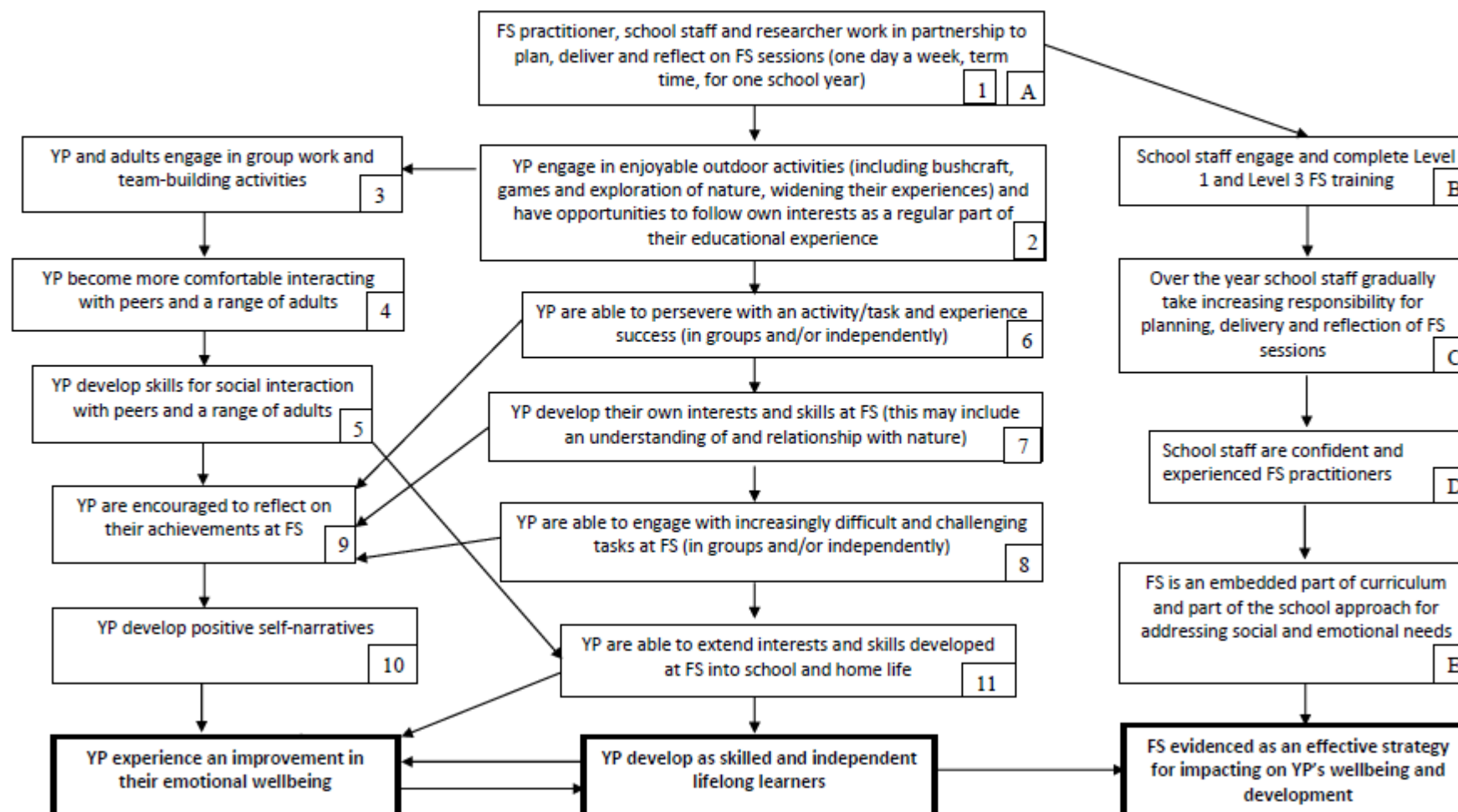
FS sessions resumed in October to Nov 2020 with eight students who attended for three hours once a week and then again from January until July 2021. A second group of five students attended for an afternoon session (for approximately 1.5 hrs) from January to July 2021. Sessions were again planned, delivered and evaluated by school staff with an additional member of staff completing Level 1 FS training.

### **Theory of change and data collection**

Figure 5 below displays the co-produced theory of change for Summer Grove School at the start of their engagement with Breeze. There are two strands of action within the model: the first is focused on impacts for the YP and the second relates to impacts for the school. These steps of change lead to three intended outcomes that:

- YP experience an improvement in their emotional wellbeing
- YP develop as skilled and independent lifelong learners
- FS is evidenced as an effective strategy for impacting on YP's wellbeing and development

Figure 5: Summer Grove theory of change



Summer Grove participated in Breeze across the three school years but the delivery of the project and ability to engage in the research was considerably different in each year. For this reason, the theory of change has been assessed firstly in relation to Year 1 (2018-2019) and secondly in relation to Year 3 (2020-2021); it was decided not to include Year 2 in the research as students had limited time to engage with Breeze (three months and two months, which was much less than the intended school year) and the research data available was also much more limited. Table 4 below displays the data collection for Year 1 and Table 5 for Year 3; data collection in Year 3 was restricted by the on-going Covid-19 pandemic and was therefore more reliant on school collected evidence.

**Table 4: data collection for Summer Grove School and person responsible in Year 1**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Collected by</b>
School planning, timetabling and evaluation documents	School, FS practitioner and researcher
11 observations of sessions	Researcher
5 interviews with school staff <sup>8</sup>	Researcher
2 interviews with the FS practitioner <sup>9</sup>	Researcher
YP's reflections during sessions	Researcher, school and FS practitioner
7 individual interviews with YP using visual methods <sup>10</sup>	Researcher
2 interviews with parents/carers <sup>11</sup>	Researcher
8 FS student reports	School

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 5 for examples of school staff interview questions

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 7 for FS practitioner interview questions

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 8 for examples of visual methods and YP interview questions

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 6 for parental/carer interview questions

**Table 5: data collection for Summer Grove School and person responsible in Year 3**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Collected by</b>
School planning, timetabling and evaluation documents	School
2 observations of sessions	Researcher
2 interviews with school staff (on-line) <sup>12</sup>	Researcher
YP's reflections during sessions	School and researcher
3 interviews with parents/carers (on-line) <sup>13</sup>	Researcher
13 FS student reports	School

## **Findings**

### ***Year 1***

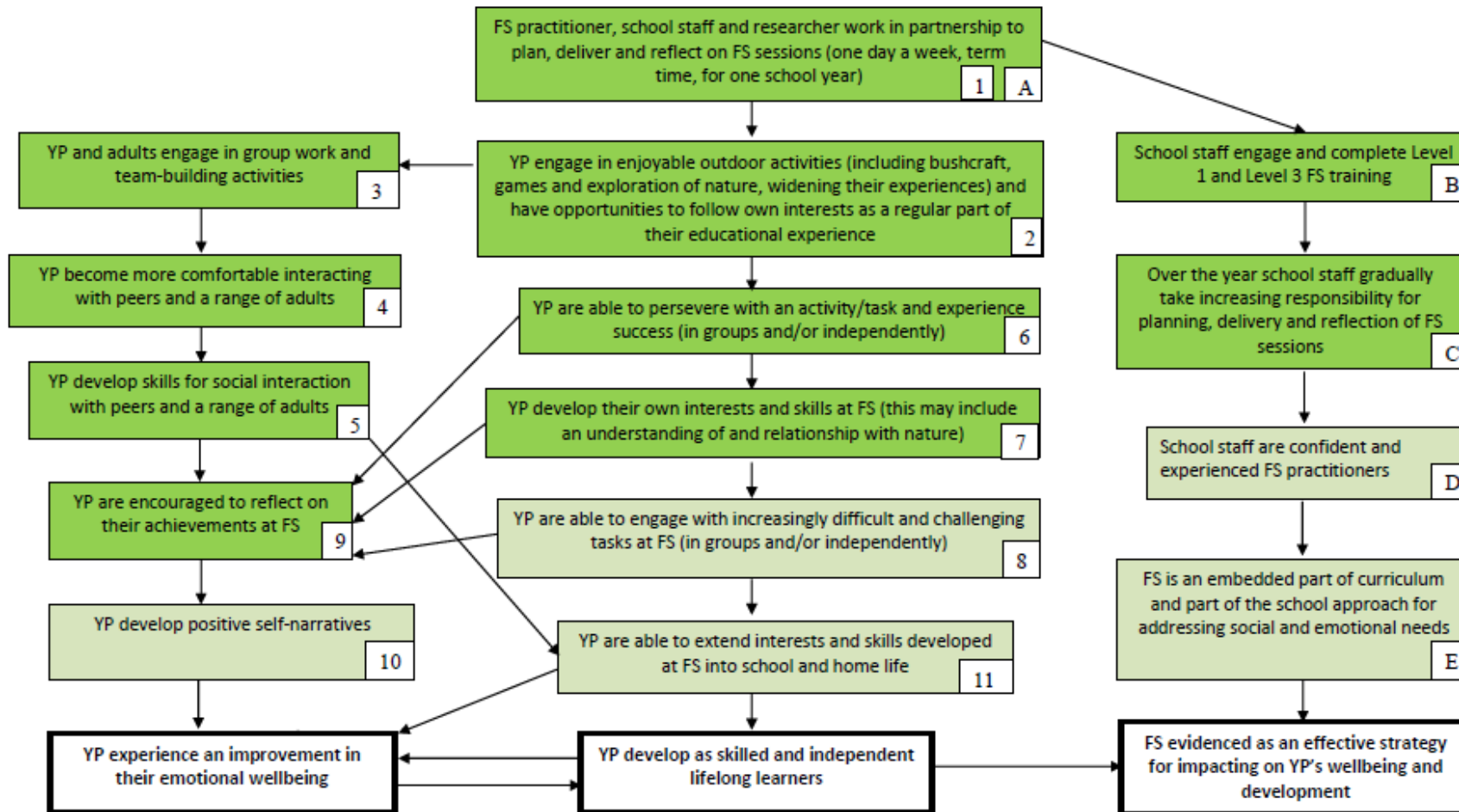
By the end of Year 1 of Breeze there was substantial evidence to support the majority of the steps of change and partial evidence to support the remaining steps, none of the steps had no evidence to support and none had evidence to refute them. This is displayed in Figure 6 below:

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 5 for examples of school staff interview questions

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix 6 for parental/carer interview questions

**Figure 6: Summer Grove theory of change  
Assessed July 2019 (Year 1)**



### *Step 1*

School staff had worked in partnership with the FS practitioner and researcher to plan, deliver and reflect on FS sessions for one day a week over the school year. This had involved weekly review and planning meetings between the school and FS practitioner, with research observations also feeding into these meetings, as well as the co-delivery of weekly sessions.

### *Step 2*

The YP were able to engage in enjoyable outdoor sessions as part of their regular education, with the students particularly commenting on the freedom and learner-led pedagogy they experienced at FS:

*You get to run around, you don't have to stay in one place (YP)*

*You get to do what you like rather than being told by teachers (YP)*

*It's exciting, you get to learn new things every week for projects that you want to do (YP)*

Crafting projects sometimes drew inspiration from existing interests the YP had, such as online gaming with YP choosing to make 'play buttons', characters or plaques with insignia from materials they found in the woods. Some of the YP did find the learner-led approach challenging at times and could find it difficult to select their own activity, '*Choosing is different, you don't have pencils, sometimes you don't know*'; in these cases the YP were often supported to engage by a member of school staff with the intention of gradually reducing this support over time. School staff commented that often young people with learning disabilities are not given the same opportunities to make choices as their peers without disabilities and so required more support to develop these skills.

### *Step 3*

Sessions always included opportunities for group work and team building activities; the YP enjoyed games such as eagle eyes and hide and seek and often choose to take part in activities in pairs or small groups. These opportunities were almost always well received by the YP and school staff noted the YP's engagement within the FS environment.

*Jacob has participated in a range of games such as hide and seek and eagle eyes. These are activities that Jacob might be reluctant to participate in at school (FS student report)*

*Jim has been able to work effectively within a team and despite having his own set ideas of how an outcome should look (hanging a tarp in the woods), he has been able to accept his friends ideas and supported them to achieve their goal (FS student report)*

#### *Step 4*

Over their year at FS, the YP all became more comfortable interacting with their peers and a range of adults; this included the school staff and also the FS practitioner and researcher. The YP recognised that adults within FS had different roles compared to school, describing them as 'cool, different, more calm' and 'it's different, they let you do what you want to do', and also appreciated FS as a space to spend time with friends:

*At Forest School we can hang with our friends, we don't do that at school, we could but don't, not sure why (YP)*

School staff noticed how some of the YP could present more socially confident at FS, 'they can surprise you, more socially confident', and how YP would move beyond their usual friendship groups:

*Taylor has shown an increase in the amount of positive interactions he has with his peers. Initially Taylor would stick quite firmly in his comfort zone of maybe 3 close friends but he will now play and talk with all members of the group (FS student report)*

#### *Step 5*

YP and school staff both recognised the skills developed through these opportunities,

*You learn how to get along with people, good teamwork. Working on things you never normally do in school (YP)*

*Kacey is more motivated to communicate with the others at forest school, at school she's not keen on using her voice and doesn't persevere much, but we're seeing her trying much harder at forest school (School)*

*At school Jason mainly interacts with adults, he has that one to one support which he relies on but at forest school he's increasingly able to spend time with his peers (School)*

#### Step 6

In articulating their theory of change, Summer Grove School explained how many of their students struggled with perseverance as their disabilities had led to limited opportunities for risk taking and challenge.

*The children in my school, in most cases, are brought to school in minibuses. They don't get the opportunity to play out at break time if there is more than a light shower, they never play out with friends at home and if it's raining at the weekend, they stay in or go to the soft play or the Metrocentre [indoor shopping centre]. They aren't given the chance to become resilient. At forest school the session goes ahead in all weather, unless it's not safe, and children are encouraged to wrap up warm, play games, build shelters and have a warm drink. I have seen children become more resilient to the weather in a short space of time (School)*

Over their time at FS all of the YP developed some level of perseverance so that they were able to complete an activity or task and experience success, whether that was in relation to fire building skills, tool use, animal and plant identification or craft projects. Those that particularly struggled were given support by staff in their chosen projects.

*Chris has made some excellent woodland crafts and has shown great patience with whittling, despite having limited mobility in one hand. He has found ways to adapt his techniques to allow him to continue with projects (FS student report)*

#### Step 7

These opportunities enabled the YP to develop their own interests and skills at FS, which for many of the YP also included a new understanding and relationship with nature. This could be in relation to a deeper knowledge and interest in nature:

*I try to think what bugs go through every day ... I like the trees (YP)*

*Taylor is very interested in nature now, he's very knowledgeable about birds, insects, newts (School)*

But also the impact of the natural environment and opportunities it afforded:

*Lifting, you feel alive* (YP on lifting and throwing logs)

*Peaceful* (YP's reflection on Forest School)

Parents also appreciated the opportunity for their children to experience new opportunities and develop interests:

*He loves being outside all day, which is great because he has a lot of anxieties about being outside. It's very difficult to get him to go anywhere but not to forest school. He really enjoys it* (parent/carer)

*It gives him more of a choice of things to do, like being in nature and having other interests rather than computer games* (parent/carer)

#### *Step 8*

The majority of YP were able to engage with increasingly difficult and challenging tasks within their own areas of interest:

*Shane has experienced a range of activities through forest school and he has shown a real flair for whittling. Over the duration of his time in forest school he has made pea shooters, small bowls, butter knives and miniature pieces of furniture. This has demonstrated a high level of focus and excellent fine motor skills* (FS student report)

*Jason has shown a keen interest in the principles of fire lighting and has set himself increasingly difficult challenges. Most recently he was able to light a fire using only a flint and steel and all natural materials available in a woodland* (FS student report)

However, two of the young people continued to find perseverance difficult and struggled to significantly progress and so this step of change was judged to be partly evidenced. One of these YP was care experienced and was moved to three different group homes over the school year and so chose to use FS as a place in which he could take some time out and develop relationships, particularly with one of the members of school staff. The other YP was also focused on developing her relationships, in this case more so with her peers, an area in which she often struggled within school.

### *Steps 9 & 10*

The YP were encouraged to reflect upon their achievements at FS, adults encouraged and praised the YP's engagement throughout sessions and reflection was a regular feature of the end of sessions, with YP often taking turns to share what they enjoyed/had gone well and what they would like to work on at the following session. These reflections could be quite descriptive but also provided opportunities for the YP to reflect on how their experiences made them feel: 'I felt confident' (YP reflecting on whittling). Over the year some of the YP were able to reflect on how their experiences at FS impacted upon their sense of self:

*There's more to life than what you think, in a really good way (YP)*

*I've never been good at anything before but I've found my thing (YP)*

These experiences could be seen as contributing towards a more positive sense of self for some YP but it was also the case that not all YP were able to reflect in these ways and so this step of change was also judged to be partly evidenced. There were no cases in which YP indicated that their FS experiences had had a negative impact on their sense of self.

### *Step 11*

School staff reported the ways in which the YP were able to use the skills and interests they developed at FS within the school environment, particularly in relation to their social skills and new friendships but also in relation to providing enriching experiences that the YP were motivated to write about.

*I still see children in school talking with the friends they made during forest school, and we will often recount activities and memories of successes and failures (School)*

*Callum's definitely grown in confidence, his eye contact is much better, even in say the corridor and he'll say hello whereas before forest school his head was always down (School)*

*Back at school none of them are reluctant to write in their forest school journal and it can be a bit of a struggle with some of them for other writing. The fact that Jacob did that report for the school newsletter too, he wanted to do it and that's unusual for him (School)*

It was harder to evidence examples of transference to the home environment, although those parents/carers that did contribute to the research were very positive about the opportunities afforded at FS. Furthermore, the school reported that two of the YP from this group talked about continuing their whittling and wooden craft projects at home two years after the end of their FS year.

Overall, there was a wealth of evidence to show how the YP had developed social and emotional skills that supported their communication and relationships with others both within and beyond the FS environment. FS had provided a nurturing context in which they could relax and appreciate the natural environment and that successful experiences had helped some YP to develop a more positive sense of self. All of the YP had been supported to take risks appropriate to them, which had led to some YP developing increased perseverance and new skills as independent learners. There had further been some evidence of individual YP continuing new interests and activities beyond their FS experience.

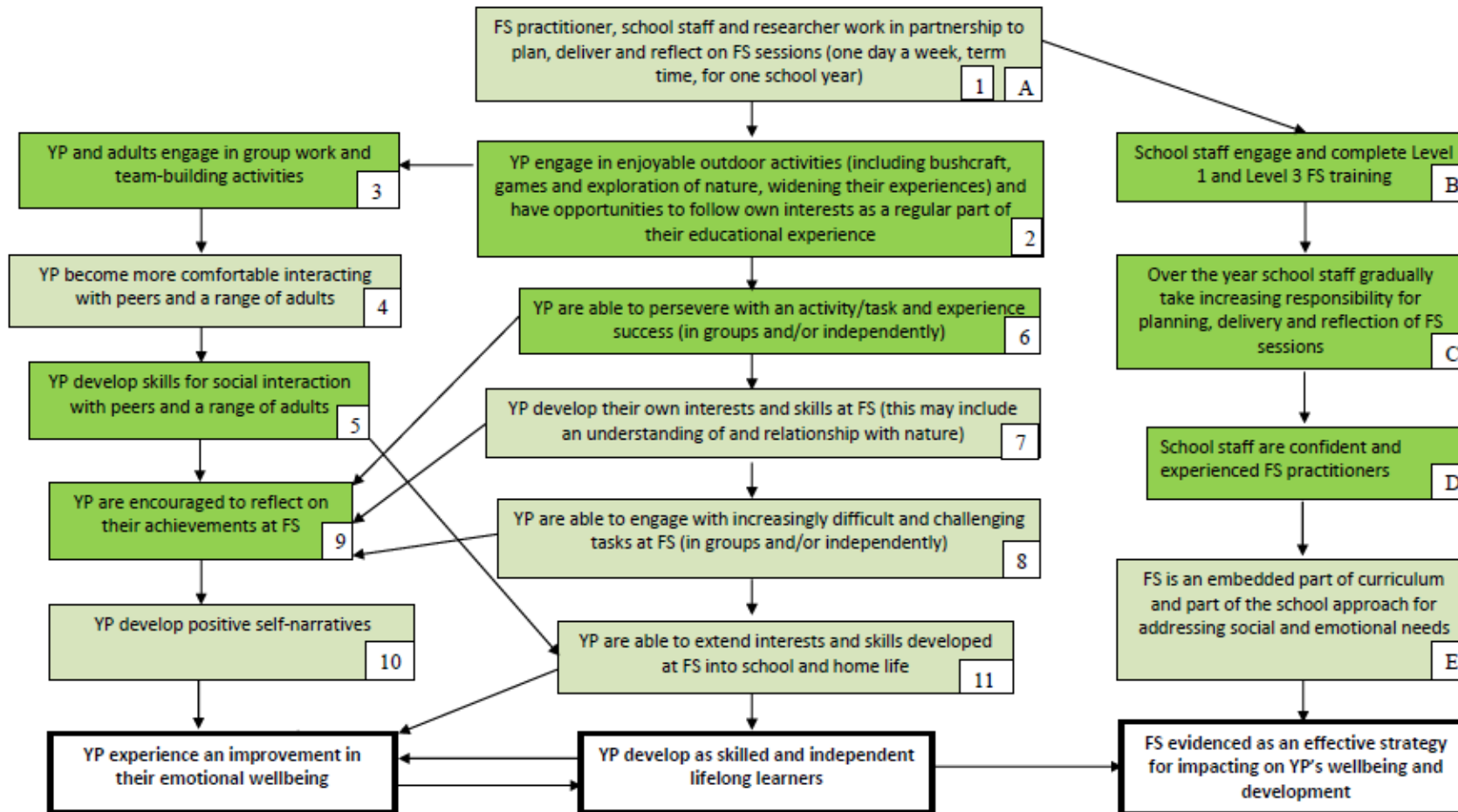
#### *Steps A, B, C, D & E*

In relation to the impact of Breeze on the school, there was substantial evidence that the school had engaged with the FS practitioner and researcher to plan, deliver and reflect on weekly FS sessions over the school year. One member of staff had completed Level 3 FS training and another Level 1, with the school staff gradually taking the lead in the planning, delivery and reflection of sessions so that they took full responsibility by the end of the school year. There was evidence of the school staff developing their confidence and experience as FS practitioners, together with their considerable experience as specialist school staff. The wider school had shown some interest in FS, with the FS qualified members of staff delivering an INSET session offered to the whole school. FS featured within school newsletters and the School Development Plan as part of their approach to meeting the emotional and social needs of students and research findings were shared with senior leaders.

#### **Year 3**

The theory of change was assessed again in relation to Year 3 and can be seen in Figure 7 below:

**Figure 7: Summer Grove theory of change  
Assessed July 2021 (Year 3)**



Bright green = substantial evidence to support

Olive green = partly evidenced: evidence to support but either incomplete at this stage or substantially evidenced for particular children only

Amber = not evidenced in this period but no evidence to refute

Red: evidence to refute step of change

Examples of data for each step of change can be seen in Appendix 3

### *Step 1*

In Year 3 school staff independently planned, delivered and reflected on FS sessions with the Level 3 qualified staff member taking the lead, however, due to a late start and some further disruption due to staff illness, provision was not for the full school year.

### *Step 2*

Nevertheless, it was clear that the YP were benefitting from regular outdoor sessions which were enjoyed by all:

*We love it! We can jump in muddy puddles but it's nice today too because the sun has come out* (YP)

*I love the hammocks* (YP)

*She was always really excited on the days she was going to forest school she has talked a lot about her friends from there and the things she's eaten and made. I think the hot chocolate and marshmallows were one of her favourite things. In the time she was going we have not heard her complain or say she didn't like anything* (parent/carer)

### *Step 3*

As in Year 1, there was substantial evidence that FS sessions provided a variety of opportunities for group work and team building activities, with running and chasing games being particularly popular with the morning group and the YP drawing on their existing interests to devise new games, as well as working together in using tools and crafting:

*Two YP work with a member of staff to use the bow saw to cut some wood cookies. The YP take turns doing the tool talk, reminding each other of any bits they've missed. Then they work together to use the bow saw supervised by the member of staff. A couple of times the saw gets stuck and they have to work together to get into a good cutting rhythm, 'pull, now you, now me, now you'*  
(Researcher observations)

### *Step 4*

In reflecting on FS the YP often commented on the opportunity to play and spend time with friends, '*Playing with friends*', '*Spending time with friends*', with parents and school staff also recognising the benefits this brought:

*The experiences Louise has had through forest school have been invaluable, she has made some lovely friendships which is something she has struggled with a bit since starting school. While we do quite a lot of outdoor activities as a family it has been nice for Louise to take part in these kind of activities with her friends and be a bit more independent (parent/carer)*

*To begin with, Robert was often on the peripherals of the group. He would choose not to get involved in the fire lighting or games but instead he would spend time watching his friends and discussing what they were doing. Over time this has changed, and he will now often get involved, this has provided some excellent opportunities for Robert to play and exercise (FS student report)*

#### *Step 5*

These experiences enabled the YP to become more comfortable interacting with their peers and progress was seen across all the students, with YP developing skills in communication, social interaction and relationships:

*Henry enjoys being in the woods with friends and often initiates conversations while sat carving or around the fire. This has been a great benefit to the group as some of the children are still developing this skill (FS student report)*

*One boy who was virtually non-verbal has started to vocalise in interacting with the others at forest school, for him that's huge (School)*

*Katherine has used her time at forest School to build and manage relationships with friends. She has, at times arrived at the sessions after falling out with a friend over lunchtime. Katherine has found this time quite beneficial to help mend her friendships, away from other students and with no expectations placed on her by teaching staff (if Katherine chooses to sit with a friend and chat, that is absolutely fine to do at forest school) (FS student report)*

*Lisa has always had a close friendship with Judy, and they have been side by side throughout. Forest school has also offered Lisa a terrific opportunity to spend quality time with other girls in her year group too. Lisa and Judy have expanded their friendship to include Laura. This has been difficult at times, but Lisa now seems accepting that they are a trio and has been a supportive friend to Laura (FS student report)*

However, the opportunity to spend time with a range of adults was restricted due to the on-going pandemic and so this was largely limited to the two members of school staff.

### *Steps 6 & 7*

School planning documents and reports recorded the variety of activities offered to the YP and how some YP developed particular interests:

*He has been willing to try every activity that has been suggested. This has allowed him to inform his own opinions on the types of things he might enjoy. He has particularly enjoyed creative activities such as Hapa Zome (traditional Japanese art form, which involves printing leaves and flowers onto cloth), he has made some wonderful wood cookies and decorated them with precision and thought (FS student report)*

Across the groups YP were supported to take risks, persevere and experience success, these experiences looked different in each case and were tailored to the YP's interests, individual needs and abilities but importantly all the YP were able to experience success:

*All the children have had successes (School)*

*They're more able to have a go at things and developing those verbal skills to ask to join in with something (School)*

*He's been working on a walking staff for the past three weeks and is immensely proud of it (School)*

*We have a new student with ADHD and he's much more able to engage and focus at forest school compared to the classroom (School)*

School staff also recognised FS as a space in which some of the YP could develop skills to regulate their mood and emotions:

*Michael has particularly enjoyed being physical, playing games, running, climbing, and swinging. I believe that at times Michael has been able to regulate his mood by taking part in these activities. Equally, at times Michael has been able to withdraw from the group to spend time by himself. He quite enjoys swinging in the hammock or on the tree swing (FS student report)*

This together with the learner-led approach enabled many of the YP to develop their own interests, knowledge and skills, which for some YP has included an interest and relationship with nature:

*Rocco is full of wonder and curiosity for the Natural world around him. More so than any other student in his group, he has been repeatedly drawn to wildlife and has listened carefully to ensure he handles creatures correctly and with care (FS student report)*

*Small animals and insects also fascinate Issac. He enjoys looking for and catching insects and is always curious to know if they are venomous, or if they will bite (FS student report)*

*More recently he has taken a keen interest in the natural world around him. He has spent lots of time looking at different insects and using books and apps to try and identify them (FS student report)*

#### *Step 8*

Some of the YP were able to gradually increase the challenge of tasks and activities, for example in relation to fire building and tool use:

*Robert independently gathers some fire wood and sorts into different sizes, he builds the fire and then asks for the flint and steel, independently lighting and feeding the fire until it is established (Researcher observations)*

*Kay has managed risk well over the last year. She has remained within the boundaries, handled knives and saws and built and sustained fires. Staff supervised her very closely to begin with but as Kay has become more independent, staff have been able to withdraw direct supervision and simply shadow her activities (FS student report)*

However, these individual interests and progression were not evident for all YP over their time at FS; this may have been partly due to the high needs of some YP and also to the reduced session length in the afternoon, with school staff reflecting that they had seen more impact for students from the morning than afternoon session:

*I've definitely seen more impact with the morning group, for the afternoon group it's more like a forest school taster, they don't have time to properly acclimatise to the setting which some of them need and starts and ends can be difficult' (school)*

### *Steps 9 & 10*

Throughout FS sessions the YP were encouraged in their efforts and weekly group reflections included YP identifying a star (positive) from the current session and a wish for the following week. Some YP were able to use these opportunities to reflect on how their FS experiences made them feel, *'I feel proud about the fire because sometimes I can get frustrated but I did it', 'It's getting better all the time'*, which could be seen contributing towards positive self-narratives as recognised by the YP, parents/carers and school staff:

*I did it, I can't believe I did it straight away. I feel really proud of myself* (YP)

*Kiera spoke excitedly when she had been to forest school, she told us what she had been doing, and also what others had been doing, she was particularly proud of the mushrooms she made, and they are still on display in the house* (parent/carer)

*Henry really enjoys spending time in nature and often speaks about family camping trips while we are at forest school. He has started to identify as an outdoor enthusiast, He has referred to himself a couple of times as 'Nature Boy'* (FS student report)

These examples evidence how FS supports YP to achieve success and how this can contribute towards a more positive sense of self, although again it was not possible to evidence for all YP.

### *Step 11*

It was also difficult to evidence the transference of skills and interests into the students' home lives, although parents/carers that did comment were all very positive about their child's FS experience. School staff were able to identify impacts in the school environment, particularly in relation to social and communication skills and continued relationships:

*We see those relationships both between the students and with staff back at school, they'll seek out those interactions about forest school asking what's the weather going to be like and suggesting activities* (School)

*All the children have had successes and they share that with other staff and friends weekly* (School)

*We're seeing those social skills being used back at school, particularly at lunchtimes, there's more mixing between the students* (School)

### *Steps A, B, C, D & E*

Over Years 2 and 3 at Summer Grove staff independently planned, delivered and reflected on sessions and expanded the number of staff qualified in FS both at Level 1 and 3 and although one Level 3 qualified staff member did leave at the end of Year 2, there was already another Level 3 staff member who was able to take over the leader role, supported by Level 1 qualified staff. These staff developed as confident and experienced FS practitioners in addition to their school roles and became recognised by students and school staff as FS leads and advocates, with one member of staff commenting: *'Feels like I'm talking about forest school every day, the kids are all desperate to come'*. There was also interest from school governors with one observing a session along with a senior member of staff. However, although senior leadership remained positive, there was a lack of clear intention in regard to the future development of FS within the school, which left a degree of uncertainty for school staff and students.

In comparing the impacts evidenced over Year 1 and then Year 3 of Breeze at Summer Grove School, it is clear that across both years YP were able to engage with enjoyable outdoor activities and develop skills particularly in relation to relationships, social interaction and communication. In Year 1 all YP were able to develop individual interests as part of their FS experience and whilst many of the YP from Year 3 also did so, this was not the case for all which was thought to be related to the time available for FS with more impact for YP attending the morning group compared to the afternoon session which was much shorter. It was also the case that across Years 1 and 3, many but not all YP were able to engage with increasingly difficult and challenging tasks; it appeared that whilst many developed their bush craft skills and FS interests, others focused mainly on their relationships and social and emotional development. The YP from Summer Grove faced multiple complex challenges and yet we have also seen examples of YP overcoming these challenges and experiencing successes that have been celebrated at FS, school and home; these opportunities support YP's sense of wellbeing and independence but also take time to develop with ten steps substantially evidenced in Year 1 compared to eight steps in Year 3. Nevertheless, across both years YP comments about FS have been overwhelmingly positive and are testimony to the positive impact on their lives.

## School D – Park View First School

### Context and engagement with the Breeze Project

Park View First School is a mainstream school for children aged four to nine years with 300 pupils on roll, it is located in a leafy-suburb and receives very little additional funding due to low deprivation and low numbers of Pupil Premium. However, at the start of the project the school was supporting 18 children on their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) list with an array of complex needs and 9 care experienced children. The school was aware that care experienced children frequently demonstrate hypervigilance in a classroom and many are not yet ready to engage in learning due to their low levels of social and emotional development; some of the children in school were presenting with challenging behaviours or could be withdrawn or self-harm as a result of negative views of themselves. Park View was using a number of strategies and approaches to meet the needs of these children but believed that their needs could not be met solely in a school setting due to the anxiety this environment often brings. The school chose to participate in the Breeze Project 'to provide children with the opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills and self-esteem and to also aid the children in achieving greater academic success by giving them the skills and confidence in their own self' (SEND Coordinator).

#### *Year 1*

Nine children (six of whom were care experienced and three SEND) were selected to participate in the Breeze Project for one morning a week during the 2018-2019 school year, the children ranged from 5 to 8 years old. Sessions were initially led by the FS practitioner from Scotswood Garden and supported by two members of school staff. Review and planning meetings were held weekly in school between the FS practitioner and one member of school staff who had attended the session, additionally the researcher attended roughly half of meetings (where she had attended the FS session) and the school SEND Coordinator also often attended. Concurrently, one member of school staff completed the Level 3 Forest School training and a second Level 1 over the school year.

#### *Year 2*

In the 2019-2020 school year, the Level 3 FS trained staff member took on the leadership of the sessions, supported by the Level 1 staff member. Breeze continued to provide some distanced support with termly meetings, continuing to support access to the FS site and providing some transport costs. Three of the children from the original group had transferred to middle school and so the remaining six continued along with one additional SEND child. As in the previous year, the group attended for one morning a week from September 2019 until March 2020

when the Covid-19 pandemic led to the first national lockdown. Review and planning was completed by the FS lead and shared with the FS assistant, SEND Coordinator, Scotswood Garden and the researcher via email, however, there was not a regular weekly meeting as in the previous year. Within this, six sessions were planned, co-delivered and reviewed by two external practitioners who were completing their Level 3 FS training at Scotswood Garden, they had previously volunteered with the group during the previous year and so had established relationships with the children, and during each session they were supported by school staff.

### *Year 3*

When schools re-opened to all children in September 2020, Park View took some time to decide how best to proceed with Breeze. The school recognised the need to support their pupils' emotional and social wellbeing now more than ever and believed that Breeze could play an important role in doing so, however, they were also constrained by government advice in relation to Covid-19 and in particular the 'bubble system' which meant that the original Breeze group were now in four separate bubbles and could not attend together. Additionally, the FS trained school staff were now supporting separate bubbles and could no longer lead sessions. It was decided to create four new groups (containing the original Breeze children with additional children from their bubbles that had been identified as either diagnosed or undiagnosed SEND); each group had six to eight children and they attended once every four weeks in rotation, sessions were led by the two external FS practitioners (funded by Breeze) who had previously completed their FS training with the original group. The sessions were supported by one member of school staff from each bubble and the review and planning completed by the FS practitioners and shared via email with supporting school staff, the SEND Coordinator, Scotswood Garden and the researcher. Sessions again stopped during the second period of school closures (January – March 2021) but resumed on schools re-opening; in total each group participated in three sessions over this period with considerable gaps in between sessions. In the final half-term of the school year bubbles were combined to make year group bubbles so that there were now two groups (one of 12 and a second of 14 children), each attended Breeze sessions for one morning a week during these final seven weeks.

### **Theory of change and data collection**

Figure 8 below displays the co-produced theory of change for Park View First School; the first strand starts in the top right corner and moves left, it articulates the anticipated steps of change for the children taking part in Breeze. The second strand also starts in the top right corner but moves down and articulates the anticipated steps of change for the school in embedding FS. These strands lead to three intended outcomes that:

- Children experience an improvement in their emotional wellbeing (particularly increased and more stable self-esteem)
- Children have the emotional and behavioural skills necessary to be ready to learn
- FS is evidenced as an effective strategy for impacting on children's wellbeing and readiness to learn

As data collection was impacted by the pandemic, Table 6 displays the agreed data collection and person responsible pre-pandemic and Table 7 what was possible from the pandemic onwards.

**Table 6: data collection for Park View First School and person responsible (pre-pandemic)**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Collected by</b>
17 observations of Breeze sessions	Researcher
Planning and evaluation meetings and documents for weekly Breeze sessions	School and/or FS practitioner
5 interviews with school staff <sup>14</sup>	Researcher
2 interviews with the FS practitioner <sup>15</sup>	Researcher
Children's reflections during sessions	Researcher, school staff and FS practitioner
9 individual Forest School diaries	CYP and staff at school
9 individual interviews with children using visual methods <sup>16</sup>	Researcher
7 parent/carer questionnaires <sup>17</sup>	Researcher
3 interviews with parents/carers <sup>18</sup>	Researcher

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix 5 for examples of school staff interview questions

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 7 for FS practitioner interview questions

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 8 for examples of visual methods and YP interview questions

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 9 for parent/carer questionnaire

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 6 for parent/carer interview questions

**Table 7: data collection for Park View First School and person responsible (pandemic onwards)**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Collected by</b>
7 observations of Breeze sessions (May – July 2021)	Researcher
Planning and evaluation documents for 10 Breeze sessions (Nov 2020 – July 2021)	FS practitioners
3 interviews with school staff (on-line) <sup>19</sup>	Researcher
1 interview with the Forest School practitioners (on-line) <sup>20</sup>	Researcher
Children's reflections shared during sessions	Researcher, FS practitioners and school staff
6 parent/carers questionnaires <sup>21</sup>	Researcher

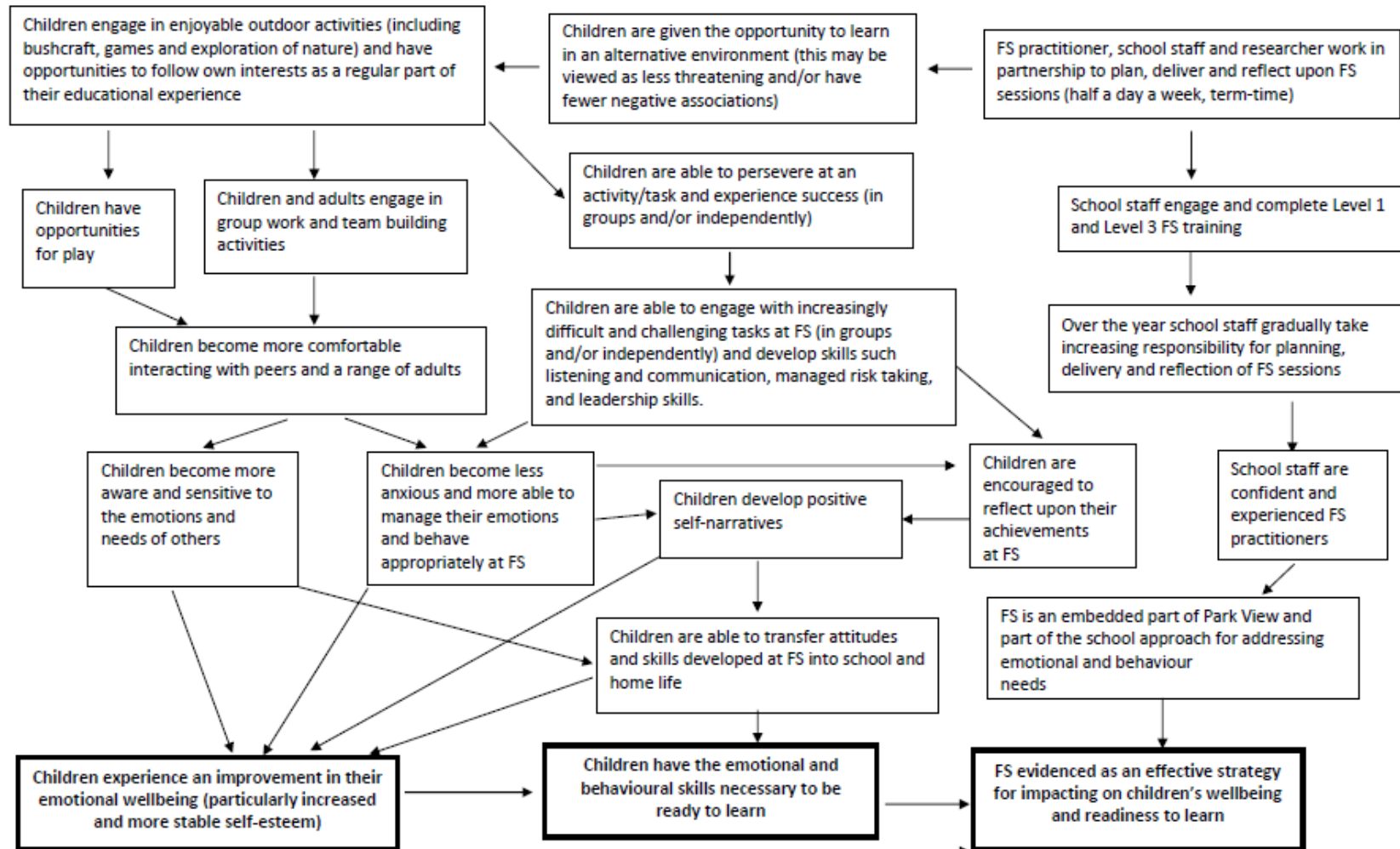
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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 5 for examples of school staff interview questions

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 7 for FS practitioner interview questions

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 9 for parent/carers questionnaire

**Figure 8: Park View First School theory of change**



## Findings

As the Covid-19 pandemic dramatically shaped how Breeze was enacted at Park View, together with the data collection, the theory of change has been assessed in relation to impacts evidenced pre-pandemic and pandemic onwards.

### *Pre-pandemic*

In March 2020 there was substantial evidence to support the majority of the steps of change as detailed in Figure 9 below.

#### *Steps 1, A, B, C & D*

The FS practitioner, school staff and researcher had worked in partnership to plan, deliver and reflect upon FS sessions (half a day a week, term-time) for the 2018-2019 school year. During the 2019/2020 school year, school staff (who had now completed their Level 1 and Level 3 FS training) took leadership of sessions and worked towards being confident and experienced FS practitioners until Breeze was suspended in March 2020 due to the pandemic.

#### *Step 2*

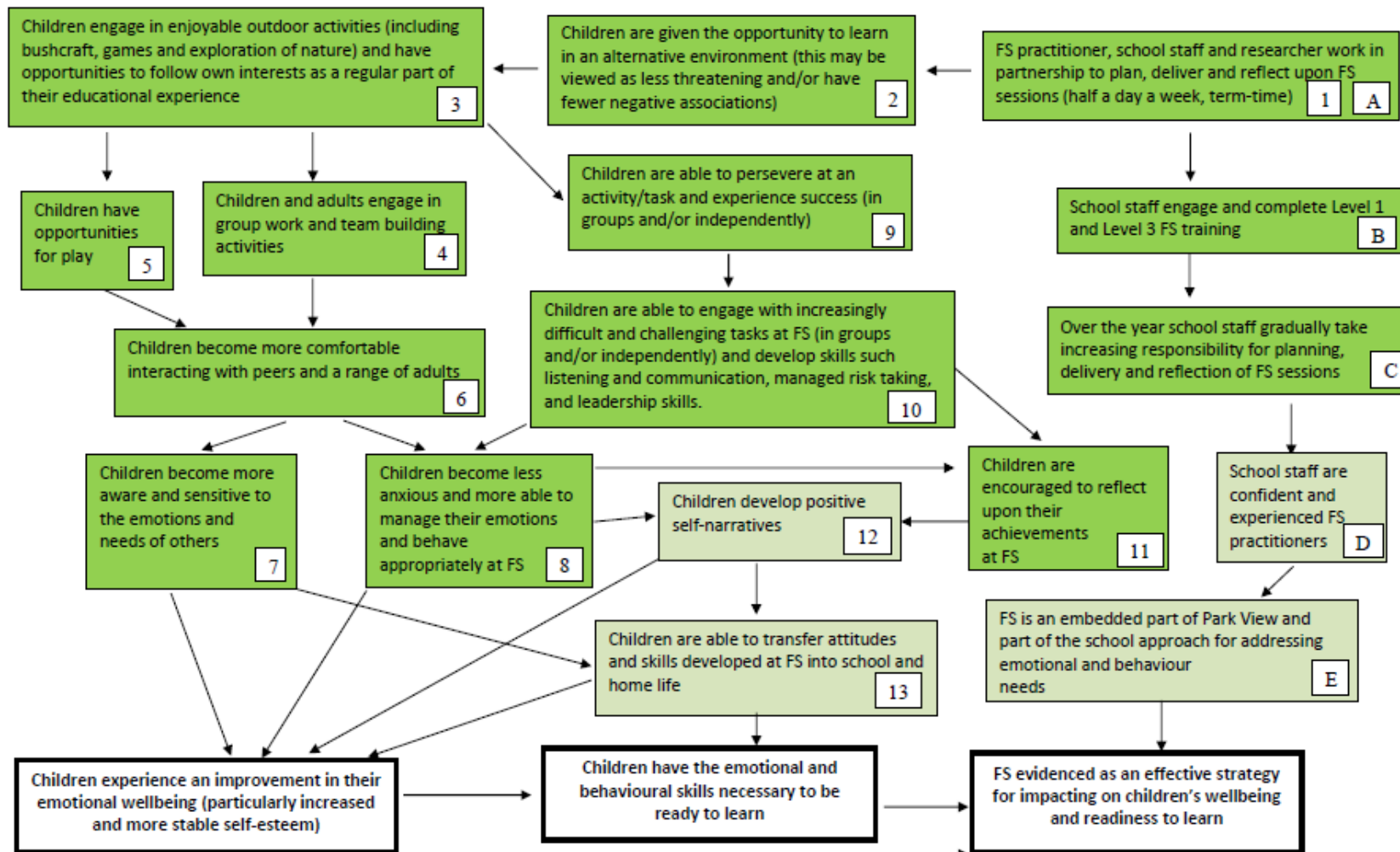
The Breeze Project enabled the children to learn in and experience an alternative physical and pedagogical environment as part of school, with testimony from the children, parents and school staff demonstrating that FS was viewed as less threatening and had less negative associations for the children:

*You can relax and do things you want to do* (YP)

*In all honesty it's the only bit of school he says he looks forward to* (parent/carer)

*They definitely feel that it's a special place and thing to do* (school)

**Figure 9: Park View First School theory of change  
Assessed pre-pandemic (March 2020)**



Bright green = substantial evidence to support

Olive green = partly evidenced: evidence to support but either incomplete at this stage or substantially evidenced for particular children only

Amber = not evidenced in this period but no evidence to refute

Red: evidence to refute step of change

Examples of data for each step of change can be seen in Appendix 2

### Step 3

All of the children were keen to express their enjoyment of FS, particularly the freedom to choose their own activities and have time to play. FS was a regular part of their school week, which they came to expect and many relied on, with parents, school staff and children themselves using FS to help them through other aspects of school which they found difficult.

*You have a lot more freedom at forest school, you're allowed to run a lot* (YP)

*It's a nice break for him just in the middle of the week so he doesn't feel overwhelmed by school* (parent/carer)

*They all love forest school, it's a lovely break in the middle of the week and parents often use that to help the children* (school)

### Steps 4 & 5

Group work and team building activities were central to FS sessions and were both planned for by the adults and emerged spontaneously from the children's play and activities; these included group games such as eagle eyes, to den building and imaginative play. The space, time and value placed on play during sessions was evident from planning and reflection documents, observations and feedback from children and school staff.

*You get to play for the whole morning!* (YP)

*Play at forest school is valued and encouraged and the benefits are clear to see in the children's joy and overall demeanour* (school)

*Session objectives: To encouraging children to play with each other and take turns, to encourage children to lead their own learning, to model behaviour and support children to build their own friendships, to have fun!* (Planning and evaluation document)

### Step 6

Planning and evaluation documents and researcher observations showed the progress children made in interacting with their peers and a range of adults. When the group first started FS a number of the children found it difficult to play with others, some found it hard to negotiate during games and there would be fallings out with children becoming distressed; this often resulted in one boy storming off and sometimes

crossing the agreed boundary, another child would often shout and/or refuse to engage with the session. A couple of the other children would always choose to play on their own and appeared not to have the skills to integrate into others' play but would often stand back and watch. The high adult to child ratios meant that the children could be supported, either to manage their emotions and find resolutions together and/or to find ways to play with others. The children were motivated by their desire to join in with others and by the games themselves, by the end of the school year and into the 2019/2020 year all the children had formed a sense of group identity and were much more able to negotiate relationships and activities themselves or with minimal support from adults. The children were often at different stages socially and emotionally but all had made progress over their time at FS.

*He seems more confident now, there's that level of maturity in his relationships, he's had issues with emotional regulation but he's been allowed to work through that at forest school ...the main benefits are in terms of his relationships with other children. He used to be quite scared of other children, forest school has provided a safe space to work at friendships (parent/carer)*

*One child, who due to her attachment difficulties thought herself to be intrinsically bad and unlovable became a natural leader in the group as a result of the playful relational approach encouraged (school)*

### Step 7

As part of this social and emotional development the children became more aware and sensitive to the emotions and needs of others. Planning and evaluation documents and researcher observations demonstrated how this was facilitated through discussions of the FS rule, 'look after others', emphasising the importance of considering others' feelings and helping one another; this was often modelled by adults in the playing of games and the sharing of food and drink and the children began to take on these practices themselves, checking that one another were ok, inviting others to play and sharing food. If a child was unkind an adult would quietly talk to him/her about the implications of their actions and they would be encouraged to think of a way to put it right. When the researcher asked a child, what have you learnt at FS, she replied 'about being kind'.

*It was also obvious (and commented on by his class teacher and head teacher) that he showed more empathy and kindness for other children both at forest school and more generally around the school at other times (parent/carer)*

### *Step 8*

Over time the children displayed less anxious behaviour at FS and observational data showed a reduction in the frequency and intensity of emotional and behavioural difficulties during sessions. One child with autism and selective mutism was able to use the FS environment to reduced his anxiety to a level that enabled him to talk with his peers during group games, this was built up over a number of months, and another child with Tourette Syndrome was able to manage his tics effectively whilst at FS.

*It's noticeable how few tics Jason displays at forest school, nothing compared to school. Usually on a school trip he would need a one to one, we would see a lot of inappropriate behaviour but he copes so well at forest school (school)*

### *Steps 9 & 10*

Planning and evaluation documents and researcher observations showed that a number of the children struggled to persevere at activities and tasks at the start of the project but all developed this ability over time; this was encouraged through activities which the children found intrinsically motivating such as building and lighting a fire, whittling, or imaginative games and play and over time the children were able to engage with increasingly difficult and challenging tasks and achieve success. Some of the older boys worked on their whittling skills and would make props for their imaginative play, often working on a particular piece over a number of weeks, whilst others would work on their listening and communication or leadership skills in group games. All of the children were encouraged to develop skills and interests important to them as individuals and were supported to achieve success.

*A child with ADHD for example found that he could focus for extended periods of time when whittling (school)*

*All the children have had successes at forest school and that helps to build their resilience in class where they often struggle (school)*

### *Step 11*

Reflection is an integral part of FS and all sessions include a reflection activity towards the end, with adults also encouraging children to reflect on their achievements as they happen during sessions. In the first year (2018/2019) children also completed FS diaries with members of staff back at school. The children were encouraged to reflect and share their FS achievements with members of school staff and their families, often instigated through taking home FS objects and craft projects.

*Bringing his crafts home (and the occasional photo) has helped facilitate some family discussions, whatever he has said about forest school has always been positive and enthusiastic (parent)*

### Step 12

Many of the children found it hard to think of themselves in a positive way or express this to others, but both parents and school staff believed that FS had helped them to begin to develop positive self-narratives and that their positive experiences at FS were contributing to a more positive self-identity. The children sometimes expressed pride in their achievements during sessions, which parents and school staff told us was rare in school.

*This is my den, I actually made this den! (YP)*

*She says she loves forest school and that forest school is 'her thing'. She's talked about being a forest school teacher when she grows up. This is very unusual for Martha and great to hear (parent/carer)*

*We think as parents that forest school has been brilliant for Luke. He looked forward to every Wednesday morning, and was really proud of his achievements (eg crafts / drawings / wood handiwork) during his time at forest school. We have kept a lot of these as mementos of his time at forest school (parent/carer)*

*Luke really shines at forest school ... he's able to say 'I'm good at climbing or whittling' and that's really boosting his self-esteem (school)*

### Step 13

Parents/carers and school staff also commented that the children's positive experiences at FS allowed them to transfer attitudes and skills into school and home life.

*These achievements and successes have been significant and have been noted by staff back in school, both in the classroom through the positive narratives which the children have been able to internalise to aid them in their learning journeys, and in the playground through the increased interactions and friendships formed as a result of the social and emotional skills developed while at forest school (school)*

*Families have also noted the positive difference forest school has made to their children with parents and carers telling school staff how they are proud of their achievements at forest school and keen to share their learning with them and additionally remarking that they have noted fewer distressed behaviours on an evening following a forest school session (school)*

*His enthusiasm for what he's learnt and wanting to do it at home e.g. light fires in the back garden and show his parents his new found skills (parent/carer)*

There was the acknowledgement from school staff that the FS environment is very different to the classroom, particularly noting the high adult to child ratios at FS and the alternative pedagogical approach, which meant that children who could be seen flourishing at FS could also struggle within the classroom setting. Nevertheless, overall there was substantial evidence from parents and school staff and observational data that all of the children experienced an improvement in their emotional wellbeing through FS, including a perceived improvement in children's self-esteem.

*I suspect Jamie has felt special and important as he has been chosen to go to forest school. This will have boosted his self-esteem and hopefully helped him to view his disabilities in a positive way (parent/carer)*

*Through Year 4 we saw a real improvement in his behaviour, esteem and general happiness at home ... He made so much progress during Year 4 and we are sure Forest School was a key factor in his development (parent/carer)*

*Martha has had a lot of therapeutic support in the past (four months of therapy and two years of child psychotherapy) and this has definitely been the most effective ... we have noticed a number of benefits. She gets dressed quickly on forest school mornings and is out of the house without problems. Usually Martha is very resistant to go to school, refuses to get dressed or leave the house ... she is much calmer on forest school evenings and goes to bed more easily. Usually Martha is very scared at bedtime and shows this through dysregulated aggressive behaviour. Martha is definitely happier on forest school days. She says it is the best day of the week (parent/carer)*

Parents and school staff also felt that FS had enabled a number of the children to develop the emotional and behavioural skills necessary to be ready to learn, although there was some variation in this across the group.

*The opportunity to develop new skills without the constraints of a set curriculum has given those attending transferrable skills which have they been able to apply back to their learning in the classroom. A child with ADHD for example found that he could focus for extended periods of time when whittling and was able to use this to support him in building up learning time interspersed with physical movement breaks (school)*

Overall there is a wealth of evidence that has demonstrated the positive impact of FS on the lives of these CYP at Park View. FS is learner-centred and so the outcomes for individual CYP will vary, but there has been substantial consensus across the data to show its ability to support learners in improving their social and emotional wellbeing. Developing these social and emotional skills is essential in establishing CYP's readiness to learn and we have seen the benefits demonstrated in the children's school and home lives.

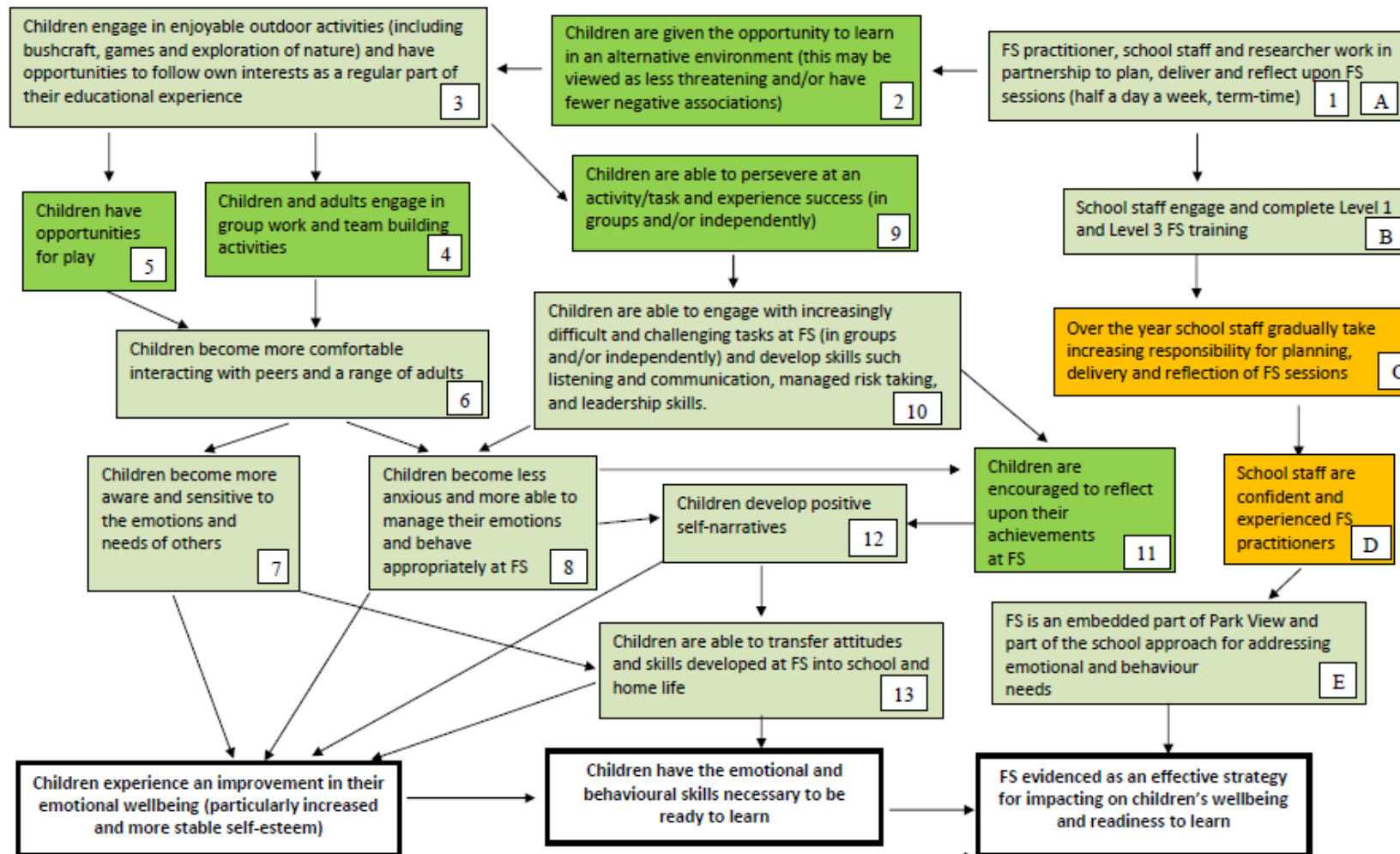
#### *Step E*

These impacts have been noted by the school, along with their desire to continue supporting their pupils in this way, however, changes in leadership and budgetary concerns were also risks to embedded practice even before the pandemic. The school SEND Coordinator continued to support the FS trained staff and fed practice findings into senior leadership meetings and planning, however, practice was limited to these staff and small group of children.

#### ***Pandemic onwards***

The theory of change in Figure 10 below articulates how the data reflected a changing picture at Park View during the 2020/2021 school year (see 'Context and engagement with the Breeze Project' section above for details):

**Figure 10: Park View First School theory of change  
Assessed post pandemic (July 2021)**



Bright green = substantial evidence to support

Olive green = partly evidenced: evidence to support but either incomplete at this stage or substantially evidenced for particular children only

Amber = not evidenced in this period but no evidence to refute

Red: evidence to refute step of change

Examples of data for each step of change can be seen in Appendix 2

### Step 1

The Covid-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions meant that Breeze was no longer enacted as originally planned at Park View; the planning delivery and evaluation of sessions was completed by external practitioners and this was shared rather than co-produced with the school and researcher. Initially sessions were run more like one off events as the gap between sessions were often considerable (each child taking part in three sessions from November 2020 to May 2021), although in the final half term (June to July 2021) each child did attend weekly. The school acknowledged that this was not ideal but was what was possible during this period *‘we have lost some of the momentum and that is disruptive for the children’* (school).

However, the number of children involved in Breeze also substantially increased, from 7 in the spring of 2020 to 26 in the 2020/2021 school year. This meant that although sessions were not regular and the long-term aspect was not fully developed in this period, a broader range of children were able to benefit from the project.

*It would have been great if she could have done it more regularly and for longer ... Important to remember that Covid was a barrier to this, but had it not been for Covid altering the groups/bubbles, Carly, without a diagnosis, probably would not have had access to the sessions. We are very grateful for the small number of session she was able to access* (parent/carer)

### Step 2

There was clear evidence that children had been given the opportunity to learn in an alternative environment that was experienced as ‘different’ for many of the children and often had less negative associations.

*It’s nice being in nature ... I haven’t been in nature much before* (YP)

*She says she enjoys it and it is better to be outside than in school* (parent/carer)

*She has seen forest school as being something different or a different experience* (parent/carer)

As before the pandemic, we saw some of the original FS children using sessions to help them through more difficult days at school and both the school and parents commented on the importance of returning to Breeze.

*Going to forest school really made her week at school easier too as it punctuated the week and she'll often say 'it's only 2 days to forest school' which I think helped her get through difficult days (parent/carer)*

*Being able to get back to forest school has been important, a little bit of normality for our original group and being able to extend that opportunity out a bit (school)*

### *Step 3*

Sessions were undoubtedly enjoyed by the children with many expressing feelings of happiness and delight and parents and carers also feeding back how much their children enjoyed FS.

*Amazing, I don't want to leave (YP)*

*We love it! (YP)*

*I've been able to help out and had so much fun (YP)*

*He likes it and can't wait to go (Parent/carer)*

*Wednesdays are his favourite day as he gets to go to forest school (Parent/carer)*

As before the pandemic, children appreciated the opportunity to follow their own interests and choices and this was particularly appreciated by new members of the group,

*We get to do anything, we choose! (YP)*

*You can see them gaining confidence, especially with the newer children, as they begin to realise that they can do what they want to do, set their own agenda (FS practitioner)*

#### *Step 4*

Planning and evaluation documents and researcher observations demonstrated the numerous opportunities for group work and team building activities. Sessions often began and ended with an organised game such as eagle eyes or musical harmonies and relationships and skills such as 'turn taking' were often discussed and supported during sessions. Opportunities for developing team building skills naturally arose, such as during a session when most of the group became absorbed in collecting and directing rain water on a wet day or in putting on group performances. Children commented on the opportunity to spend time with friends, and in the final sessions, children from other classes, *'You get to be with your friends and friends from different classes'* (YP).

#### *Steps 5, 9 & 10*

FS always included the space and time for children to choose their own activities and play; some became interested in fire lighting and cooking or craft projects but the majority choose to play in groups, enjoying the space the FS area provided and engaging in imaginative play. One recurring game observed by the researcher was tag or manhunt, during the final few weeks this evolved into a game the children called 'Infection' and involved one infected person who passed on the infection by tagging until everyone was infected. There were also a series of performances which the children devised themselves 'in secret' and then performed to the adults towards the end of the session. Children showed perseverance in their play and activities and in the final half term often returned to ideas and developed them over a number of weeks. Staff supported the children in their interests and relationships with one another, particularly where individual children found these social skills difficult.

*Having that opportunity to play at forest school, we're seeing more complex games emerging, working on conflict resolution and their relationships with one another* (school)

*He absolutely loves to have time to play chasing games with his friends as he doesn't often get to play these kind of games at home as there aren't many friends who play outside around where we live* (parent/carer)

#### *Step 6*

Further, testimony from the school, children and parents suggested that sessions had also been particularly effective in supporting the children's relationships with school staff who attended FS.

*I've noticed Emily has been speaking to me more than ever at Forest School, she seems a bit scared of me in school* (school)

*Having each class teaching assistant involved has been very beneficial, it's partly that relationship building and seeing another side to those children (school)*

*It's really helped her build a stronger attachment with the school staff who have come to sessions and also with the forest school facilitators (parent/carer)*

*I like the teachers (YP)*

### *Step 7*

Due to the limited number of sessions and researcher observations it has been difficult to track progress in the children's social and emotional skills, although the FS practitioners particularly commented on one boy who had found it hard to take his turn in games which had resulted in some arguments but towards the end of the ten sessions had developed this skill and was aware of its importance in continuing games and friendships, this was also commented upon by his parent/carer.

*He often tells us about 'arguments' around rules of games and hopefully he has had time and space to learn about playing according to the rules of others and listen to other children's ideas – neither of these have been his strong point in the past (parent/carer)*

### *Step 8*

Again, as the researcher had much less time to get to know and observe the children over time it was not clear whether they were less anxious or more able to manage emotions and behaviour at FS, although two parents did feedback that their child was more relaxed and happy and that they experienced less dysregulated behaviour at home on FS days.

*I think Carly feels more relaxed about her day when she knows that it is forest school ... she often comes home and has a massive melt down after school. Not so much on forest school days (parent/carer)*

### *Step 11*

Throughout sessions children were encouraged to reflect on their achievements, as and when they happened and in reflection activities at the end of the session. Children also often expressed pride and satisfaction in talking to the researcher:

*This is my musical instrument, it was quite tricky to get right (YP)*

*I'm taking this home for my mum, she'll be really pleased (YP)*

These successes were also celebrated at school and home, facilitated through the school staff who attended sessions and through taking home objects and in providing a FS report to parents.

*I have noticed that they talk about forest school a lot when back in school and it's on a really equal footing (parent/carer)*

*It's definitely boosted her confidence and the reports have been a great tool for us to use to try and help boost her self esteem (parent/carer)*

### *Steps 12 & 13*

There was some evidence from parents that FS was impacting on children developing positive self-narratives and that some had experienced an improvement in their emotional wellbeing which was having positive impacts at home, this included children from the original FS group and newer members.

*The whole forest school has been amazing experience for her, and by extension, us ... It's given her solid foundations, happy memories of school and a real confidence boost. She now wants to be a forest school teacher and work at Scotswood Garden. This is the first time that she has expressed any thoughts about her future (parent/carer)*

*He said to us that he is a much better runner at forest school than he is at school! He has certainly become more confident to try new physical things (parent/carer)*

*It has been very positive for her mental health (parent/carer)*

*We have definitely noticed that he is calmer and happier to accept when things don't go his way at home. He has also rekindled his interest in looking for bugs and watching birds – two things he enjoyed when he was younger but seemed to have lost interest in (parent/carer)*

*He has become more interested in outdoor activities and has asked to continue with forest school (parent/carer)*

For some of the children from the original FS group, there was also evidence of FS impacting in school through the development of social, emotional and behavioural skills that enable children to be ready to learn.

*We're noticing at school that Martha is more able to articulate what she is worried about, she can talk through issues, and that's come from those experiences at forest school (school)*

*I didn't expect forest school to make a difference to her academically but I think she is a more confident learner and definitely more engaged with school. Her teacher thought that forest school had made a difference to her learning (parent/carer)*

#### Steps A, B, C, D, 6 & 13

In assessing the impact of Breeze on school practice at Park View over the 2020/2021 school year, restrictions in staffing had meant that Park View's FS trained staff were no longer involved in the planning, evaluation and delivery of sessions which negatively impacted on their development as FS practitioners. However, the increase in staff attending sessions and the subsequent Level 1 training of two additional members of school staff meant that there was a broader range of staff involved in Breeze and subsequently a greater understanding of the project and the FS approach across school. Both school staff and parents commented on the benefits of having the class teaching assistant (TA) involved in Breeze sessions, this enabled staff 'to see another side to those children' (SEND Coordinator) and also to be able to use the successes made at FS to encourage the children back at school.

*He has certainly become more confident to try new physical things. His teacher and TA have really encouraged him with this too this year, so it has been good for him to have his class TA with him at forest school so she could encourage him to try things in school that he did at forest school (parent).*

Breeze sessions were also seen to be an opportunity for children and school staff to build and develop relationships, for example in the case of one child who needed a lot of support for a medical condition and in another with a child who was struggling with relationships at school '*She likes spending time with Mrs Taylor who makes her feel special and valued*' (parent).

### *Step E*

The fact that the SEND Coordinator at Park View took a particular interest in the Breeze Project as part of her role in supporting SEND and care experienced children meant that FS continued to be prioritised. The substantial evidence obtained before the pandemic demonstrated the outcomes that could be achieved CYP through a regular and long-term FS intervention, where thirteen out of seventeen steps were substantially evidenced, the remaining four partly evidenced and it is reasonable to assume that the trajectory would have continued had the pandemic not changed delivery so dramatically. Five of the steps of change were also substantially evidenced in the adapted pandemic practice and a further ten partly evidenced; it was undoubtedly well received by children, parents and school staff, and the theory of change demonstrates how evidence was starting to show impact across a number of areas, particularly once sessions became more regular in the final half term. Senior leaders were convinced by the outcomes evidenced for their pupils:

*The outcomes we've seen from Breeze are notable, we would put it in front of an Ofsted inspection ... it's a valid use of money and staffing in supporting social, emotional and mental wellbeing that is essential in helping children regulate and engage in learning (school)*

Park View had demonstrated a commitment to FS in a very challenging context and whilst practice was not currently embedded across school, support from the senior leadership team and proposals to develop the school site with increased outdoor learning provision (including an orchard, sensory/nature garden, edible garden, outdoor classroom and dedicated FS area) are indicative of a medium to long-term vision.

## Discussion

### Impacts across the Breeze Project

Research with four schools and CYP aged 5 to 16 years across three years has displayed a wealth of evidence of the ways in which the Breeze Forest School Project has supported CYP both in their sense of wellbeing and in developing skills to enable engagement in learning. Schools have articulated their rationale for engaging in the project and anticipated steps of change leading to outcomes and we have heard from CYP, parents and carers, school staff, FS practitioners, as well as research observations and school documentation, evidencing the many and varied impacts of the project. Researching during the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated interruptions and adaptations to the original design of the project but this has allowed us to compare impact across a number of models; benefits have been seen across all groups but a longer-term approach of regular sessions has been shown to maximise impact (see case studies Schools C and D for comparisons of Breeze models) and the greatest impact seen on classroom and school learning where CYP took part in Breeze for a full school day weekly for between one and two and a half school years (see School A). In analysing the impacts seen across the four schools the following themes have been seen:

#### **Enjoyment and engagement**

The Breeze Project has been very well received by CYP across all groups; this was consistent across those that completed a full school year of the project (or more) and in shorter term groups. Young people particularly appreciated spending time with friends (old and new) and within the natural environment, the majority appreciated the learner-led pedagogy and freedom from the normal structures of school, although some secondary aged students found making their own choices challenging at times.

#### **Improved relationships, social and communication skills**

FS facilitates opportunities for group work, games and play, taking a holistic approach to learners' development and a focus on relationships. We have seen how this led to developments in communication and social skills and improved relationships, both between CYP and with school staff. Schools have reported on the increased need to support a broader range of CYP experiencing social and emotional difficulties following the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Connection to nature and wellbeing**

CYP across all groups talked about their appreciation of the natural environment and the positive impact that this had on their lives; this was sometimes in relation to the calming effect they felt within the woods, enabling them to take time out from pressures within their lives, a sense of freedom and/or in relation to a new found wonder or interest in nature. Connection to nature was not a primary anticipated outcome of the Breeze Project but was seen to be important for the CYP particularly in relation to their sense of wellbeing.

### **Behaviour and emotional regulation**

Where CYP have had difficulties with emotional regulation and behaviour they were much more able to regulate this within the FS environment and, given longer-term engagement (minimum of one school year) to develop and practise skills, learners were able to use these skills to manage their behaviour and emotions at school and in some cases within the home environment too.

### **Sense of self**

There is evidence across all the case studies of CYP developing a more positive sense of self; for many young people this stemmed from successful experiences at FS (often involving appropriate levels of risk) from which they recognised skills such as perseverance and resilience and expressed feelings of pride, with teachers and parents also observing increased self-confidence in the CYP. Further for some CYP, developing FS interests over time led to seeing themselves as a 'nature' or 'outdoorsy person', contributing to their positive self-identity.

### **Engagement in learning within the classroom**

Through supporting learners to take risks appropriate to them at FS, CYP have been able to over-come anxieties and develop skills to support engagement in learning such as perseverance and resilience; in some cases this has been seen to support learning back in the classroom. This has been most successful where consistent school staff support learners both at FS and within the classroom environment as they are able to help CYP to make the connections between their successful experiences at FS and the challenges they face within the classroom.

### **Impacts within the home environment**

Whilst there has been evidence of impacts transferring to the home environment, this has been difficult to evidence for the majority of CYP as the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic have restricted parental involvement in both Breeze and the research. Nevertheless, given the

evidence to support impact within the classroom, it is reasonable to think that this transference would also be possible across more CYP within the home environment but would most likely require greater involvement from parents and carers with the FS approach.

### **Divergent outcomes**

We have seen evidence of the numerous ways in which CYP have developed as a result of their FS experience across four schools, all young people benefitted in some way but not all in the same way. FS's learner-centred pedagogy enables young people to develop in ways important to them (although this is often not a conscious decision); some CYP worked on developing their communication and social skills which led to improved relationships, others were able to reduce anxieties that enabled them to engage in challenging tasks or a connection to nature improved their sense of wellbeing and emotional regulation. The learner led pedagogy of FS does lead to divergent outcomes but in researching across schools we have identified the key ways in which FS can benefit a broad range of CYP.

### **Study limitations and reflections**

Despite the wealth of rich data throughout this study, there are inevitably limitations which include the variations of data collected in each school. It was always intended to work in co-production with stakeholders and so the data collected was necessarily bespoke to each school but a key priority was to prioritise the voice of participants within the research. In order to work with CYP in ways in which they were comfortable and were complimentary to the FS pedagogy, research methods included walking interviews and interviews mediated by photographs, the environment and craft projects; this was successfully embedded in the first half of the project but had to be suspended in March 2020 due to the first national lockdown. From the pandemic onwards the research became more reliant on school staff (both in detailing their own perspectives and in seeking feedback from CYP and families) than had originally been intended, but without this continued commitment from school staff the Breeze project and research would not have been possible at all. Researcher observations and walking interviews were re-established for three schools in the summer of 2021 and parental/carers views were also sought via remote methods and each case study does include reflections from CYP, parents and carers, school staff and FS practitioners (where applicable), although the weighting of these voices has varied in each case according to what was possible.

These years of the pandemic have seen unprecedented disruption which has been unavoidable, but it is also the case that in working with schools, CYP and families, there was always going to be variation in how schools and individuals engaged with the project and research. Co-produced research methodologies recognise that such an approach entails researchers sharing decision making with the reciprocal transfer of

knowledge, skills and expertise from each partner (Hatzidimitriadou et al, 2012); this can make uniform data sets difficult to achieve but what is gained is a deep understanding born from the collective endeavour to understand the processes and impacts enacted through the project and this collaborative effort is evident throughout Breeze. The theories of change produced through the research evidence those processes, albeit through a variety of data, and in looking across the theories of change we can see the patterns of change that enable us to become confident in their replicability.

### Recommendations for schools

In adopting a FS approach, schools do need to think carefully about what they intend to achieve and how this is likely to be achieved. The theories of change produced through this research provide models of how a FS approach can support CYP experiencing social and emotional difficulties and how engagement in FS can lead to improved wellbeing and increased engagement in learning. In these contexts the following have been shown to be important:

- a minimum of a half day of FS once a week
- a long-term commitment to FS (at least one full school year)
- high adult to child ratios to support the needs of CYP and deliver a personalised FS experience
- role of staff in supporting transference of FS impacts back in the classroom
- senior leadership support, commitment and vision
- training a number of staff in FS to widen awareness of the pedagogical approach and embed within the school's curriculum

It is also likely that increased parental engagement would facilitate greater transference of impacts into the home environment.

### Recommendations for research

Continued research is needed in order to test the replicability of these theories of change in a range of further contexts and to more fully understand the possibilities for impacts within the home environment, together with the longer term impacts for CYP. A co-produced research approach, combined with a range of methods including visual and participatory methods, have been shown to be effective in gaining rich understandings from a range of participants and stakeholders; it is important that research continues to prioritise the voice of CYP and families

and to seek innovative methods to maximise engagement in research. Theories of change have articulated how impacts are achieved through actions and provided models of impact that can be used by schools, practitioners and researchers in continuing FS practice.

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## Appendixes 1-9

### Appendix 1: Hillhead ARC steps of change

Steps of change	Assessed July 2021	Examples from data
1. School staff plan, deliver and evaluate FS sessions (one day a week, term-time)	Substantially evidenced	School documentation Sept 2018-July 2021 (including timetabling, website information and planning) Researcher observations Sept 2018 – Feb 2020 (9 sessions) Staff interviews (11)
2. Children are given the opportunity to learn in an alternative outdoor environment (this may be viewed as less threatening and/or have less negative associations)	Substantially evidenced	School documentation and researcher observations as above  <i>The children are continuing to enjoy sessions, they want to come and parents reporting that the children say it is the best day of the week and are more willing to get ready in the morning on forest school days.</i> (Parents comments collected by school, Nov 2018)  <i>A lot of them will say 'I love being out here', 'I love a Thursday (FS day)', 'Thursdays always go so fast' (YP comments reported by school, summer 2021)</i>  <i>The children continue to see Thursdays (FS day) as their favourite day and lots of parents have said that they have no difficulty in getting their child ready for school on a Thursday and they are enthusiastic to come to school. This is often a huge improvement especially with children who have previously been at mainstreams on reduced timetables.</i> (School, Jan 2021)
3. Children engage in enjoyable outdoor activities (including bushcraft, games and exploration of nature) and have opportunities to follow own interests as a regular part of their educational experience	Substantially evidenced	<i>They are less interested in craft projects, although did enjoy whittling and generally enjoy fire building, especially if it involves food.</i> (School, Nov 2018)  <i>His mam has commented that he loves forest school and he gets so much out of it, he loves it so much.</i> (Parent comment collected by school)  <i>He loves to climb and playing chasey games, the fact that he can be free and move about as much as he likes at forest school, I think that suits him really well ... He absolutely loves forest school and if ever he feels like there is a chance that he isn't coming he is upset about it, he does love to come.</i> (School, June 2019)  <i>The forest school set up really suits Katy, that child-led learning style where she can move around and select her own</i>

		<p><i>activities, she's very much driven by what she wants to do and she finds it very easy to be creative, she loves the whittling, the woodwork, that day with the painting, and her confidence in things like tree climbing has massively improved ... In school she finds the structure difficult ... I think it's what she needs and although she's a Year 2 she's still very much learning at that Reception level and it is the only day in the week when she gets that style of learning. (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>Come and see my den, I made this, it's my secret place (YP, 2019)</i></p> <p><i>You can run around, we play hide and seek and eagle eyes (YP, 2019)</i></p> <p><i>They've recently become interested in making traps, Billy does different ones each week but the others will often join him, they love climbing trees, bug hunting and identification, using the saw to cut wood for crafts and the fire, we make a fire and cook every week. Some of them like the clay and weeding and planting our edible garden. Den building and we've started building a willow fence. (School, July 2021)</i></p>
4. Children and adults engage in group activities and play	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>Each session involves opportunities for group games and activities such as crafts, whittling, fire and cooking, den building and bug hunting. Sometimes the whole group will engage in a game but often they will split into twos or threes, with opportunities for a child to work one-on-one with an adult if they wish. (Researcher observations and school planning)</i></p>
5. Children become more comfortable with and able to interact with peers and a range of adults (for example improvements in communication, negotiation and compromise)	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>This year the children are playing more imaginatively, developing social skills and beginning to manage their relationships better. (School, Nov 2018)</i></p> <p><i>They get a lot from playing together, learning to be together ... in the classroom too we are seeing that they are using words first to try and resolve issues. (School, March 2019)</i></p> <p><i>His confidence with the other kids too, at forest school he's much more willing to say 'do you want to do this with me', whereas he wouldn't necessarily do that in class. (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>At forest school he speaks to you and Harriet, at his old school he wouldn't talk to any adult, even the adults in his own class never mind others. He wouldn't even ask his key worker if he wanted the toilet, but to come over to you, rather than wait for you to ask him, that's huge. (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>He's more involved with the other children at forest school than he is in the classroom, at forest school you see a lot more of him wanting to join in, whereas he's happy to be on his own here (in the classroom) ... before he would</i></p>

		<p><i>happily sit in a den with an adult and let the games go on around him and never once interact with the others, he didn't even seem to notice that the games were going on, now he has that desire to play with them even if the game isn't really his idea of fun. (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>After the second lockdown it was like re-introducing them to one another again and with really basic skills like sharing and looking after each other and we're able to do that through forest school. (School, July 2021)</i></p> <p><i>Children who have previously found making friendships hard have been excited to spend time with their peers at forest school and it has definitely impacted building positive relationships amongst the children. (School, Jan 2021)</i></p> <p><i>We've had a very high turnover of staff this year and forest school has been that chance for the staff to get to know the children and the children to know the staff in that more informal, working together time ... forest school has been a really nice chance to sit and complete an activity one-to-one with someone who's maybe a new adult and it means that in other opportunities during the week they've already started to build on those relationships ... they (the children) like to show the adults, come and I'll show you how to put up a hammock, because actually they are the experts (School, July 2021)</i></p> <p><i>At forest school they are a lot more willing to walk away from conflict and be distracted whereas in class they might refuse that support whereas at Forest school they are much more willing to go and do something else. (School, July 2021)</i></p>
6. Children become more aware and sensitive to the emotions and needs of others	Substantially evidenced	<p>When playing a game of tag one YP reminds the others, <i>You're not allowed to victimise anyone</i> (YP)</p> <p>One YP praises another when he gets the fire going, <i>You've done really well Luke</i> (YP)</p> <p>One of the YP falls and two others immediately go ask him if he's ok and help him up (Researcher observations)</p> <p><i>He can mediate with the others when something has gone wrong and he can be honest and reflect on what he could have done differently, when he's calm. (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>I'm making this for my brother, it's his birthday</i> (YP, 2019)</p> <p><i>At forest school they are really caring with one another and again that's nice to be able to refer back to. (School, July 2021)</i></p>

<p>7. Children become less anxious and more able to behave appropriately at FS</p>	<p>Substantially evidenced</p>	<p><i>In school when he's anxious he barks, it can be quite a lot when he's anxious but we hardly hear that at all at forest school, it's not never but it's a lot less frequent. Today I didn't hear him at all, which says a lot about how he's feeling and suggests that he's feeling less anxious, more comfortable. (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>He gets a lot out of being in the forest in the sense of wandering around and the flapping. He finds sitting in the classroom and following the classroom day tricky, forest school is a bit of a release, it's freer and he can regulate with the flapping and things and sit down in a hammock if he wants to, so it does suit him well. (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>Our head teacher really sees the benefit, she often says Thursdays (FS day) are our calmest day, there's less behavioural challenges so she'll say Thursdays is when I book my meetings because I know I'm not going to be called upon to go to the ARC, we're not seeing the same sort of difficulties where we might need to call upon senior leaders to help. (School, July 2021)</i></p>
<p>8. Children develop an understanding and relationship with nature</p>	<p>Substantially evidenced</p>	<p><i>I've seen newts sleeping ... come and see (YP)</i></p> <p><i>A number of the YP are fascinated by the newts, they have found a juvenile sleeping behind a brick and take turn to guard it in case anyone moves the brick. They are keen to show me and also very respectful, taking care to speak quietly and not disturb the sleeping newt. (Researcher observations May 2019)</i></p> <p><i>I love it here, it's so peaceful (YP, 2019)</i></p> <p><i>Out on the yard you often hear some of the children talking about looking after nature, they have brought that back to school. I've heard them telling other children within the school and they are thinking about the impact that they're having. (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>They've developed their bug hunting and identification and which trees to use, they are much more aware of what resources we've got in terms of plants and trees and how to look after them. (School, July 2021)</i></p>
<p>9. Children are able to persevere at an activity/task, develop interests and experience success (in groups and/or independently)</p>	<p>Substantially evidenced</p>	<p><i>Henry has been trying to get the fire going for some time and the third attempt goes out. He seems a bit frustrated but manages to control his behaviour. Mrs Coates suggests he takes a break to have his lunch, Henry replies 'Ok but I'm not giving up though'. After lunch Henry comes back and successfully gets the fire going using some extra cotton wool and seems pleased. (Researcher observations, Feb 2019)</i></p> <p><i>Everyone is putting up tarps but Hugo is struggling, becoming frustrated and shouting that he can't do it. After some time he calms down enough to be able to work with Mrs Coates and as he finishes the knot at the end declares 'Look</i></p>

		<p><i>Mrs Coates, I'm actually doing it, I'm finally doing it', later he tells another adult 'Look what I did with Mrs Coates'. (Researcher observations, April 2019)</i></p> <p><i>Katy works well with Mrs Coates to peel and cut the vegetables for the soup, it takes most of the morning but she perseveres and seems to enjoy Mrs Coates company as they work together. (Researcher observation, May 2019)</i></p> <p><i>His confidence has massively increased. It was that fear of failure that sometimes stops him, that is something we see in school if he feels like he's got something wrong, that can be a trigger for shutting down, but at forest school he's taking more and more risks, he perseveres at things. Like last week when making the hot chocolate with the kelly kettle, he could not light it and if it was something in class and he couldn't do it after a couple of attempts, not even that, he would give up, whereas the fact he kept going, kept going. (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>When he's opted to do something like build a fire and in those incidences he's very good at listening to instructions, very good at following the things that have been asked of him, he stays completely on task ... when he whittled one week he really took on what you were saying which he doesn't do in class, he's normally full steam ahead. (School, June 2019)</i></p>
10. Children are able to engage with increasingly difficult and challenging tasks at FS (in groups and/or independently)	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>The children are improving their skills in fire lighting and putting up tarps and tying knots and there are still a lot of running around games. The children are taking more ownership and responsibility of equipment, they will suggest what they should take and will help to pack away equipment at the end of session. (School, March 2019)</i></p> <p><i>One week we had a waterproof den challenge and I said I would test it by throwing a bucket of water at the den and he spent ages and ages on that den and making it not just waterproof but homely (School, June 2019)</i></p> <p><i>Henry with the fire, over the course of the last few months he keeps coming back to the same activity and we are seeing each time an increased level of independence and what he can do with it, he keeps coming back to it and extending the experience so now he'll set everything up, collect the sticks, he know the safety things, will make quite a good attempt at laying everything out and once he gets it going, cooking on it. He will now see that whole activity through to some sort of conclusion, he's finally got that sense of purpose ... in class he finds independence incredibly difficult. (School, June 2019)</i></p>
11. Children are encouraged to reflect upon their experiences	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>School staff often encourage the children to reflect on their experiences during FS sessions, 'how did that go?', 'remember when you ...' Children and staff also celebrate one another's successes, particularly when it has required perseverance. The YP find it hard to engage in reflection activities as a group so it is usually done either with an</i></p>

and achievements at FS		<p><i>individual or small group as occasions arise rather than at the end of the session. (Researcher observations)</i></p> <p><i>We have been posting photos and updates of forest school on the app Seesaw which was intended for home learning. Children have been going home and telling parents about what they have been doing at forest school and encouraging their parents to look at the photos of the day on seesaw. This has helped us engage parents in home learning and helped improve parents' engagement in the app. On this lockdown we have had a much higher uptake in home learning because parents were all already using the app. (School, Feb 2021)</i></p> <p><i>On a Friday, in the morning, we've been doing a reflection of what they've been up to at forest school and that's working as a reflection ... the end of the session had always been quite fraught and that's been a sticking point across the project, this reflection at the end of the session but Friday mornings have been working. They talk about the things they like doing, some weeks we talk about something where it might have gone wrong and they have to persevere or cope with new strategies. We also talk about what they have planned for next week so that helps me get what we need. (School, July 2021)</i></p> <p><i>The children have been asked to think about skills they have developed this year and I would say 90% of their examples were times at forest school, things like teamwork, creativity and problem solving, they can really see those skills in the things they do at forest school ... I think that shows that they are unpicking what they are doing at forest school. (School, July 2021)</i></p> <p><i>Seeing the children really engage in activities and that's nice to refer back to when we're back in class and a way to prove to them actually you can sit and do something. (School, July 2021)</i></p> <p><i>They benefit from opportunities to have positive experiences with one another, working with other children. When we have new children it can be quite a challenge to get them to gel as a group, this year it's been a positive in that if there are points in the week if they aren't getting on with someone, we have been able to encourage them to reflect back on when they have worked well with someone and that's usually at forest school. (School, July 2021)</i></p>
12. Children develop positive self-narratives	Partly evidenced	<p><i>I built that with Harriet! (YP)</i></p> <p><i>I got the certificate for the 10 minute fire challenge, I did it all myself! (YP, 2019)</i></p> <p><i>During lockdown two of our children continued FS with a small group of key worker and vulnerable children in school. They had that opportunity to be experts and show the others their skills which has been really beneficial for them, taking that role that they wouldn't normally have with mainstream children. (School, June 2020)</i></p>

		<p>In discussing the children's skills <i>forest school is where they could pick out their strengths and skills.</i> (School, July 2021)</p> <p><i>There's been times when some of them that have been with us longer have been able to take the lead in teaching the newer ones how to build a fire and helping the others, and with the likes of Timmy and Albert they are very confident at forest school now.</i> (School, July 2021)</p>
13. Children are able to use skills and interests developed at FS within the classroom and school life	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>We've been able to draw upon his successes at forest school, that's how we introduced him to integration, his first integration was a forest school session so he would be that little bit more confident ... we're seeing Terry managing more and more with his anxiety, he's actually experiencing successes and he's seeing times when he doesn't get it right first time and it doesn't matter. I think the Terry that we're seeing now is getting more and more able to cope when things go wrong.</i> (School, June 2019)</p> <p><i>Well they are generally more prepared to give things a go, they all took part in the KS2 performance at Christmas, previously we would maybe have one prepared to do that, and half of the children now integrate into mainstream classes at some point over the week. That's the highest number integrating we've ever had ... Last year we mainly saw the impacts at forest school but this year we are seeing the impacts back at school too</i> (School, Jan 2020)</p> <p><i>Parents have commented that the increase interest in school and pride in their photos (from FS) has helped create a more positive view of school for the children. This in turn has helped the parents as they feel that they are not having to struggle to get their child to attend school.</i> (School, Feb 2021)</p> <p><i>When we talk about skills they've used, they can see those skills quite embedded in forest school so that means when we're talking about it in other subjects I think they've got a much clearer idea of what it looks like. So for example creativity, to start with they had this idea that it was art, if you're good at art, but through using forest school examples we talked about it in coming up with different approaches to something.</i> (School, July 2021)</p> <p><i>A lot of them do have a lot of baggage about being in class so it can be a big hill to climb but we're seeing there has been an increase in their willingness to give things a go, to work with one another and mediate difficulties with one another and willingness to move on from things and that has massively changed.</i> (School, July 2021)</p> <p><i>We have seen strong friendships develop often starting on Thursdays (FS day).</i> (School, Jan 2021)</p> <p><i>In the forest school sessions they really are much more aware when someone's upset and more responsive to that in</i></p>

		<i>the classroom than they had been. (School, July 2021)</i>
14. School feel confident about taking children outside of the classroom	Partly evidenced	<p>School successfully took the ARC class to Scotswood Garden weekly from September 2018 until February 2020. At that time four new children joined the class which impacted upon the dynamic of the group and one particular child was a persistent flight risk. At this time the school decided to temporarily re-locate weekly FS sessions to the school site which was more secure, this became longer term with the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, FS sessions continued throughout the project.</p> <p><i>Well they are generally more prepared to give things a go, they all took part in the KS2 performance at Christmas, previously we would maybe have one prepared to do that, and half of the children now integrate into mainstream classes at some point over the week. That's the highest number integrating we've ever had ... Last year we mainly saw the impacts at forest school but this year we are seeing the impacts back at school too (School, Jan 2020)</i></p>
15. Children are able to use skills and interests developed at FS within home life	Not evidenced in this period	Unfortunately the researcher was unable to engage with families to a sufficient extent to evidence whether this had happened or not
16. Families are motivated to and feel confident about taking children to a range of activities	Not evidenced in this period	<p>Unfortunately the researcher was unable to engage with families to a sufficient extent to evidence whether this had happened or not</p> <p><i>One YP tells me that he has just started swimming lessons and school staff report this is significant as previously his family had been very reluctant to take him to places or activities due to his unpredictable and volatile behaviour (Researcher notes, May 2019)</i></p>

## Appendix 2: Northgate (2019-2021) steps of change

Steps of change	Assessed July 2021	Examples from data
1. School staff plan, deliver and evaluate FS sessions (one day a week, term-time)	Substantially evidenced	School documentation Sept 2019-July 2021 (including timetabling, website information and planning) Researcher observations Sept 2019 – Feb 2020 and June-July 2021 School staff, parental and YP interviews
2. Young people (YP) are given the opportunity to learn in an alternative outdoor environment (this may be viewed as less threatening and/or have less negative associations)	Substantially evidenced	School documentation, researcher observations and interviews as above  <i>I like it here because it's relaxing, I just watch the nature ... it's nice to know that we'll be coming here on a Friday</i> (YP, July 2021)  <i>I've also learnt that nature can be very calming</i> (YP, June 2021).
3. YP engage in enjoyable outdoor activities (including bushcraft, games and exploration of nature) and have opportunities to follow own interests as a regular part of their educational experience	Substantially evidenced	School planning and evaluation documentation – staff ask YP what they would like to do at the following session and adapt resources accordingly  <i>In school it's all about work but here we have free time</i> (YP, June 2021)  <i>I like it because you can choose and there's quite a lot of choices</i> (YP, July 2021)  <i>He absolutely loved it, loved every minute, he was on a high when he came in (after FS)</i> (Parent/carer Feb 2020)  <i>Luke thoroughly enjoyed forest school especially whittling and being outdoors.</i> (Parent/carer Feb 2020)  <i>They often take on different roles within the group according to their interests and abilities, so one might be the chef and another lead on building structures.</i> (School, Jan 2021)
4. YP develop an understanding and relationship with	Substantially evidenced	<i>I started noticing the tiny details that other people take for granted and how nice it looks ... it just makes me feel happy</i> (YP, July 2021)

nature		<p><i>YP tells me the names of some of the trees in the FS area 'this one's Hazel, my grandma has a Cherry tree'</i> (Researcher notes and YP, June 2021)</p> <p><i>(At forest school) he also enjoys his surroundings and taking photos of what he finds</i> (Parent/carer, Oct 2021)</p> <p><i>A crow joins the group and the YP discuss what it might be doing and thinking, they call him Tommy, 'he's here for his lunch, he wants your lunch', 'here comes Tommy again, I wonder what he's doing', 'he's after your spot, this is his patch', 'he wants to join in'.</i> (Researcher observation, June 2021)</p>
5. YP are able to persevere at an activity/task, develop interests and experience success (in groups and/or independently)	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>'I do quite a lot of photography, I like to just notice things'</i> (YP, July 2021)</p> <p><i>He enjoyed making fire, building dens, navigating with a compass and using a knife in woodwork, as well as cooking outdoors</i> (Parent/carer Feb 2020)</p> <p><i>He really enjoys being hands on when using the kelly kettle and the responsibility</i> (Parent/carer, Oct 2021)</p> <p><i>Leo asks for his whittling project that he started last week; he is whittling a large stick. Billy joins Leo and they sit together working on their own projects and chatting quietly.</i> (Researcher observations, July 2021)</p> <p><i>Adam really enjoys the fire and cooking, he often asks to cook or make hot chocolate for everyone.</i> (Staff, June 2021)</p>
6. YP are able to engage with increasingly difficult and challenging tasks at FS (in groups and/or independently)	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>I've learnt quite a lot like fire, when I first came I didn't know anything about fire, it was really hard to get it started but now it's getting easier ... you have to collect the wood and check for hazards and then start building the fire like this, sometimes I rush it a bit ... when a new teacher came she couldn't get the fire going and I showed her, I got it going straight away</i> (YP, June 2021)</p> <p><i>Adam shows me his bee sculpture, it's made out of a tin can, which he's painted with a face and with strings and bells attached. 'I've been working on this for three weeks, I did this bit first and then added the bells, I want to add some wings next'</i> (Researcher observation and YP, June 2021)</p> <p><i>Billy and Leo work together to put up their hammocks and build a den around them, they work independently and quickly, I ask them about the knots and Leo tells me 'this one's a half-hitch'. Their teacher tells me that when they started forest school they were often reluctant to tie any knots themselves and would rely on staff but that over time they had built their skills and confidence and could now design quite complex dens independently.</i> (Researcher</p>

		<p>observations, July 2021)</p> <p><i>Recently we've done more tool based projects, developing the skills and confidence that they can do some of these things on their own, having that experience and skills they can use in their future lives. Extending projects and the students' ideas. (School, Jan 2021)</i></p>
7. YP and adults engage in group activities and games	Substantially evidenced	<p>School planning and evaluation documentation</p> <p><i>The YP play games of hide and seek tag, manhunt and card games like Uno, sometimes the staff join in and other times it is just the YP. Often one or two YP will choose to do an independent activity, on their own or with a member of staff, but everyone joins in at some point. (Researcher observations, June – July 2022)</i></p>
8. YP become more comfortable with and able to interact with peers and a range of adults (for example improvements in communication, negotiation and compromise)	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>He can be socially awkward, doing the right thing can be difficult for him, he's got autism and ADHD. But working alongside peers, developing social skills, team work skills, that's been good for him. (Parent/carer Sept 2021)</i></p> <p><i>One of the lads lives in a flat and has very limited social contact, in the beginning he said he didn't like going outside but he's really enjoyed running around and getting involved in the cooking. Socially he's gained loads. (School, Jan 2021)</i></p> <p><i>We see them developing those interpersonal skills, teamwork and personal and social development ... Being able to engage with one another and the task they have chosen, as they often find that difficult in class. (School, Jan 2021)</i></p> <p><i>Leo, Billy, Oscar and Luke are playing a game of manhunt, they negotiate the rules and are able to tell each other when the game is getting a bit much and one of them wants a break. Oscar is quieter but they all seem to enjoy taking part. (Researcher observations, July 2022)</i></p>
9. YP develop relationships with peers and adults at FS	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>Outside it's more relaxed and you have that space, it's nice to be able to talk to them and they can open up more if others aren't too close ... they might ask for help with something when they wouldn't usually in the classroom (School, Jan 2021)</i></p> <p><i>Playing Uno has helped him to get involved with the others, before he would always take himself off but it's helped him to get involved. Now they will all play games of tag and they include him, if it gets a bit silly he will take some time out but then he'll be back again later on. They really feel like a group now, they've managed to gel together in their different ways. (School, June 2021)</i></p>

		<p><i>In class getting on with his peers can be an issue but he seems ok at forest school. (Parent/carer, Sept 2021)</i></p> <p><i>You can just hang out, feel happy. I always make the hot chocolate for everyone. (YP, June 2021)</i></p>
10. YP become less anxious and more able to behave appropriately at FS	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>He suffers from anxiety and finds if some situations get a bit much , that taking himself off to take photos has really helped him (Parent/carer, Oct 2021)</i></p> <p><i>It's lovely to see them so relaxed here, they're very happy. They're a great class but some of them can struggle in the classroom but not here (School, June 2021)</i></p> <p><i>In a classroom it's full of tension but out here it's really calming (YP, June 2021)</i></p>
11. YP are encouraged to reflect upon their experiences and achievements at FS	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>During sessions school staff regularly encourage the students and give positive feedback on their efforts and achievements, 'you're working hard at that', 'you've made a lot of progress', using past successes to motivate when finding things tricky 'that's right, keep going, you managed that well last week' (Researcher observations, June – July 2021)</i></p> <p><i>I've learnt quite a lot like fire, when I first came I didn't know anything about fire, it was really hard to get it started but now it's getting easier ... you have to collect the wood and check for hazards and then start building the fire like this, sometimes I rush it a bit ... when a new teacher came she couldn't get the fire going and I showed her, I got it going straight away (YP, June 2021)</i></p> <p>School planning and evaluation documentation incorporates reflection and positive feedback during sessions</p>
12. YP develop positive self-narratives	Partly evidenced	<p><i>After initial reluctance Luke perseveres in altering a swing and re-tying it at a higher height, tells adult 'I'm proud of myself, that I did that!'</i> (Researcher observation, Dec 2019)</p> <p><i>He loved it, would always talk about it before and afterwards. Felt it was so good for him to have some fun ... Forest school helped him to smile again (Parent/carer Sept 2021)</i></p> <p><i>He developed in leaps and bounds, his confidence, doing something new, the fire, hammocks, bushcraft (Parent/carer Sept 2021)</i></p> <p><i>The benefits are that he's in the outdoors, doing things that he wouldn't usually be doing. It gives him more confidence in himself and independence. (Parent/carer, Oct 2021)</i></p>

		<i>Building up good habits, outdoor experiences that capture his imagination ... building his self-confidence.</i> (Parent/carer 2021)
13. YP are able to use skills and interests developed at FS within the classroom and school life	Partly evidenced	<i>We wanted to take that forest school ethos and skills and continue to develop that with the students, to provide that balance, life experience and therapeutic quality alongside the academic. So as well as forest school, we're now offering outdoor learning and the John Muir award to develop our Key Stage 3 curriculum. At Key Stage 4 we're offering Environmental Studies and John Muir ... We've invested in staff training and some have previous experiences too, outdoor learning is now an integral part of what we offer and we've continued that for our students coming into school over the lockdowns.</i> (School, Jan 2021)
14. YP are able to use skills and interests developed at FS within home life	Partly evidenced	<p><i>We have pictures from forest school at home on the fridge, we look at them every day.</i> (Parent/carer Feb 2020)</p> <p><i>I'd like to go to more places like this in the future</i> (YP, June 2021)</p> <p><i>I do quite a lot of photography at home too, I just like to notice things</i> (YP, July 2021)</p> <p><i>I've started growing things, I've got an onion and a sunflower in pots at home</i> (YP, June 2021)</p>

### Appendix 3: Summer Grove School steps of change

#### Strand of Action 1: Impact for young people (YP)

Steps of change	Year 1	Examples from data	Year 3	Examples from data
1. FS practitioner, school staff and researcher work in partnership to plan, deliver and reflect on FS sessions (one day a week, term time, for one school year)	Substantially evidenced	Weekly FS planning and evaluation documents (term time)  Researcher observations (11 sessions)  Staff and FS practitioner interviews (7)	Partly evidenced	Weekly FS planning and evaluation documents Oct-Nov 2020 (am only) and Jan-July 2021 (am and pm groups) Researcher observations (2 sessions) Staff interviews (2)
2. YP engage in enjoyable outdoor activities (including bushcraft, games and exploration of nature, widening their experiences) and have opportunities to follow own interests as a regular part of their educational experience	Substantially evidenced	Planning and evaluation documentation and researcher observations as above  <i>You get to do what you like rather than being told by teachers</i> (YP)  <i>It's exciting, you get to learn new things every week for projects that you want to do</i> (YP)  <i>You get to run around , you don't have to stay in one place</i> (YP)  <i>You don't have teachers on your case; you can set your mind free. At school I just think about work</i> (YP)	Substantially evidenced	Planning and evaluation documentation and researcher observations as above  <i>I love forest school, when I first started I was really worried because I know forests are dangerous but I love it, I've made fires, I can show you</i> (YP)  <i>We love it! We can jump in muddy puddles but it's nice today too because the sun has come out</i> (YP)  <i>She was always really excited on the days she was going to forest school she has talked a lot about her friends from there and the things she's eaten and made. I think the hot chocolate and marshmallows were one of her favourite things. In the time she was going we have not heard her complain or say she didn't like anything</i> (parent/carer)

3. YP and adults engage in group work and team-building activities	Substantially evidenced	<p>FS planning documents and researcher observations include weekly games such as eagle eyes and hide and seek.</p> <p><i>The YP often choose to do activities in pairs or small groups, such a bug hunting, using tools to create wooden artefacts or fire lighting and cooking. An adult will work alongside and supervise or support the YP as needed. A couple of the YP find it hard to choose their own activities and are supported to engage by an adult, often one to one (Researcher observations)</i></p> <p><i>Jacob has participated in a range of games such as hide and seek and eagle eyes. These are activities that Jacob might be reluctant to participate in at school (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>Jim has been able to work effectively within a team and despite having his own set ideas of how an outcome should look (hanging a tarp in the woods), he has been able to accept his friends ideas and supported them to achieve their goal (FS student report)</i></p>	Substantially evidenced	<p>FS planning documents and researcher observations include weekly games such as eagle eyes and an adapted game the YP call 'fox and chickens' or in another group a game called 'among us' (a form of manhunt).</p> <p><i>Two YP work with a member of staff to use the bow saw to cut some wood cookies. The YP take turns doing the tool talk, reminding each other of any bits they've missed. Then they work together to use the bow saw supervised by the member of staff. A couple of times the saw gets stuck and they have to work together to get into a good cutting rhythm, 'pull, now you, now me, now you' (Researcher observations)</i></p> <p><i>Issac has thoroughly enjoyed his time at forest school. He has taken part in a wide variety of games and activities. He enjoys playing chase games with his friends and building fires (FS student report)</i></p>
4. YP become more comfortable interacting with peers and a range of adults	Substantially evidenced	<p>During FS sessions students have opportunities to spend time with school staff, the FS practitioner and researcher as well as their peers. YP described the adults at FS as 'cool, different, more calm' and 'it's different, they let you do what you want to do'</p> <p>School staff reported that a number of the YP started to present more confidently at FS 'they</p>	Partly evidenced	<p><i>The experiences Louise has had through forest school have been invaluable, she has made some lovely friendships which is something she has struggled with a bit since starting school. While we do quite a lot of outdoor activities as a family it has been nice for Louise to take part in these kind of activities with her friends and be a bit more independent (parent/carer)</i></p>

		<p><i>can surprise you, more socially confident' (School staff)</i></p> <p><i>At forest school we can hang with our friends, we don't do that at school, we could but don't, not sure why (YP)</i></p> <p><i>Taylor has shown an increase in the amount of positive interactions he has with his peers. Initially Taylor would stick quite firmly in his comfort zone of maybe 3 close friends but he will now play and talk with all members of the group (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>During forest school, I see children run and play who would not usually do so. I see children interact with others and make new friends, share experiences, support each other and depend on each other (School)</i></p>		<p><i>To begin with, Robert was often on the peripherals of the group. He would choose not to get involved in the fire lighting or games but instead he would spend time watching his friends and discussing what they were doing. Over time this has changed, and he will now often get involved, this has provided some excellent opportunities for Robert to play and exercise (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>Lisa has always had a close friendship with Judy, and they have been side by side throughout. Forest school has also offered Lisa a terrific opportunity to spend quality time with other girls in her year group too. Lisa and Judy have expanded their friendship to include Laura. This has been difficult at times, but Lisa now seems accepting that they are a trio and has been a supportive friend to Laura (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>What have you enjoyed about FS? Playing with friends (YP)</i>  <i>Playing 'Among Us' and spending time with friends (YP)</i>  <i>Playing with my friends (YP)</i>  <i>Playing games with my friends (YP)</i></p>
5. YP develop skills for social interaction with peers and a range of adults	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>You learn how to get along with people, good teamwork. Working on things you never normally do in school (YP)</i></p> <p><i>Kacey is more motivated to communicate with the others at forest school, at school she's not</i></p>	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>Katherine has used her time at forest school to build and manage relationships with friends. She has, at times arrived at the sessions after falling out with a friend over lunchtime. Katherine has found this time quite beneficial to help mend her friendships, away</i></p>

		<p><i>keen on using her voice and doesn't persevere much, but we're seeing her trying much harder at forest school (School)</i></p> <p><i>Kacey often struggles to communicate with staff and her peers but she has shown a good persistent attitude and has been able to make herself well understood through verbal communication and gestures (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>At school Jason mainly interacts with adults, he has that one to one support which he relies on but at forest school he's increasingly able to spend time with his peers (School)</i></p>		<p><i>from other students and with no expectations placed on her by teaching staff (if Katherine chooses to sit with a friend and chat, that is absolutely fine to do at forest school) (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>Henry enjoys being in the woods with friends and often initiates conversations while sat carving or around the fire. This has been a great benefit to the group as some of the children are still developing this skill (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>One boy who was virtually non-verbal has started to vocalise in interacting with the others at forest school, for him that's huge (School)</i></p>
6. YP are able to persevere with an activity/task and experience success (in groups and/or independently)	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>The children in my school, in most cases, are brought to school in minibuses. They don't get the opportunity to play out at break time if there is more than a light shower, they never play out with friends at home and if it's raining at the weekend, they stay in or go to the soft play or the Metrocentre [indoor shopping centre]. They aren't given the chance to become resilient. At forest school the session goes ahead in all weather, unless it's not safe, and children are encouraged to wrap up warm, play games, build shelters and have a warm drink. I have seen children become more resilient to the weather in a short space of time (School)</i></p>	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>He's been working on a walking staff for the past three weeks and is immensely proud of it (School)</i></p> <p><i>We have a new student with ADHD and he's much more able to engage and focus at forest school compared to the classroom (School)</i></p> <p><i>All the children have had successes (School)</i></p> <p><i>They're more able to have a go at things and developing those verbal skills to ask to join in with something (School)</i></p>

		<p>Researcher observations shows YP engaging in activities such as fire building and cooking, tool use, bug identification, creating crafts. Some of the YP are able to self-direct, whilst others need support to engage (Researcher observations)</p> <p><i>Chris has made some excellent woodland crafts and has shown great patience with whittling, despite having limited mobility in one hand. He has found ways to adapt his techniques to allow him to continue with projects (FS student report)</i></p>		<p><i>He has been willing to try every activity that has been suggested. This has allowed him to inform his own opinions on the types of things he might enjoy. He has particularly enjoyed creative activities such as Hapa Zome (traditional Japanese art form, which involves printing leaves and flowers onto cloth), he has made some wonderful wood cookies and decorated them with precision and thought (FS student report)</i></p>
7. YP develop their own interests and skills at FS (this may include an understanding of and relationship with nature)	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>I try to think what bugs go through every day ... I like the trees (YP)</i></p> <p><i>Lifting, you feel alive (YP)</i></p> <p><i>Peaceful (YP's reflection on FS)</i></p> <p><i>It gives him more of a choice of things to do, like being in nature and having other interests rather than computer games (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>He loves being outside all day, which is great because he has a lot of anxieties about being outside. It's very difficult to get him to go anywhere but not to forest school. He really enjoys it (parent/carer)</i></p>	Substantially evidenced	<p><i>Michael has particularly enjoyed being physical, playing games, running, climbing, and swinging. I believe that at times Michael has been able to regulate his mood by taking part in these activities. Equally, at times Michael has been able to withdraw from the group to spend time by himself. He quite enjoys swinging in the hammock or on the tree swing (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>Rocco is full of wonder and curiosity for the Natural world around him. More so than any other student in his group, he has been repeatedly drawn to wildlife and has listened carefully to ensure he handles creatures correctly and with care (FS student report)</i></p>

		<i>Taylor is very interested in nature now, he's very knowledgeable about birds, insects, newts (School)</i>		<p><i>Small animals and insects also fascinate Issac. He enjoys looking for and catching insects and is always curious to know if they are venomous, or if they will bite (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>More recently he has taken a keen interest in the natural world around him. He has spent lots of time looking at different insects and using books and apps to try and identify them (FS student report)</i></p>
8. YP are able to engage with increasingly difficult and challenging tasks at FS (in groups and/or independently)	Partly evidenced	<p><i>Shane has experienced a range of activities through forest school and he has shown a real flair for whittling. Over the duration of his time in forest school he has made pea shooters, small bowls, butter knives and miniature pieces of furniture. This has demonstrated a high level of focus and excellent fine motor skills (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>Chris has enjoyed making various woodland crafts and whittling. He has shown excellent perseverance while attempting to saw large logs. He is able to give a tool safety talk and work effectively with a friend to operate a bow saw (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>Jason has shown a keen interest in the principles of fire lighting and has set himself</i></p>	Partly evidenced	<p><i>Robert independently gathers some fire wood and sorts into different sizes, he builds the fire and then asks for the flint and steel, independently lighting and feeding the fire until it is established (Researcher observations)</i></p> <p><i>Kay has managed risk well over the last year. She has remained within the boundaries, handled knives and saws and built and sustained fires. Staff supervised her very closely to begin with but as Kay has become more independent, staff have been able to withdraw direct supervision and simply shadow her activities (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>He has especially enjoyed using tools</i></p>

		<p><i>increasingly difficult challenges. Most recently he was able to light a fire using only a flint and steel and all natural materials available in a woodland (FS student report)</i></p> <p><i>A couple are still struggling with making their own choices, they need more direction and support than I would have anticipated at this time in the year (School)</i></p>		<p><i>such as a carving knife, a hand saw and palm drill to bring to life the ideas he has. Ali has worked hard to create catapults, tent pegs, pea shooters, and pointed throwing sticks. (FS student report)</i></p>
9. YP are encouraged to reflect on their achievements at FS	Substantially evidenced	<p>Weekly FS planning and evaluation documents record reflection from YP on what they enjoyed and what they would like to do at the next session – star and a wish</p> <p>All the adults encourage and praise the YP for their engagement in tasks and activities (Researcher observations)</p> <p><i>‘I felt confident’ (YP reflecting on whittling)</i></p>	Substantially evidenced	<p>Weekly FS planning and evaluation documents record staff encouragements and reflections from YP on what they enjoyed and what they would like to do at the next session – star and a wish</p> <p><i>I feel proud about the fire because sometimes I can get frustrated but I did it (YP)</i></p> <p><i>It’s getting better all the time (YP)</i></p>
10. YP develop positive self-narratives	Partly evidenced	<p><i>There’s more to life than what you think, in a really good way (YP)</i></p> <p><i>I’ve never been good at anything before but I’ve found my thing (YP)</i></p>	Partly evidenced	<p><i>I did it, I can’t believe I did it straight away. I feel really proud of myself (YP)</i></p> <p><i>Kiera spoke excitedly when she had been to forest school, she told us what she had been doing, and also what others had been doing, she was particularly proud of the mushrooms she made, and they are still on display in the house (parent/carer)</i></p>

				<p><i>Henry really enjoys spending time in nature and often speaks about family camping trips while we are at forest school. He has started to identify as an outdoor enthusiast, He has referred to himself a couple of times as 'Nature Boy' (FS student report)</i></p>
<p>11. YP are able to extend interests and skills developed at FS into school and home life</p>	<p>Partly evidenced</p>	<p><i>I still see children in school talking with the friends they made during forest school, and we will often recount activities and memories of successes and failures (School)</i></p> <p><i>Callum's definitely grown in confidence, his eye contact is much better, even in say the corridor and he'll say hello whereas before forest school his head was always down (School)</i></p> <p><i>Back at school none of them are reluctant to write in their forest school journal and it can be a bit of a struggle with some of them for other writing. The fact that Jacob did that report for the school newsletter too, he wanted to do it and that's unusual for him (School)</i></p> <p><i>At home I don't have anyone to hang out with, just family (YP)</i></p> <p>Two years after the students stopped</p>	<p>Partly evidenced</p>	<p><i>We see those relationships both between the students and with staff back at school, they'll seek out those interactions about forest school asking what's the weather going to be like and suggesting activities (School)</i></p> <p><i>All the children have had successes and they share that with other staff and friends weekly (School)</i></p> <p><i>We're seeing those social skills being used back at school, particularly at lunchtimes, there's more mixing between the students (School)</i></p> <p><i>Jill can answer yes and no to questions I ask her and when I have asked her if she enjoyed forest school she has always been full of smiles and said yes ... she was also very enthusiastic to show us the leaf prints that she had done at forest school (parent/carer)</i></p>

		attending forest school, two say they have continued whittling and making wooden object/crafts at home (School)		
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***Strand of Action 2: Impact for school***

Steps of change	Year 1	Examples from data	Year 3	Examples from data
A. FS practitioner, school staff and researcher work in partnership to plan, deliver and reflect on FS sessions (one day a week, term time, for one school year)	Substantially evidenced	Weekly FS planning and evaluation documents (term time)  Researcher observations (11 sessions)  Staff and FS practitioner interviews (7)	Partly evidenced	Weekly FS planning and evaluation documents Oct-Nov 2020 (am only) and Jan-July 2021 (am and pm groups)  Researcher observations (2 sessions)  Staff interviews (2)
B. School staff engage and complete Level 1 and Level 3 FS training	Substantially evidenced	1 staff member Level 3  1 staff member Level 1	Substantially evidenced	Additional staff member Level 3 (Year 2)  Additional 2 staff members Level 1 (1 in Year 2 and 1 in Year 3)
C. Over the year school staff gradually take increasing responsibility for planning, delivery	Substantially evidenced	Weekly FS planning and evaluation documents, school takes on lead Summer 2019  School staff and FS practitioner interviews (7)	Substantially evidenced	School staff fully independent - School FS planning and evaluation documents  School staff interviews (5)

and reflection of FS sessions				
D. School staff are confident and experienced FS practitioners	Partly evidenced	By the end of Year 1 school staff have taken on the independent planning, delivery and evaluation of sessions and are developing as newly qualified FS practitioners.	Substantially evidenced	<p>School staff fully independent and experienced in planning, delivery and evaluation of sessions.</p> <p>FS qualified staff run yearly INSET sessions for school to disseminate the principles and approach of FS. One member of staff does leave but three others remain and are passionate about FS.</p>
E. FS is an embedded part of curriculum and part of the school approach for addressing social and emotional needs	Partly evidenced	<p>Staff who have completed Forest school training delivered INSET session to other school staff</p> <p>FS featured in their 2018-2019 School Development Plan as part of approach to meeting the emotional and social needs of students</p>	Partly evidenced	<p>The school has one Level 3 and two Level 1 FS qualified members of staff who are passionate about FS</p> <p><i>Feels like I'm talking about forest school every day, the kids are all desperate to come (School)</i></p> <p>Governor and Senior Leadership have observed a FS session and there are additional staff interested in FS training.</p>

## Appendix 4: Park View First School steps of change

### Strand of action 1: Impact for children and young people (CYP)

Steps of change	Spring 2020	Examples from data	Summer 2021	Examples from data
1. FS practitioner works with school staff to co-plan and co-deliver FS sessions (one half day per week, term-time)	Substantially evidenced	<p>Sept 2018 – March 2020: weekly FS planning and evaluation documents (term time)</p> <p>Researcher observations (17 sessions)</p> <p>Interviews with school staff, FS practitioners and CYP</p>	Partly evidenced (not consistently weekly, co-delivered but largely planned by FS practitioner)	<p>April – October 2020: no sessions</p> <p>November 2020 – May 2021: occasional sessions: four groups of children received 3 sessions (Planning and evaluation documents and 2 researcher observations)</p> <p>June – July 2021: weekly FS sessions for two groups of children for seven weeks (Planning and evaluation documents and 4 researcher observations)</p> <p><i>Being able to get back to forest school has been important, a little bit of normality for our original group and being able to extend that opportunity out a bit but we have lost some of the momentum and that is disruptive for the children (SENCO)</i></p>
2. Children are given the opportunity to learn in an alternative environment (this may be viewed as less threatening and/or have fewer negative associations)	Substantially evidenced	<p>Planning and evaluation documentation and researcher observations as above</p> <p><i>You can relax and do things you want to do (YP)</i></p> <p><i>In all honesty it's the only bit of school he says he looks forward to (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>They all love forest school, it's a lovely break in the middle of the week and parents often use</i></p>	Substantially evidenced	<p>Planning and evaluation documentation and researcher observations as above</p> <p><i>It's nice being in nature ... I haven't been in nature much before (YP)</i></p> <p><i>She says she enjoys it and it is better to be outside than in school (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>She has seen forest school as being</i></p>

		<p><i>that to help the children. They definitely feel that it's a special place and thing to do and that's important as some of our post looked after children don't feel special so it gives them a boost (school)</i></p> <p><i>Going to forest school really made her week at school easier too as it punctuated the week and she'll often say 'it's only 2 days to forest school' which I think helped her get through difficult days (parent/carer)</i></p>		<p><i>something different or a different experience (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>Being able to get back to forest school has been important, a little bit of normality for our original group and being able to extend that opportunity out a bit (school)</i></p>
<p>3. Children engage in enjoyable outdoor activities (including bushcraft, games and exploration of nature) and have opportunities to follow own interests as a regular part of their educational experience</p>	Substantially evidenced	<p>Researcher observations (17 sessions)</p> <p><i>You have a lot more freedom at forest school, you're allowed to run a lot (YP)</i></p> <p><i>About nature, different types of forest, trees (YP)</i></p> <p><i>He's always excited about going (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>He loves it. Asking every day when he's going to forest school (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>Luke really enjoyed forest school from the very first day he was there. The more relaxed outdoor environment suited him perfectly and I think he was delighted to find out he was allowed to climb trees, cook things, learn how to make fires and generally hang out in the woods with other children from school... during school time! (parent/carer)</i></p>	Partly evidenced (not consistently regular)	<p>Researcher observations (7 sessions)</p> <p><i>We get to do anything, we choose! (YP)</i></p> <p><i>Amazing, I don't want to leave (YP)</i></p> <p><i>I've been able to help out and had so much fun (YP)</i></p> <p><i>It's fun, seeing our friends (YP)</i></p> <p><i>He likes it and can't wait to go (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>Wednesdays are his favourite day as he gets to go to forest school (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>You can see them gaining confidence, especially with the newer children, as they begin to realise that they can do what they want to do, set their own agenda (FS practitioner)</i></p>

4. Children and adults engage in group work and team building activities	Substantially evidenced	<p>FS planning and evaluation documents – group games offered such as eagle eyes, 1,2,3 where are you; where a YP is struggling to interact with peers a member of staff identified to support interactions.</p> <p>Researcher observations – children often choose to work/play together in tasks such as den building, imaginative play. CYP often ask for adult assistance in tasks such as fire building or tool use. Adults model positive interactions and use praise to encourage YP.</p> <p>When asked whether they had learnt anything at FS one YP said: <i>Yes different skills and teamwork</i></p> <p><i>Jasper has met new friends there (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>Throughout the year he has had a big interest in creating a Nature Reserve in the forest – to look at bugs. He has got other children involved throughout the year, either with bug identification or making potions in the reserve (school)</i></p>	Substantially evidenced	<p>FS planning and evaluation documents – opportunities offered through group games, often at the start and end of sessions.</p> <p>Researcher observations – most of the children choose to work/play in groups, either in imaginative play or performances or in group tasks such as collecting and directing rain water on a wet day. Adults remind YP to ‘look after others’ by including each other in games.</p> <p><i>This is our hole, we’ve been doing it two weeks, it’s big but not very deep (YP)</i></p> <p><i>You get to be with your friends and friends from different classes (YP)</i></p>
5. Children have opportunities for play	Substantially evidenced	<p>FS planning and evaluation documents – every session includes time for YP to play if they choose</p> <p>Researcher observations - most of the time at FS is for children to direct themselves, this includes space for children to devise their own games and imaginative play, as well as some optional craft</p>	Substantially evidenced	<p>FS planning and evaluation documents - every session includes time for YP to play if they choose</p> <p>Researcher observations – many of the children enjoy planning and putting on shows, this is a recurring activity but often has different focus or theme</p>

		<p>or other activities often building upon their particular interests</p> <p><i>You get to play for the whole morning!</i> (YP)</p> <p><i>Sarah especially enjoys imaginative play in the forest with the other children and getting involved with group games. It is a delight to see Sarah having so much fun!</i> (school)</p> <p><i>Play at forest school is valued and encouraged and the benefits are clear to see in the children's joy and overall demeanour</i> (school)</p> <p><i>Session objectives: To encouraging children to play with each other and take turns, to encourage children to lead their own learning, to model behaviour and support children to build their own friendships, to have fun!</i> (Planning and evaluation document)</p>		<p>Another recurring game is tag or manhunt, during the final few weeks this evolved into a game the children told me was called 'Infection' and involved one infected person who passed on the infection by tagging until everyone was infected.</p> <p><i>Having that opportunity to play at forest school, we're seeing more complex games emerging, working on conflict resolution and their relationships with one another</i> (school)</p> <p><i>He absolutely loves to have time to play chasing games with his friends as he doesn't often get to play these kind of games at home as there aren't many friends who play outside around where we live</i> (parent/carer)</p>
6. Children become more comfortable interacting with peers and a range of adults	Substantially evidenced	<p>Researcher observations – When the group first started coming to forest school a number of the children found it difficult to play with others, they were from a range of classes and whilst all knew at least one other child, they did not have established relationships with everyone. Some of the children found it hard to negotiate during games and there would be fallings out with children becoming distressed. The high adult to child ratios meant that the children could be supported to manage their emotions and find resolutions together. Adults would model positive interactions and use praise to encourage the YP. By March 2020 all the children had</p>	Partly evidenced (some evidence but incomplete)	<p>Due to the limited number of researcher observations it has been hard to observe change over the time period. However, the following feedback was given:</p> <p><i>I've noticed Emily has been speaking to me more than ever at forest school, she seems a bit scared of me in school</i> (school)</p> <p><i>Having each class teaching assistant involved has been very beneficial, it's partly that relationship building and seeing another side to those children</i> (school)</p> <p><i>It's really helped her build a stronger</i></p>

		<p>formed a sense of group identity and were much more able to negotiate relationships and activities themselves.</p> <p><i>He seems more confident now, there's that level of maturity in his relationships, he's had issues with emotional regulation but he's been allowed to work through that at forest school ...the main benefits are in terms of his relationships with other children. He used to be quite scared of other children, forest school has provided a safe space to work at friendships (parent/carer)</i></p>		<p><i>attachment with the school staff who have come to sessions and also with the FS facilitators (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>I like the teachers (YP)</i></p> <p><i>After two long, lonely lockdowns where family members were shielding, James has really benefitted from unstructured social interaction with his peers. Most especially, he has been able to play with friends freely and has had to negotiate rules and resolve conflict (parent/carer)</i></p>
7. Children become more aware and sensitive to the emotions and needs of others	Substantially evidenced	<p>Researcher observations – Use of the FS rule 'look after others', was used to emphasise the importance of considering other's feelings and helping one another. This was encouraged during games and play, and in the serving of food and drinks. Over time all of the YP improved their social and emotional skills in interacting with one another.</p> <p><i>It was also obvious (and commented on by his class teacher and head teacher) that he showed more empathy and kindness for other children both at forest school and more generally around the school at other times (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>Children have benefitted ... in the playground through the increased interactions and friendships formed as a result of the social and emotional skills developed while at forest school (school)</i></p>	Partly evidenced (some evidence but incomplete)	<p>Researcher observations – hard to track change over time frame, although positive interactions were discussed and modelled, for example in 'looking after others', and encouraged in games and the sharing of food and drink. Observed examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- one child was keen to ensure that the adults had been offered pancake before the children had seconds</li> <li>- A boy with ASD who had previously struggled with interactions with peers (pre-pandemic) was more open to others joining his games and activities and even negotiated with another child who was hostile to an additional child joining their game</li> <li>- The FS practitioner observed that a child who found it hard to take turn with his peers, gradually became more aware of the importance of turn-taking in continuing games and friendships. Also</li> </ul>

		What have you learnt at FS? <i>About being kind</i> (YP)		commented on by parent <i>He often tells us about 'arguments' around rules of games and hopefully he has had time and space to learn about playing according to the rules of others and listen to other children's ideas – neither of these have been his strong point in the past</i> (parent/carer)
8. Children become less anxious and more able to manage their emotions and behave appropriately at FS	Substantially evidenced	<p>Observations recorded a reduction in the number and severity of behavioural incidents over the time period. For example one girl who found it very difficult to follow instructions and would often become distressed was supported and encouraged by adults over a number of months and in time she was able to join in with others at tidy up time and be relied upon to follow safety instructions in building a fire and cooking. This observed improvement in emotional regulation was also noticed by school staff and parents.</p> <p><i>The whole experience at forest school we think helped to build up his self confidence and self-esteem, making him more resilient, content, relaxed, understanding and patient</i> (parent/carer)</p> <p><i>Being in nature itself has also contributed to the physical wellbeing of those attending, with one child with Autism and Selective Mutism displaying a reduction in anxiety to the level that he could converse with his peers in games</i> (school)</p>	Not evidenced in this period	<p>Researcher observations did not indicate any particular changes over the short time period, however, two parents commented:</p> <p><i>I think Carly feels more relaxed about her day when she knows that it is forest school ... she often comes home and has a massive melt down after school. Not so much on forest school days</i> (parent/carer)</p> <p><i>Huge benefits. Martha has had a lot of 'interventions' at school but none have benefitted her as much as forest school. She is noticeably happier on forest school days and there are no problems getting her up, dressed and out of the house like on other days. The forest school effect lasts right up until that evening when she is calmer, more chatty, higher in spirits and less spikey.</i>(parent/carer)</p>

9. Children are able to persevere at an activity/task and experience success (in groups and/or independently)	Substantially evidenced	<p>Researcher observations – a number of the children struggled to persevere at activities and tasks at the start of the project but all developed this ability over time, this was encouraged through activities which the children found intrinsically motivating such as building and lighting a fire, whittling, or imaginative games and play.</p> <p><i>All the children have had successes at forest school and that helps to build their resilience in class where they often struggle</i> (school)</p> <p><i>This is my den, I actually made this den!</i> (YP)</p> <p><i>We made it!</i> (YP)</p>	Substantially evidenced	<p>Researcher observations – all of the children displayed some level of perseverance in their games, craft activities and/or fire lighting and celebrated individual and group successes. Children often came to show me what they they had made or been working on and expressed feelings of satisfaction and pride <i>This is my musical instrument, it was quite tricky to get right</i> (YP)</p> <p><i>I'm taking this home for my mum, she'll be really pleased</i> (YP)</p> <p><i>Did you enjoy the show? We had to do a lot of practising, I'm the director, she's the co-director</i> (YP)</p>
10. Children able to engage with increasingly difficult and challenging tasks at FS (in groups and/or independently) and develop skills such as listening and communication, managed risk taking and leadership skills	Substantially evidenced	<p>Researcher observations – all of the children extended their ability to persevere at tasks and activities over their time at FS (which was either 10 or 16 months). All developed listening and communication skills in interacting with their peers and negotiating in games, with some taking on leadership skills and helping other members of the group in their play and relationships. All the children were encouraged to take managed risks at FS and we saw children extending their comfort range, whether that be persevering at a task they found hard, climbing a tree or allowing a child they did not consider as a friend into a game.</p> <p><i>A child with ADHD for example found that he could focus for extended periods of time when whittling</i> (school)</p>	Not evidenced in this period	<p>Researcher observations – no observable differences over the short time frame.</p> <p>FS practitioners noted one boy who had found it hard to take his turn in games causing some arguments in the group but towards the end of the ten sessions had developed this skill and was aware of its importance in continuing games and friendships.</p>

		<p><i>One child, who due to her attachment difficulties thought herself to be intrinsically bad and unlovable became a natural leader in the group as a result of the playful relational approach encouraged (school)</i></p> <p><i>Mary is increasingly enjoying playing with the other children ... She has become better able to take on other children's ideas and accept when things do not go her way (FS practitioner)</i></p>		
11. Children are encouraged to reflect upon their achievements at FS	Substantially evidenced	<p>Planning and evaluation documents and researcher observations – all sessions include a reflection activity towards the end and adults also encourage children to reflect on their achievements as they happen during sessions.</p> <p>Once back at school children completed FS diaries with key members of staff and were again encouraged to reflect and share successes with school staff and family.</p> <p><i>We think as parents that forest school has been brilliant for Luke. He looked forward to every Wednesday morning, and was really proud of his achievements (eg crafts / drawings / wood handiwork) during his time at forest school. We have kept a lot of these as mementos of his time at forest school (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>Bringing his crafts home (and the occasional photo) has helped facilitate some family discussions, whatever he has said about forest school has always been positive and enthusiastic</i></p>	Substantially evidenced	<p>Planning and evaluation documents and researcher observations – all sessions include a reflection activity towards the end and adults also encourage children to reflect on their achievements as they happen during sessions.</p> <p>School staff and parents also report how achievements at FS are celebrated back at school and at home</p> <p><i>I have noticed that they talk about forest school a lot when back in school and it's on a really equal footing (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>It's definitely boosted her confidence and the reports have been a great tool for us to use to try and help boost her self esteem (parent/carer)</i></p>

		(parent/carer)		
12. Children develop positive self-narratives	Partly evidenced (some evidence but incomplete)	<p>Children sometimes expressed pride in their achievements whilst at FS, which parents and school staff told us was rare in school: <i>This is my den, I actually made this den! (YP)</i></p> <p>Feedback from parents and carers suggested that FS had played a role in helping the develop positive self-narratives: <i>Has definitely grown in confidence physically (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>I suspect Jamie has felt special and important as he has been chosen to go to forest school. This will have boosted his self-esteem and hopefully helped him to view his disabilities in a positive way (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>She says she loves forest school and that forest school is 'her thing'. She's talked about being a forest school teacher when she grows up. This is very unusual for Martha and great to hear (parent/carer)</i></p>	Partly evidenced (some evidence but incomplete)	<p>Some evidence from parents and carers: <i>A change this year (after 2 years of coming) is that Martha has started to internalise and recognise the benefits of forest school herself. She says herself that it's the only thing that helps. It's definitely boosted her confidence and the reports have been a great tool for us to use to try and help boost her self-esteem ... She would never say but I know she is proud of her achievements at forest school which is great. (Parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>Jason also struggles with balance and co-ordination and it has been fantastic for him to be involved in physical activity which is not competitive. He said to us that he is a much better runner at forest school than he is at school! He has certainly become more confident to try new physical things (parent/carer)</i></p>
13. Children are able to transfer attitudes and skills developed at FS into school and home life	Partly evidenced (evidenced for some but not all children)	<p>School staff and parents were both able to share examples of where children had used skills developed at FS in their school and home lives. However, there was also an acknowledgement from school that the classroom environment is very different to FS, both in terms of adult-child ratios and pedagogical approach.</p> <p><i>Through Year 4 we saw a real improvement in his behaviour, esteem and general happiness at</i></p>	Partly evidenced (evidenced for some but not all children)	<p><i>Martha has had a lot of 'interventions' at school but none have benefitted her as much as forest school. She is noticeably happier on forest school days and there are no problems getting her up, dressed and out of the house like on other days. The forest school effect lasts right up until that evening when she is calmer, more chatty, higher spirits and less spikey. (Parent)</i></p>

		<p><i>home ... He made so much progress during Year 4 and we are sure forest school was a key factor in his development (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>His enthusiasm for what he's learnt and wanting to do it at home e.g. light fires in the back garden and show his parents his new found skills (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>These achievements and successes have been significant and have been noted by staff back in school, both in the classroom through the positive narratives which the children have been able to internalise to aid them in their learning journeys, and families have also noted the positive difference forest school has made to their children with parents and carers telling school staff how they are proud of their achievements at forest school and keen to share their learning with them and additionally remarking that they have noted fewer distressed behaviours on an evening following a forest school session (school)</i></p>		<p><i>We have definitely noticed that he is calmer and happier to accept when things don't go his way at home. He has also rekindled his interest in looking for bugs and watching birds – two things he enjoyed when he was younger but seemed to have lost interest in (parent/carer)</i></p> <p><i>He has become more interested in outdoor activities and has asked to continue with forest school (parent/carer)</i></p>
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**Strand of Action 2: Impact for school**

Steps of change	Spring 2020	Examples from data	Summer 2021	Examples from data
A. FS practitioner works with school teachers to co-plan and co-deliver FS sessions (half day per week, term-time)	Substantially evidenced	Sept 2018 – March 2020: weekly FS planning and evaluation documents (term time)	Partly evidenced (not consistently weekly, co-delivered but largely planned)	November 2020 – May 2021: occasional sessions: four groups of children received 3 sessions (Planning and evaluation documents and 2 researcher observations)

			by FS practitioner)	June – July 2021: weekly FS sessions for two groups of children for seven weeks (Planning and evaluation documents and 4 researcher observations)
B. School staff engage and complete Level 1 and Level 3 FS training	Substantially evidenced	1 staff member Level 3 1 staff member Level 1	Partly evidenced (only Level 1)	2 staff members Level 1
C. Over the year school staff gradually take increasing responsibility for planning and delivery of FS	Substantially evidenced	Sept 2018 – March 2020: weekly FS planning and evaluation documents, school takes on planning Summer 2019	Not evidenced in this period	Level 3 qualified staff member no longer available for FS. External FS practitioners take on planning and evaluation in short term.
D. School staff are confident and experienced FS practitioners	Partly evidenced (some evidence but incomplete)	Two trained members of staff independently planning and leading sessions although practice not widespread amongst school staff  Planning and evaluation documents Summer 2019-March 2020.	Not evidenced in this period	Wider awareness of the benefits of outdoor learning and Forest school across school staff, although not widespread practice at this stage. <i>Some members of staff feel that they might lose control outside of the classroom. We need to encourage them to be a bit braver, go where the children go, have a try, it doesn't matter if it doesn't go to plan. We're wanting to develop those rich experiences beyond the four walls of the classroom, that cultural capital (school)</i>

<p>E. FS is embedded practice at Park View as part of the school approach to addressing emotional and behavioural needs</p>	<p>Partly evidenced (some evidence but incomplete)</p>	<p><i>We've seen the impact that forest school has had for our children and we are keen to keep it. We have a new headteacher so that's a factor and of course budgets but yes we want to carry on (school, July 2019)</i></p>	<p>Partly evidenced (some evidence but incomplete)</p>	<p><i>Because I'm on the senior leadership team I can drive things, disseminate information, organise resources, keep that dialogue going in school. It is kept on the agenda as part of our strategy for supporting those children and part of our School Development Plan in regards to wellbeing. It fits with our Thrive approach and Nurture Group UK and we hope to be able to use some of that forest school learning in that work. Having more teaching assistants trained in forest school and being part of those sessions has been very beneficial, seeing another side to those children, and so we're gaining more understanding across school (school, July 2021)</i></p>
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## **Appendix 5: School staff interview questions**

Interviews with school staff happened informally during sessions and during FS reviewing and planning meetings but also periodically through semi-structured interviews at school, here questions included:

- Can you give me an update on how you feel the FS sessions are going?
- How does this fit with the theory of change? Does the theory of change model still make sense? Would you change anything?
- What do you feel have been the benefits of FS for the young people?
- What do you think has been difficult? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Do you feel that FS impacts in any way on the young people back at school and/or home?
- What do the CYP tell you about FS?
- Have parents or families given you any feedback on FS?
- How does FS fit within the wider aims and approach of your school?
- What do you think is the future of FS at your school?
- Any other comments?

## **Appendix 6: Parent/carer interview questions**

As part of the Breeze Forest School research we would like to hear the views of parents and carers. Any feedback given will be shared between the school, the Forest School practitioners and the researcher. Comments will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and no individual will be named or identified in reports produced from the research (for more information please see the Breeze research information and consent form)

- What has your child (name) told you about Forest School?
- Does he/she seem to enjoy it? If so which parts?
- Does he/she seem to find anything difficult?
- What do you feel are the benefits of Forest School?
- Are the activities at FS similar to any other activities your child (name) does/is interested in?
- Any other comments?

## **Appendix 7: FS practitioner interview questions**

Interviews with FS practitioners happened informally during sessions and during FS reviewing and planning meetings but also periodically through semi-structured interviews, here questions included:

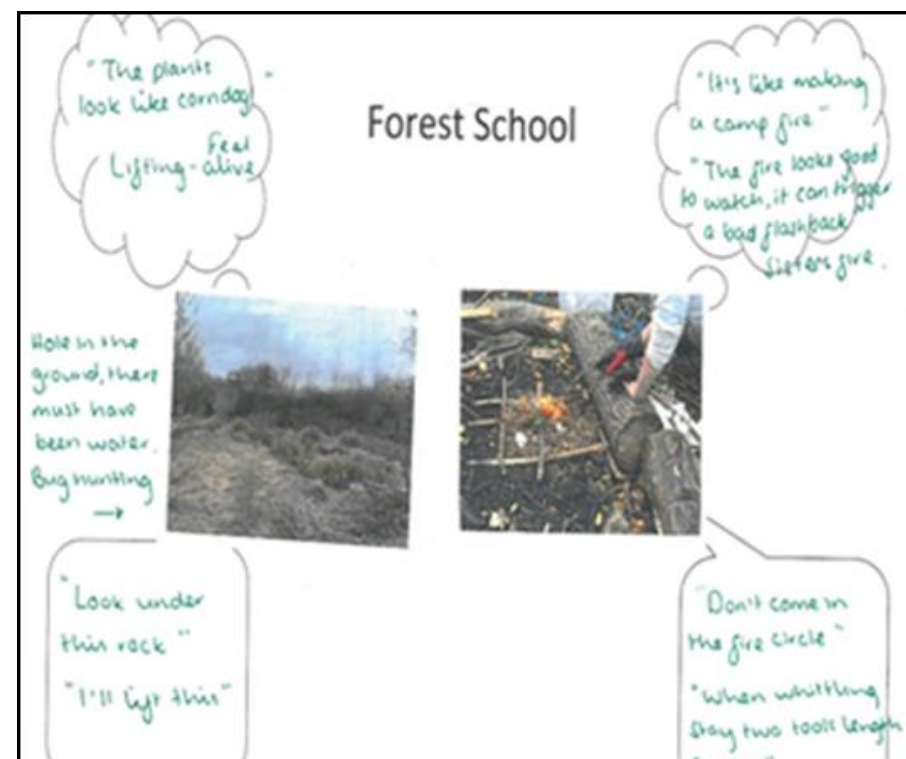
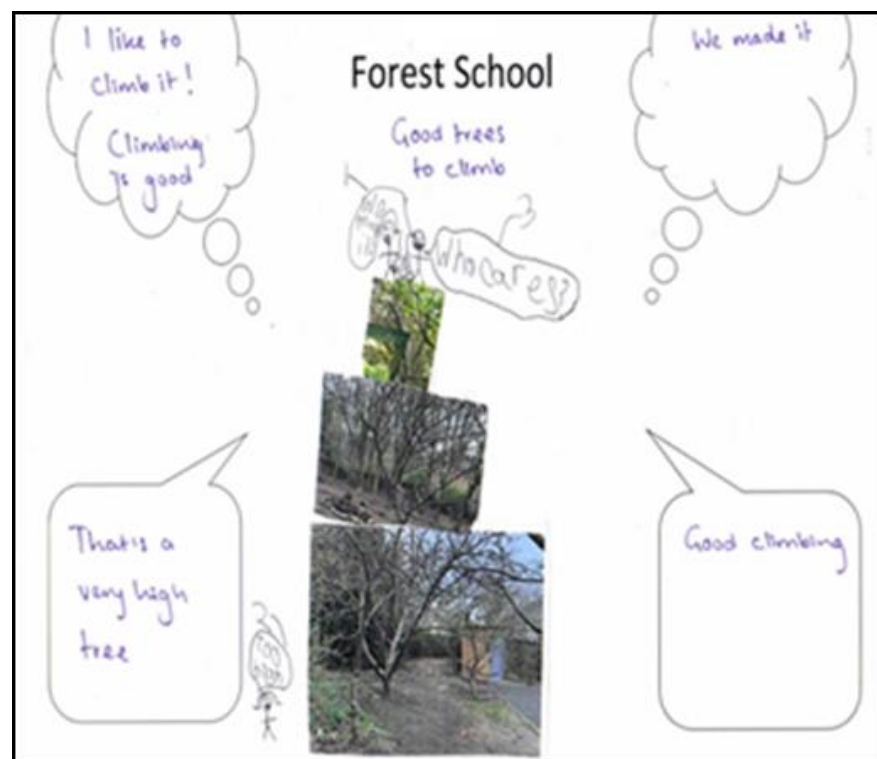
- Can you give me an update on how you feel the FS sessions are going?
- How does this fit with the theory of change? Does the theory of change model still make sense? Would you change anything?
- What do you feel have been the benefits of FS for the young people?
- What do you think has been difficult? Is there anything you would do differently?
- Any other comments?

## **Appendix 8: Interview questions for children and young people and visual methods**

The researcher took part in conversations with the children and young people about their activities during sessions, these could be walking interviews, conversations mediated by FS objects, crafts or the environment. The young people and staff also took photographs during sessions and these were printed and used to facilitate reflections. Questions used by the researcher included (but were not restricted to):

- What do you think/how do you feel about FS? What do you enjoy? What do you find difficult?
- Has your opinion of/thoughts about FS changed over the past year/months? Do you feel the same now as then?
- What do you think you learn whilst at FS?
- How does FS compare to school and/or home? Is it the same/different?
- Do the things you learn at FS help you with anything else at school and/or home?
- Would you recommend FS to another school? What would you tell them about FS?
- Any other comments?

In two schools the researcher asked the CYP to select photographs from a set taken during their FS sessions and to reflect on what might be being said (using speech bubbles) and what might be being thought (using thought bubbles). This is based on Pupil Views Templates, please see: K. Wall, S. Higgins, E. Packard (2007) *Talking about learning: Using templates to find out pupils' views*, Southgate Publishing, Devon.



## Appendix 9: Parent and carer questionnaire

### Breeze Forest School parent and carer questionnaire

As part of the Breeze Forest School research we would like to hear the views of parents and carers. Any feedback given will be shared between the school, the Forest School practitioners and the researcher. Comments will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and no individual will be named or identified in reports produced from the research (for more information please see the Breeze research information and consent form)

- Does your child talk about Forest School at home? If so, what does he/she tell you?
- What do you feel have been the benefits and/or difficulties of Forest School for your child? Have these benefits/difficulties been seen at Forest School, back at school and/or at home?
- Has anything about your child's experience of Forest School surprised you?
- Do you have any suggestions that would improve your child's experience of Forest School?
- Any other comments?



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