



## **Title of study: Forest school Interventions for Children's Health (FINCH): a feasibility cluster randomised control trial**

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARENTS**

#### **YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET**

We invite you to participate in a study

- Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important you understand why the study is being done and what it will involve.
- Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information.
- The Principal Investigators for this study are Dr Hannah Armitt and Professor Peter Coventry. Please contact [hannah.armitt@nhs.net](mailto:hannah.armitt@nhs.net) or [peter.coventry@york.ac.uk](mailto:peter.coventry@york.ac.uk) if you have any questions.

#### **Why are we doing this study?**

More children and young people than ever are experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing. It is important to find ways to support them. Older children who will soon transition to secondary school are particularly affected. School can be a great setting to support and improve children's wellbeing and we are interested in how schools can most effectively support children in educational settings.

There is a lot of evidence to suggest that spending time in nature and the outdoors can help children's wellbeing. We know as children get older they start to spend less time outdoors and interact with nature less. Forest Schools are one potential intervention which helps children spend more time outdoors, engaging with nature.

Although there is some evidence for the effectiveness of Forest School much of this evidence is based on small numbers of children and is often focused on case studies. We would like to see if it is possible to gather quantitative (numerical data) and qualitative (spoken/observed/written) data on Forest Schools versus no delivery of Forest Schools. We are interested in working with Key Stage 2 children for this study as there is less information on these children than younger early years.

#### **What methods will we use?**

We will use a method called 'Feasibility Randomised Control Trial' alongside a 'process evaluation' to gather this information.

For the feasibility randomised control trial, we aim to determine if it is possible to randomly allocate four schools, using a computer program, to deliver Forest School to a class of KS2 pupils, while assigning another four schools to a control group that does not deliver Forest School. This trial will be conducted over the Spring and Summer terms of 2025.

For the process evaluation we will also carry out some workshops, interviews and observations within schools to get a better understanding of what makes Forest School work best.

### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You and your child have been invited to take part because your child's school is interested in being part of our study. Your child is in a Key Stage 2 class that could take part in the study.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

Your school will sign a school study agreement and consent form with the University of York so they know what to expect and what the timelines for the study are. We, the research team, will then provide an information session about the study either in person at the school or online (depending on preference) to introduce ourselves, provide you with more information about the study and give you the opportunity to ask any questions.

We plan to have two groups of schools who will take part in the study - four schools to start in the spring term and four schools to start in the summer term. Your school might decide that one term is better for them to help us with the research and we will make sure we listen and support this decision.

Your child's class will be randomly assigned to either receive Forest School for a term or be in the control group that does not receive it during that term. We will work with the school to make the necessary arrangements.

We are asking schools to provide us with some basic demographic information about your child using school records. This information will be: age, gender (male/female/third gender), ethnicity, special educational needs and disabilities (children with Education Health Care Plan; diagnosis (i.e. Autistic/ADHD), if in receipt of free school meals, pupil premium, and full postcode of your registered address to map to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and to map green space in your neighbourhood. We are collecting this to find out if the Forest School intervention is accessible for a diverse population.

We will also ask you to provide us with some basic demographic information in the form of a questionnaire at the beginning of the study. This information will be: age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, relationship to the child involved in the study, highest level of academic qualification, occupation, and accommodation status.

In addition, we will ask you as a parent/carer to complete two short questionnaires on three occasions: once at the start of the spring or summer term (depending on when the school starts the study), once at the end of the term, and then at a follow up point of 24 weeks. These questionnaires are:

- **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)** A short questionnaire which asks questions about emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship issues, and prosocial behaviour.

- **Frequency of accessing, and attitudes towards green and natural spaces:** We would like to know how often you and your child currently access nature and the outdoors. We will use some brief questions from Natural England's People and Nature Survey to help us gather this information.

We will also ask your child to complete three short questionnaires looking at their quality of life, wellbeing and nature connection. These questionnaires can be completed in school with the support of the research team.

### **Additional optional interview**

We would also like to conduct interviews to understand more about people's thoughts on Forest Schools. If you are interested in taking part in an interview, please let the research team know by indicating this on the consent form and we will contact you in due course about this.

### **Will I be compensated for taking part in the longer interview?**

The individuals selected to take part in the interviews will receive a £25 voucher. The interviews will last 45 minutes to 1 hour, and the voucher will be a thank you for giving this time to the study.

### **Do I have to take part?**

**If you DO NOT want you or your child/children to take part** in the assessments or survey or to share their data with the research team:

Please return the attached withdrawal form to your child's school or communicate your wishes to the school via email, telephone, or in person by the date specified on the form. The school will make a note of this and will ensure that any data about you or your child is not passed to the research team and that your child is not assessed as part of this study. You should no longer receive any of the aforementioned parent questionnaires. It is not possible to withdraw from one element only (e.g. no parent assessments whilst the child is completing assessments or vice versa).

Note: If you choose for you or your child/children not to take part in the assessment and data sharing elements of the study (as mentioned above), all KS2 children at schools which are randomly selected to receive the Forest School training, will still be involved in FINCH, as teachers will be adopting a forest school approach to their lessons.

### **How do I take part?**

The questionnaires we are asking you to complete will be sent out from school with an anonymised participant identification number. Your child/children will complete their questionnaires at school in the classroom. When you receive your questionnaire, please complete this as soon as possible. You can and return them in two ways: either directly to the research team in the pre-paid envelope provided, or return them back to the school via your child's teacher. Please do not include yours or your child's name on the questionnaires.

### **What are the possible risks of taking part?**

The study involves asking participants to allocate time to answering questions using questionnaires and interviews. We will minimise the burden on you by providing different ways for you to complete the questionnaires (via phone/pen and paper) at times which are convenient to you. We can also assist with completing the questionnaires, if required, please let the research team know if you would like us to do this.

### **What are the benefits of taking part?**

The data we collect as part of this study will improve our understanding about whether it is possible to deliver Forest School in primary schools in England.

### **How will you use the information I provide?**

The study findings will be written up into a report, child friendly study updates, and also an academic journal paper. We will use anonymised quotes from interviews in our reports and academic journals. No personally identifiable information will be used in the write ups.

### **How will you protect the information I give you**

We will write our reports in a way that no-one can identify that you took part in the study.

Your data will be processed in accordance with the UK-GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

- Data will be collected securely for passing to The University of York.
- Only anonymous data will be shared with the research team.
- You will be given a participant ID number by your organisation, so your data is not identifiable by the research team.
- If you take part in the interview any quotes used will be anonymised using a participant ID number.
- We will keep your data securely for a period of 10 years from the last date it was accessed.
- Data will be transferred securely in accordance with the [University of York IT guidance](#) for securely sharing confidential data.

### **What if I change my mind about my data being used for the study?**

You are free to withdraw from the trial at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, the data you have provided up until the point you withdraw will still be retained and used, unless you request for it to be deleted within two weeks of withdrawing. However, in certain circumstances we are not able to destroy data you have provided. This includes any data that has already been included in the analyses of the study, and data that is stored in computer back ups.

### **Data Protection Statement**

The data controller for this project is The University of York. The legal basis for processing your personal data for research purposes under GDPR is a 'task in the public interest'.

If you are not happy with the Sponsor's response or believe the Sponsor is processing your data in a way that is not right or lawful, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) ([www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk) or 0303 123 1113).

### **How is the project being funded?**

This project is being funded through the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Public Health Research programme.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

As the study has been funded by the NIHR we will report back the findings of the study to them and progress updates on a regular basis. We will write a report containing the results which will be shared with your child's school.

We will make sure that there is an easy read accessible version of this report for sharing with the wider community. We will also write-up the results of the study as an academic journal article and share the findings at conferences.

### **Who has reviewed this study?**

Research studies are reviewed by an independent group of people called a Research Ethics Committee. This is to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed and has been given a favourable opinion by The Department of Environment and Geography Ethics Committee, at the University of York.

### **Who should I contact for further information?**

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the project research team via the project leads, Dr Hannah Armitt or Professor Peter Coventry. Either of them would be happy to talk through the study with you and answer any questions you may have. Please contact us if you feel there are any challenges in participating in the study but please note whilst emails are monitored there may be times when these are not checked frequently.

Dr Hannah Armitt

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Email: [Peter.coventry@york.ac.uk](mailto:Peter.coventry@york.ac.uk)

### **Further details about how we process your information**

Questionnaire responses will be compiled by the lead of the project you are participating in, and then transferred securely to the project team for processing and analysis. As part of the process, the information you provide will be anonymised, so that the data you provide cannot be linked to you as an individual, only to your characteristics. Analysis of the data and subsequent presentation of the results will not involve any identification of you as an individual. Similarly, no information that identifies you will be shared with other researchers.

The University of York processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing

of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing [dataprotection@york.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@york.ac.uk) or at [www.york.ac.uk/records-management/dp/](http://www.york.ac.uk/records-management/dp/).

## **Privacy notice**

This Privacy Notice tells you what to expect when you participate in this study. This is being carried out by, at the University of York. For details of how your personal information is used in other ways, please see the other University Privacy Notices [www.york.ac.uk/records-management/dp/your-info](http://www.york.ac.uk/records-management/dp/your-info). For the purposes of this privacy notice, University of York is the Data Controller as defined in the General Data Protection Regulation. We are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office and our entry can be found here. Our registration number is: Z4855807.

### **What is our legal basis for processing your data?**

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the University must identify a legal basis for processing personal data and, where appropriate, an additional condition for processing special category data.

In line with our charter which states that we advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research, the University processes personal data for research purposes under Article 6 (1e) of the GDPR: "Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest". Special category data is processed under Article 9 (2j): "Processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes".

Research will only be undertaken where ethical approval has been obtained, where there is a clear public interest and where appropriate safeguards have been put in place to protect data. In line with ethical expectations and to comply with common law duty of confidentiality, we will seek your consent to participate. This consent will not, however, be our legal basis for processing your data under the GDPR.

### **How do we keep your data secure?**

The University takes information security seriously and has implemented appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect personal data and special category data. Access to information is restricted on a need-to-know basis and security arrangements are regularly reviewed to ensure their continued suitability. For further information see [www.york.ac.uk/it-services/security/](http://www.york.ac.uk/it-services/security/).

### **How long will we keep your data?**

Your data will be kept in an anonymised form indefinitely for research purposes only.

### **What rights do you have in relation to your data?**

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), you have a right of access to your data, a right to rectification, erasure (in certain circumstances), restriction, objection, or portability (in certain circumstances). You also have a right to withdraw consent (where this applies). For more information, see: <https://www.york.ac.uk/records-management/generaldataprotectionregulation/individualsrights/>. Please note that, as data in this study will be anonymised, it will not be possible for you to exercise these rights after

this point. This is because it will not be possible for us to identify your record once it has been anonymised.

**Right to complain**

If you are unhappy with the way in which the University has handled your personal data, we ask you to contact us in the first instance, so that we can try to put things right. If you are unhappy with our response, you have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. For information on reporting a concern to the Information Commissioner's Office, see [www.ico.org.uk/concerns](http://www.ico.org.uk/concerns).

**Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this study.**

## **PARENT/CARER CHILD WITHDRAWAL FORM**

Your school is taking part in the FINCH study.

**If you DO NOT want you or your child to take part in any assessments/surveys as part of the evaluation of FINCH, and you DO NOT want the data to be processed as outlined in the Information for Parents/Carers, please complete, sign and return this form to your child's school OR contact your school in person, or via email or telephone by < INSERT CUT OFF DATE >**

If you are happy for you and your child to complete the assessments and surveys and their data to be processed as outlined in the Information for Parents/Carers, please do not complete this form - you do not need to do anything.

Your child's full name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of parent/carer: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/carer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_