



**St John the Evangelist
Church School**

Love, learn, together we soar

Forest School Handbook



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Handbook to be read by all Forest School staff and volunteers

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The Forest School Ethos

Forest School is a unique programme offering hands-on learning experiences in woodland or other natural environments. The aim is to develop the person as a whole by providing opportunities for them to succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem.

Forest school gives children the opportunity to explore the outside world, through child-led play and exploration and structured activities in a woodland setting. This environment, where children are encouraged to take risks and be at the centre of their learning helps to foster children's curiosity, creativity, independence and self-esteem. Completing small achievable tasks, coupled with genuine praise from adults, helps to boost confidence and self-esteem. For children at school, attitudes to learning are improved as they discover learning can be fun and enjoyable. This new, positive outlook is then transferred to the classroom, where they are found to be more motivated and better able to concentrate.

Forest School encourages children to:

- Develop personal and social skills
- Work through practical problems and challenges
- Use tools to create and build
- Discover how they learn best
- Learn how to manage failures
- Build confidence in decision making and evaluating risks
- Develop practical skills
- Understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- Explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- Regularly experience achievement and success
- Reflect on learning and experiences
- Develop language and communication skills
- Improve physical motor skills
- Become more motivated
- Improve concentration skills

Click the link [here](#) to read the Forest School Associations 'principles and criteria for good practice'

Forest School at St John the Evangelist Church School

Children take part in a programme of sessions over a term. Sessions involving practical hands-on activities aim to build up participants' skills, abilities, and confidence week by week. Each activity at Forest School has its own risk assessment.

Forest School Sessions

Our sessions are planned and led by our Forest School Leader. However, the Forest School ethos is based around participant-led learning, so as the weeks progress learners are given more freedom and responsibility to explore their interests and therefore initiate their own learning. At the start of each session there is a short briefing during which the children are reminded of the Forest School expectations. We have a short starter activity, then a main activity which is linked to the interests of the children. Opportunities for reflection and to share experiences are provided, which help with the social and emotional development of the children.

Activities can include:

- Collecting, identifying, and sorting natural materials
- Developing stories and drama
- Fire lighting and camp cooking
- Gardening
- Making bird boxes
- Natural art
- Observing and studying wildlife
- Shelter and den building
- Team and group games
- Using knots
- Woodwork – using tools

Forest School location

We have a designated area in the woodland behind our Explorers Challenge, and at times we use other parts of the school ground. Our site is a beautiful area made up of mainly deciduous trees such as oak, maple, sycamore, and birch. The secure site is within school grounds and is not accessible to the general public.

Insurance

The BWMAT insurance with RPA (Risk Protection Arrangement) covers us to run Forest School sessions. Adventurous activities with fires and tool use are permitted on the premises as long as they are delivered by a trained Level 3 Forest School Leader and ratios in this handbook are adhered to.

Forest School Staff

Our sessions are organised and run by Mrs Alison Holland who is a Level 3 Forest School Leader. Mrs Holland is a paediatric first aider. Before assisting at sessions all staff and volunteers undergo appropriate Forest School training by the Forest School Leader.

Adult roles and responsibilities:

- The Forest School Leader is always the person in charge of sessions
- The Forest School Leader has overall duty of care for the children in their charge, however, all adults involved in Forest School sessions are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of children
- All adult helpers MUST sign and date the sign-off sheet at the end of this handbook to show that they have read and understood their roles and responsibilities
- All adult helpers MUST read the risk assessments appropriate to the session in which they are helping
- The Forest School Leader to carry a first aid kit and school walkie-talkie to all sessions
- The Forest School Leader is responsible for training the children in how to use tools and equipment safely and appropriately

Working Ratios

There is always a high adult to child ratio at Forest School. The high number of adults means that children can safely experience adventurous activities like lighting controlled fires and using knives. It also means that adults are able to give individuals one to one attention when needed and to lead small group work.

General Activities – Adult: child ratios

Foundation stage	1:6
Years 1 to 3	1:8
Years 4 to 6	1:10

Session Procedures

To ensure the safety of children and adults attending Forest School sessions there are specific checks that are made before, during and at the end of each session. It is the Forest School Leader's responsibility to ensure that all checks are completed.

Pre-session checks:

- Check that Forest School site complies with site risk assessment by completing a daily site check
- Remove all visible litter, any obvious trip hazards and, if necessary mark any out of bounds areas
- Cut any overhanging vegetation from paths
- Collect Forest School first aid kit and fully charged school walkie-talkie
- If running fire sessions inform school office, collect water and group fire safety set
- Check that all tools needed for planned activities are in good working order

At the start of the session:

- Take group register
- Remind children about physical boundaries (use visual clues when needed) and that they must stay within these
- Remind children how they should behave and how to stay safe on site
- If running fire sessions then explain to children the need for, and principles of, fire safety

Throughout the session:

- Remind children how to stay safe by highlighting any potential hazards and reminding them of the boundaries
- Encourage children to take responsibility for the Forest School area by making adults aware of any possible hazards they spot
- Take photos and make observations of individual children (being aware of those children who are not allowed to have their photo taken)
- Use de-escalating techniques whenever possible when dealing with any behavioural issues (working within the school's behaviour policy)
- Carry out regular head counts during sessions and at any break times

At the end of the session:

- Clean and return all equipment and resources to the Forest School cupboard
- Carry out a final head count and escort the group back to their respective classes
- Evaluate session and identify any further learning opportunities
- File any completed accident forms
- Follow up any potential hazards/risks identified during session

Suitable Forest School clothing

An important part of Forest School is that children experience the outdoors in all weather. The only exception to this is during very high winds or thunderstorms.

Children attending Forest School sessions are required to wear appropriately fitting and comfortable clothing that protects them from the extremes of heat or cold, and keeps them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes. Below is listed suitable outdoor clothing dependant on the season. Please be aware that children are likely to bring some mud home with them after each session.

Autumn/Winter clothing list:

- Waterproof trousers and waterproof coat (with a hood)
- Warm full-length trousers
- Long-sleeved jumper or fleece
- Trainers (with sensible socks)
- Wellington boots (with thermal socks or two pairs of thinner ones)

Spring/Summer clothing list:

- Waterproof trousers and waterproof coat (in a bag)
- Trainers or wellington boots (with appropriate socks)
- Full-length trousers
- Long-sleeved top or light fleece (with t-shirt underneath)
- Sun hat (that fits well to ensure good visibility)
- Sunscreen (that needs to be applied at home before school)

Health and Safety

St John the Evangelist Church School sets out clear statements of intent regarding the whole school's approach to the health and safety of its children, staff, visitors to the school and the school site. All staff and volunteers assisting at Forest School sessions are required to read this handbook and the session activity risk assessments. They must sign the sheet at the end of the handbook to confirm they understand the appropriate requirements and procedures for our sessions.

Managing risks and ensuring all participants are safe is central to the planning of Forest School activities. This does not mean eradicating all risks but is in fact the opposite. Planning for risk taking and involving children in the process is vital so they can learn how to do this for themselves in Forest School sessions and in their lives. Sometimes the risk level of an activity will change due to a change in weather. In these situations, it is the Forest School Leader who is continually risk assessing and being flexible, either to put a control in place to make the activity safer, or stop the activity until the risk has been reduced.

Before children are on site, the Forest School Leader completes a site risk assessment to ensure the area is safe for activities to commence. All activities are thoroughly risk assessed and adults continue to monitor the safety of the group as activities evolve. Children are involved in completing their own verbal risk assessments throughout the sessions. This gives them ownership of the process and helps them to be aware of, and calculate, the risks involved in each activity. Children are asked to discuss with adults what risks and hazards they should be aware of, and what steps they can take to reduce or mitigate them.

Whilst annual consent given by parents/carers allows children to take part in forest school activities on site, when they are informed that their child will be attending sessions, parents/carers will be reminded to advise us of any known allergies to plants or reactions to bee or wasp stings. The forest school register completed at each session will include this information and also whether photo permission has been withheld.

Cancellation of sessions

Forest School sessions run in most weather conditions. Sessions are only cancelled under the following conditions:

- A problem with the site that deems it unsafe
- Absence of the Forest School Leader – insufficient adult to child ratio
- Extreme weather such as thunderstorms or high winds

Minor accidents

All minor accidents are dealt with on the spot by our Forest School Leader who holds a paediatric first aid qualification. If assistance is needed, then the Forest School Leader will radio for help from the school office. Accidents are recorded in the Forest School first aid book and parents/carers are informed at the end of the day. Activities may need to be stopped or changed to ensure the adult to child ratio is adhered to.

Serious accidents

In the event of a serious incident the Forest School Leader stops the session and follows the Emergency and Serious Incident Plan on page 14. Accidents are recorded in the Forest School first aid book and the Head teacher will be informed to action an accident report form (including RIDDOR if required).

Injury/illness – Forest School leader

In the event of the Forest School leader becoming ill or sustaining a serious injury the session must end. The additional adult will take the lead and follow these procedures

- gather all children and do a headcount
- contact the school office on the radio for assistance
- ensure Forest School leader is out of danger
- extinguish the fire if lit

Poisonous/dangerous plants and fungi

It is the responsibility of the Forest School Leader to complete a regular site risk assessment identifying any hazardous plants. These are either removed or pointed out to the children. We help children to identify hazardous plants so they can learn to avoid them. In order to prevent children from serious poisoning from berries and fungi, they are not allowed to forage or eat anything in the Forest School site unless it is agreed with the Forest School Leader. If a member of the group is exposed to a hazardous plant or fungi the Forest School Leader is informed and first aid administered as appropriate. If the reaction is more serious the Emergency and Serious Incident Plan on page 14 is followed.

Administering medicines and sun cream

Forest School follows the school policy on administering sun cream which states that parents/carers are required to ensure their child comes to school with an appropriate level applied. Medicines for pupils requiring prescribed medication are held in school with the relevant authorisation and can only be administered by the school's nominated first-aider or a designated adult.

Insect bites and stings

Insect bites and stings are common, particularly in spring and summer. These usually only cause minor irritation but in rare cases can cause a serious reaction that requires immediate medical treatment. Medication, if provided by the parent/carer and permission given, is administered or the school office radioed for advice. The Forest School Leader is aware of any child who may need an EpiPen and is trained to administer medication.

Missing child

As our sessions are held on school grounds it is unlikely that a child will go missing as regular head counts are made throughout the session. If it is thought that someone is missing the children are called to the fire circle using the agreed call sign and the Forest School Leader completes a head count. If numbers are not confirmed the Forest School Leader gives a second call sign. If the missing child/children do not return on the second call then we follow the Emergency and Serious Incident Plan on page 14.

Unwanted guests on site

The school site is a secure ground accessible during the day through an intercom-controlled gate, so all visitors report to the school office. In the unlikely event of a dog or a member of the public accessing the school grounds the school office alerts us on the radio and we follow the school lockdown procedure on page 14.

If someone at Forest School sees a dog or a member of the public on school grounds and we have not been alerted by the school office, then all children are called to the fire circle using the agreed call sign and the Forest School leader completes a head count. All adults and children then proceed into the school building closing the outside door and the Forest School leader alerts the school office using the radio.

Safe lifting

Children are encouraged to carry the items they are using either by themselves or with a partner. Children are taught how to correctly lift and carry items to minimise the likelihood of an injury. This is also modelled correctly by any adults at Forest School. Heavier objects are rolled, dragged or carried by more than one person.

Safeguarding

Our school community is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of our pupils.

DBS checks

All staff at St John the Evangelist Church School have an enhanced DBS check and have regular safeguarding update training. Checks of all staff are monitored and reviewed by the School Business Manager. Adult volunteers must be DBS checked and attend an annual safeguarding training session in school. Only volunteers with a current enhanced DBS are able to help at Forest School.

Photographs

All parents/carers are asked for consent to their child's photograph being taken at Forest School. Photographs may be displayed on the school website or the Forest School internal noticeboard. Any child without consent is not photographed.

Reporting and recording disclosures

St John the Evangelist Church School has established and maintains an ethos which enables pupils to feel secure, and encourages them to talk, knowing that they are listened to. At Forest School there is time and space for talking openly and we acknowledge that this could be an environment where a child may feel comfortable to make a disclosure. If this happens, staff must follow the school safeguarding policy. If a disclosure is made to a volunteer, then they must inform the Forest School Leader who will follow the safeguarding policy procedure. If immediate action is required then activities are adapted or stopped to ensure ratios are adhered to.

Equal opportunities

Our aim is to enable all pupils to take part as fully as possible in Forest School sessions. Our sessions are planned with the interests and abilities of each group in mind. If needed, activities are modified for children with additional needs and extra adult support is provided. The site is easily accessible for all.

Toilet Facilities

Children are asked to go to the toilet before attending Forest School sessions but if during a session an individual needs the toilet, they have access to the Key Stage 2 toilets. These are located opposite the Forest School area so can be safely monitored by Forest School staff. Children in Owls and Kites Base are accompanied by an adult with an enhanced DBS. Any child attending with a Behaviour Plan, IEP or EHCP is accompanied if their plan states this.

Behaviour Management

Children attending Forest School sessions are expected to behave with the same positive behaviour standards expected in school. Forest school sessions comply with the school's behaviour policy which is available to read on the school website. The behaviour policy allows adults at Forest School to award house points for positive learning and behaviour. During sessions, if Forest School rules are not adhered to, we follow the behaviour policy traffic light system.

All school teaching and support staff assisting at Forest School sessions have received a minimum of 6-hour Team Teach training. Team Teach is a framework used at school focusing on positive behavioural support approaches, with an emphasis on de-escalation.

Due to the nature of Forest School sessions, we have additional physical and behavioural boundaries which are agreed with children at the first session. We encourage children to take an active part in deciding what appropriate boundaries would be and at each subsequent session these boundaries are revisited and reinforced. Through practising established routines the children at Forest School are able to encourage/remind others how to behave. During sessions we encourage children to explore the Forest School area and we use a pre-agreed call sign to bring everyone back to the fire circle.

Safe Tool Use

The use of hand tools is an integral part of the Forest School experience. Before using tools with children and adults the Forest School Leader is to model how to use each tool correctly and explain its use. Children receive instructions on how to use each tool safely and are provided with a visual prompt. Verbal reminders and visual prompts are used at each session. Tools are only to be used in specific safe zones which other children must not enter. We call this safe zone the 'blood bubble' and explain to children that when someone is working with tools other children are not to enter the blood bubble. All tools are only used under close adult supervision. All children wear cut proof gloves when using tools.

The following tools are likely to be used as part of our sessions:

- Vegetable peelers
- Palm drills
- Knives – whittling knives and hook knives
- Folding saw
- Bill hook
- Bowsaw

The Forest School Leader is responsible for overseeing the storage, safe use and maintenance of all tools. When not in use all tools are stored in a padlocked tool box in a secure setting. A full list of all tools is kept with the tools and a separate list is carried when tools are taken out on site. Tools are counted out at the beginning of a session and counted back in at the end.

Vegetable Peelers – Adult: pupil ratios

Years 1 to 3	1:2
Years 4 to 6	1:4

Palm drills – Adult: pupil ratios

Years 1 to 3	1:1
Years 4 to 6	1:3

Whittling knives – Adult: pupil ratios

Years 1 to 3	1:1
Years 4 to 6	1:4

Hook knife/Folding saw/Bill hook/Bowsaw – Adult: pupil ratios

Years 1 to 3	1:1
Years 4 to 6	1:1

Fire Lighting and Outdoor Cooking

Campfires are an important part of Forest School and are used in many sessions. Allowing children to light fires offers them opportunities to take supported risks.

We have a designated fire circle area with a fire pit which we use for fire lighting and campfire cooking. The area is away from trees and has circular seating two metres from the centre of the fire circle. Before a fire is lit the Forest School Leader is to carry out the activity risk assessment to confirm it is safe to proceed.

The Forest School leader will then collect the fire lighting kit and the fire safety kit. The fire safety kit consists of the following red coloured items – first aid and burns kit, fire blanket, fire gloves and a fire bucket containing water. Once the fire is lit it is not left unattended. At the end of a session the fire is extinguished by dousing with water. The ashes are stirred to ensure there are no hot spots remaining. Once the ashes are completely cold, they are disposed of in the nettles.

All children with long hair must tie it back before the session starts. After being shown the fire position and demonstrating it to the Forest School Leader children will have the opportunity to practise lighting fires under close supervision. Once the fire is lit children are reminded that they are not to run past, or through the fire circle, and are not allowed to enter the fire circle perimeter unless invited by the Forest School Leader. If a child wishes to move to a new seat they must stand up, take a step back over the seating, and walk around the outside of the seating area.

During some sessions children have the opportunity to experience outdoor cooking. This can be snacks such as hot chocolate, brioche, marshmallows or popcorn. Children must wash their hands with soap and water before preparing, cooking and eating food. After putting on the fire gloves and demonstrating the fire safety position children, under the direct supervision of the Forest School Leader, are allowed to cook with a ratio of one adult to one child. All cooking equipment is washed thoroughly after use.

Respecting our environment

We encourage all children attending Forest School sessions to develop a respect for our school environment and subsequently the natural world. The children are encouraged to take ownership of our site and be responsible for monitoring the impact of our use and managing our area. We rotate the frequency and site of our activities to reduce the impact on the area. Where possible we purchase items required for Forest School from local providers and we source sustainable resources as much as we can.

Bug hunting – we teach children to be respectful when looking for insects and how to carefully pick them up using sticks. We teach them that whilst it is okay to place a bug carefully in a bug pot for a short time to observe, it is important they put the insect back exactly where they found it.

Collecting natural materials – children are encouraged to take all materials from the woodland floor. We explain to the children about sustainability.

Den and shelter building – we have a designated area for den building which helps to reduce any damage to trees. We use sticks found on site to build dens and shelters. We leave our shelters and dens between sessions and dismantle them at the end of the term.

Fires – we light fires in a designated area away from trees and tree roots. Fires are extinguished properly and if possible ashes are disposed of in nettles.

Flowers – during the spring we are mindful of the daffodils growing in our area. We do not pick them and are careful where we walk and run so we do not trample on them.

Food – after cooking, any leftovers that can go on the compost heap are put there rather than the bin.

Litter – we work according to the ethos ‘leave no trace’ as much as is reasonably possible. All rubbish must be removed after each session and disposed of in school bins. All recycling is placed in our green tub to be sorted into correct recycling containers.

Sticks – we ask children to pick sticks up from the ground and not pull them from living trees.

EMERGENCY AND SERIOUS INCIDENT PLAN

In the event of a serious incident these procedures are to be followed.

Serious Injury or Illness – Child or Adult

- Forest School Leader to call the group back to the fire circle using the agreed call sign
- Complete a head count to make sure everyone is accounted for
- If help is needed use school radio to call the office for additional help
- Adult volunteers to take all children into school away from any danger
- First Aider to attend to any casualties – record any changes in their condition or administer first aid
- In the event of a serious incident the emergency services will be called, and the location of the school given
- Additional adult to go to school car park to meet emergency services
- Next of kin of patient/s will be informed by school office

Missing Child

- If, after completing a second call sign, anyone is found to be missing all children will be returned to their class
- Using school radio Forest School Leader is to alert school office
- All available adults are to search school grounds and school building
- If, after a complete search of the school and the grounds, the missing child is not found then the school office is to ring 999 and the parents/carers of the missing child

Fire Alarm (one continuous long ring)

- Forest School Leader to call the group back to the fire circle using the agreed call sign
- Complete a head count to make sure everyone is accounted for
- All adults and children to go straight to the fire assembly point joining their class line for a class head count

School Lockdown Alarm (3 long rings)

- Stop all activities – Forest School Leader to call the group back to the fire circle using the agreed call sign
- Complete a head count to make sure everyone is accounted for
- All adults and children to enter the school quickly and quietly from the nearest entrance and proceed to the school hall
- Forest School Leader to complete a second head count