

St George's Primary School Forest School Handbook



Forest School's learner-centred approach interweaves with the ever-changing moods and marvels, potential and challenges of the natural world through the seasons to fill every Forest School session and programme with discovery and difference. Making each session and every experience a valuable one.

(Forest School Association)



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Document Review

This handbook will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis

Created by Stuart Kilpatrick , Forest School Leader , May 2022



What is Forest School?

Forest School is a long term learning process that is child centred and takes place in a woodland environment. The program uses play, exploration and managed risk taking to allow children to develop socially , emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually.

Learning in and from the natural environment children will grow to cherish and value the world they live in and will grow into adults that appreciate the importance of sustainable management of the world's resources and the importance of protecting nature.

Having fun is an important part of these sessions and children are allowed to express themselves, to direct their own play, to learn new skills and build their self confidence and self esteem. They learn social skills through collaboration and teamwork.

It gives them new opportunities and new experiences out in nature whatever the weather.

Through research and case studies it has been shown that Forest School has many benefits to the child and the the school setting

- Better emotional understanding
- Improved problem solving
- Rapid increase in vocabulary and communication
- Reading, writing and maths improve
- Unwanted behaviours decrease

Play that is child led and directed has been shown to be extremely important in the development of the child's imagination and creative interests. It promotes resilience, emotional intelligence , social skills, risk management and enhances a child's ability to learn. (Play England)

The aims of Forest School are set out by the Forest School Association and they state that all children that attend Forest School are

- equal, unique and valuable
- competent to explore & discover
- entitled to experience appropriate risk and challenge
- entitled to choose, and to initiate and drive their own learning and development
- entitled to experience regular success
- entitled to develop positive relationships with themselves and other people
- entitled to develop a strong, positive relationship with their natural world

Forest School at St George's takes place in the ECO Area at the end of the main playground backing onto Church View. The school site is fenced off and kept locked during the school day.

Forest School Rules

Forest School at St George's has three basic rules which underpin all our activities and behaviour

Be kind to Nature

Being aware of the natural environment around us, that it is the home to the plants and insects, birds and animals that live there and we should recognise their right to live there.

We operate a general 'No Pick, No Lick' policy in relation to the plants and creatures that live there. From time to time we will forage for some plants, berries etc but this will always take into account that they are food for insects and birds so we will take the minimum amount. Planting of plants / flowers that are beneficial to insects takes place. We also do our best not to break branches on trees and not to disturb insect or minibeast homes.

Be Safe - Don't hurt yourself and don't hurt anyone else.

Allowing children to learn to manage personal risk during play and being able to build self confidence through activities which have been carefully Benefit / Risk Assessed. Giving children the opportunity to build their social skills in an environment where they have the emotional, physical, mental space to be themselves and to learn about themselves.

The boundary of the Forest School site is the picket fence and all activities will take place within this area. For Junior children some games may be played outside the picket fence.

Have Fun

Forest School is all about allowing children to enjoy playing for playing sake, to give them an environment where they can enjoy learning new skills at their own pace, where they can build friendship bonds with their peers and to enjoy just being out in nature and appreciating it and learning their part and responsibility for the natural world.

We have specific rules about tool use, behaviour, camp fires, food etc which build on from these basic rules. New skills and experiences are built upon the respect for nature, keeping safe and having fun while managing risk, stretching and building confidence and learning and developing life skills.



Typical Forest School session

Each Forest School session will be different as it is child led and directed but they follow a very basic routine as follows

- Before the session the Forest School Leader will do a sweep of the site to check for any safety issues and will fill out a Site Risk Assessment sheet. Any issues will be resolved before the session commences.
- Children go to the toilet and get changed into their Forest School clothes as appropriate for the weather
- Children make their way to the Forest School site and meet at the fire circle
- Remind them of the three Forest School rules to 'Be kind to Nature' , 'Be safe' and 'Have Fun' and any other specific information for that session.
- Play a warm up game.
- Tell the children about the main activity for that session and any specific safety rules (fire safety, tool use etc).
- Children can then choose to play, explore the site, take part in the day's activity, or make a den , play in the mud kitchen, discover what's happening in nature or a mixture of them all!
- At the end of the session we meet at the fire circle where each child has the opportunity to reflect on what they have experienced or learnt or enjoyed in the session.
- Children return to the school building and get back into their school clothes.
- Waterproofs and wellies are dried and stored.
- The Forest School site is tidied and all tools and equipment cleaned and stored away safely.



Roles & Responsibilities

All Forest School sessions will operate with a child to leader ratio of at least 1:8, additional staff may be present where children have assessed SEN needs.

All Staff that help at Forest School have to sign to say that they have read this handbook and understand the ethos of Forest School and will comply with the safety guidelines.

Clothing

As we will be outside in all weathers adults and children should be prepared wearing suitable clothing for the season so that they can fully enjoy their time at Forest School.

The school will provide waterproof coats, waterproof trousers, wellington boots and gloves.

On cold days please provide the following for your child

- Warm hat
- Warm socks and spare socks
- Trousers
- Extra fleece/ sweatshirt

On hot days please provide the following for your child

- Sun hat
- Sun cream
- Water bottle
- Trousers
- Walking boots / sturdy shoes if not wearing wellington boots



Start & End Session Procedures

Before sessions the Forest School leader will

- Complete a sweep of the site to identify and remove any hazards that might cause illness.
- Complete a safety check form documenting any hazards and how they were managed.
- Check the weather - that there are no extreme weather conditions expected.
- Check the trees, bushes etc that there are no dangerous branches and to advise the children that things may be slippery after rainfall.

At the end of sessions the Forest School Leader will

- Tidy the site and remove rubbish.
- Ensure the fire is completely put out.
- Clean any tools or pots, pans, utensils etc that have been used and put away.
- Put away any resources that were used



Essential Equipment

During sessions the Forest School Leader will ensure that the following equipment is always available

- Water & soap to wash hands
- First Aid kit
- Burns kit
- Drinking water
- Fire Blanket and bucket of water
- Mobile phone to contact the school office in the case of an emergency

Risk Management

'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool'.

Health & Safety Executive

A Site Risk Assessment has been carried out to determine hazards that the children may encounter and controls to minimise the risks, this will be reviewed and updated throughout the year.

For each activity type i.e. fire lighting, den building, craft foraging activities, wide games a specific Risk / Benefit analysis will be prepared to ascertain the benefits of the activity to the children balanced against any risks involved.

Before each session a brief risk assessment will be carried out and recorded and any issues resolved or screened off.

The Forest School takes place inside the fenced school grounds and there is no access for members of the public or dogs without permission.

Common Risks

Toxic Plants / Berries / Fungus	Children are advised against picking any plants, berries or fungus unless permission is given by the Forest School Leader. Some berries (blackberries / cherries / raspberries) , flowers (nasturtiums / borage) , leafy plants (garlic mustard, dandelions) which are edible grow on the site. This will only be picked with adult permission. Children wash their hands before eating. If a child does eat something which could be toxic then medical aid will be sought.
Uneven ground and trip hazards	Children will be advised of the danger of uneven ground and trip hazards and will be shown how to take care of themselves
Low branches	Children will be made aware of the areas where there may be low branches and advised to take care

Children going out of sight or missing	Apart from playing wide games the boundary of the site will be the picket fence. Children will be advised to stay within this boundary. Adults will be aware of the children's whereabouts at all times. The school gates are kept locked during the school day.
Allergies	<p>Specific measures may need to be taken depending on the child's allergy, these will be known to the class teaching assistant.</p> <p>No nut based products will be used when cooking.</p> <p>Any specific child requirements will be notified by the class teaching assistant and any specific inhalers, epi pens will be brought to the site for the session.</p>
Insect bites / stings	<p>Children will be advised of the location of any stinging plants so they can identify them themselves and avoid them. Any wasp / bees nests/swarms will be identified and cordoned off.</p> <p>Any child that gets an insect bite will be treated accordingly.</p> <p>Any specific child requirements will be notified by the class teaching assistant.</p>
Disease / infection	<p>Advise children about the risks of touching animal faeces.</p> <p>Washing hands before eating.</p>
Moving and lifting	Children will be shown how to lift and move large/heavy sticks etc safely around the site.
Water	The pond is fenced off and is out of bounds to the children.
Handwashing	Water and soap is provided for children to wash their hands as required

Tool Use

During sessions children will be given opportunities to learn how to safely use different tools and become proficient using them. This will always be carried out under strict adult supervision and will be based on the child's ability and maturity and the opportunity to use tools can be removed from a child because of lack of respect for the tools or unsafe or unwanted behaviour during tool use.



Children will be taught

- What each tool is and what it is used for and how it is used safely.
- That they can only use it with the Forest School Leader's permission and in the presence of the Forest School Leader.
- That they have a 'Safety Bubble' around them, a safe working space that others may not enter when that tool is being used and if someone enters that bubble then they will stop using the tool immediately until the person leaves the bubble.
- How to use the Saw Horse safely.
- How to safely use the tool, this will include wearing appropriate gloves.
- When using a knife, that all movements of the knife are away from the body and that the hand holding the wood is as far away from the blade as possible. That they wear a 'No Cut' glove on the hand not holding the knife and that all hands and parts of the body are behind the knife.
- That they treat the tool with respect and never run or play with it.
- That they know how to pass a tool safely to another person.
- That tools are cared for and cleaned and stored away safely at the end of use.

Campfires



Having a campfire will be a common occurrence at Forest School. Strict rules relating to the fire circle and the campfire will be explained to the children before any fire is lit. Children will have the opportunity to build and light fires under adult supervision and in small groups. We will also make hot drinks and cook on the fire.



Rules of the Fire Circle

Sitting around a fire or cooking on it should be fun so we will ensure that respect and safety is taught so that we can all enjoy it.

- No one is to walk through the fire circle even if the fire is unlit, to get to a different seat a child must walk around the circle to the new place.
- We treat the fire pit as dangerous even when the fire pit is unlit to ensure that it is always treated with respect.
- The person who lit the fire is the only one who can add wood to it. This will usually be the Forest School Leader but may be a child who has learnt how to build a fire and has shown the maturity and ability to responsibly carry out the task safely.
- All children will be given the opportunity (based on their age and maturity) to learn how to safely light a fire and the safety precautions that should be taken to ensure everyone can enjoy it safely. This opportunity will be given as and when a child exhibits the maturity to learn this new skill.
- A fire blanket for emergencies and bucket of water to put out the fire will always be on hand
- Fire gloves will be used to tend to the fire
- A first aid kit and burns kit will be on hand
- Once a fire is lit it will always be monitored by the Forest School Leader and children will be made aware that it is lit.
- No running will be allowed around the fire circle.
- Fire lighting equipment is stored safely and is out of bounds to children. It will be accessible to them in small groups when they are being taught how to light fires under the Forest School Leader's supervision.

Ropes / Paracord

At Forest School we use ropes / paracord to build dens , craft activities, pulling logs, making swings etc.

To keep us all safe we follow some basic rules

- The ropes / paracord is brightly coloured so it is easily seen.
- It is not left lying on the ground where it may become a trip hazard.
- It is not wasted.
- It is only used for the required purpose and never tied around a person.
- It is not tied anywhere it could be a trip hazard or be below head height.
- Unused rope / paracord is stored away safely.

We teach children how to tie a variety of knots which will allow them to use the ropes / paracord more effectively when building things.



Behaviour

The school's behaviour policy and bullying policy apply during Forest School.



First Aid

The Forest School Leader is qualified in First Aid for Outdoor activities and a First Aid kit (and Burns kit) is always available on site. Other trained first aiders are available in school during the school day.

Personal Protective Equipment

Personal Protective Equipment such as gloves will be provided when certain activities require. All children will be provided gloves to use as they wish during normal play and craft activities. Safety gloves are provided when children are using tools or fire lighting. Sturdy footwear is always worn by children and adults.

Food

Snacks are provided during the Forest School sessions, Forest School Leaders have Level 2 Certificate in Food Hygiene and all food is stored and prepared according to these guidelines.

Children are advised to wash their hands before eating and not to run around while eating.

Extreme Weather

The Forest School session may need to be cancelled if extreme weather such as very high winds or thunder and lightning is forecast. Children are provided with wet weather gear and so rainy days are not a problem. The Forest School site is quite sheltered by large trees and so hot days will not normally be a problem if children are wearing sun block, long sleeve tops, sun hats and have their water bottles.

Inclusion Statement

As in normal school life all children are included and afforded the same opportunities for participation, learning and fun in a secure and accepting environment. This is built on the school's own Inclusion policy.

Ecological Impact Statement

An Ecological Impact Survey has been carried out on the area used by Forest School as a baseline against which the impact both positive and negative that the Forest School sessions will have on the plants and creatures that live there. Many wildlife areas have been set up to provide habitats for insects and minibeasts such as bug hotels, different wood piles, pond, meadow flower area, bee friendly flower area, dead hedge, bird box and bat boxes.

We have a sustainable Management Plan to allow us to monitor how the site is faring and how we can manage it and improve it year to year so that we can find a balance between nature and our use of it.

Statutory Requirements

Statute	General Application	Forest School Application
In loco parentis	In loco parentis describes the duty of care that Teaching / support staff have towards the children under their care that they have the same duty of care that a parent / carer would have towards the child in the same circumstances.	This underpins all provision for children at school
Health & Safety at Work act (1974) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)	Employers have a duty to provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment with risk assessments and procedures laid down for serious and imminent danger	Risk Assessments and Risk Management Insurance Reporting of Accidents and Near Misses - Accident Book
Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations (1981)	Requires employers to provide adequate and appropriate equipment, facilities and personnel to enable first aid to be given to employees if they are injured or become ill at work. Members of the public and other non-employees are included in the first aid needs assessment and provision must be made	Qualified First Aider with First Aid kit and Burns kit at each Forest School session.
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Regulations (1992)	Requires the provision of device or appliance designed to be worn or held by an individual for protection against one or	Appropriate PPE is provided depending on the situation.

	more health hazards. Requires user instructions and independent testing requirements.	
Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations RIDDOR (1995)	Requires the reporting of any work-related death or injury lasting over three days, disease or dangerous occurrence that may not have resulted in a reportable injury, but which clearly could have (near miss)	Reporting of Near Misses.
The Protection of Children Act 1999	Created a system for identifying persons considered to be unsuitable for working with children	DBS Checks on all school staff.
Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (2002)	Requires employers to control exposure to hazardous substances to prevent ill health and to keep records of any hazardous substances used	No hazardous chemicals are used on the Forest School Site.
The Children Act (2004)	Places a duty of services to work together to ensure that every child, whatever their background or circumstances, has the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve through learning, make a positive contribution to society and achieve economic well-being. (Every Child Matters)	School Safeguarding Policy covers Forest School.
The Knives Act (1997)	Legislation states that 'It is illegal to carry any sharp or	All knives are used under Forest Leader tuition and

<p>The Offensive Weapons Act (1996)</p> <p>The Violent Crime Reduction Act (2006)</p>	<p>bladed instrument in a public place (with the exception of a folding pocket knife, which has a blade that is less than 7.62 cm (3 inches) without lawful authority or reasonable excuse.'</p>	<p>supervision and stored safely when not in use.</p>
<p>The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)</p>	<p>Protects certain rare and endangered wild plants from any collection (even flowers, fruit, foliage and fungi) and forbids the uprooting and collecting of any wild plant</p>	<p>At Forest School we respect nature. The Forest School is actively maintained and beneficial plants are introduced. We have carried out an Ecological Assessment and have a plan to manage the site.</p>

Medical and Emergency Contact

Forest School follows the school procedure for Emergency Contacts and Medicines. Any required medicine or inhalers that are held in the classroom for a child will be brought to the Forest School site by the Teaching Assistant in case required during the session.

EPI Pens are stored in the School Office and existing medical procedures will be followed for their use if required. Child medical information is stored in the school office.

Toilet Arrangements

The site is just at the end of the playground and so children can return to the school building to use the toilets. Junior children can do this by themselves, infant children will be accompanied by an adult.

Emergency Procedures

If an accident or illness occurs then the Forest School Leader should be notified and they will administer first aid to the casualty. The supporting adult will gather all the children to the Fire Circle. The supporting adult will inform the school office. If the situation will require the emergency services then they will be called prior to calling the school office.

The Forest School Leader will stay with the casualty to monitor the situation. The supporting adult will put the fire out and store the tools away. The Forest School Leader will decide whether the children should return to school with the supporting adult.

If a fire becomes out of control then the Forest School Leader will shout 'FIRE' and gather all the children and supporting adults to a safe location and do a headcount. The Fire Brigade and the school office will be called and with all children present the adults will lead the group back to the school building.

Lost Child Procedure

If a child is believed to be missing then we will call all the children to the Fire Circle and do a headcount. If a child is missing we will ask who may have seen them last and where. While the supporting adult minds the children at the Fire Circle. An initial sweep will be made and if the child can not be found within 5 minutes then the Forest School Leader will phone the school office who will commence the procedure for a missing child. The fire will be put out and any tools tidied away while the Forest School Leader continues the search. If the child is found in the Forest School site then the school office will be notified.

Safeguarding

Forest School comes under the school Safeguarding policy and all safeguarding issues will be reported as per this policy, this includes the procedures for child disclosure and reporting concerns. All Forest School staff are DBS checked.

Support Staff Declaration Consent Form

Forest School is a place where children can direct and control their own discovery and learning journey in nature as far as possible. Adult intervention is sometimes needed but this should only be to help as much as the child requires and not to direct the play or take over and do the thing for the child. Children also have the freedom to explore the site, to run and play and interact which may become noisy. Adults should refrain from unnecessary interventions during play but may join in in the experience of play and interaction in the natural environment.

Adult helpers are there to encourage positive behaviour, respect for nature and to help each child enjoy their experience in the natural environment.

I have read, understood and am satisfied with the topics covered in the St George's Forest School Handbook and associated Risk Assessments.

I agree to take part in Forest School and am responsible for my own safety and others around me.

I agree to listen to information and instructions given to me.

I know of no medical reason why I should not take part.

I consent to receiving any necessary first aid treatment from the Forest School Leader or other school First Aider for any illness or injury that occurs during the Forest School session.

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Confidential Medical Information is held in the school office.