



Forest School Handbook



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1. The Forest School Ethos

Forest school is an inspirational education approach to learning where children develop many skills and attributes through regular experiences in the woodland; developing the child as a whole, in a natural environment. Removing the constraints of the traditional four walls and allowing children the time and space to initiate their own learning through practical activities, children develop in such areas as resilience, confidence, self-esteem, imagination and independence.

Forest school allows the child's full capacity to be respected; allowing them to use tools, explore, investigate and assess risks. There are no ceilings to learning for all children - no matter their perceived classroom ability, attitude or behaviour.

It is the adults role to lead by example, allow children to play and undertake achievable and challenging activities in safe and nurturing space, observing the child initiated learning and promoting further possibilities.

2. What happens at Forest School

Small groups of children get the opportunity for a sequence of outdoor sessions that enable them to gain new skills such as tying knots, shelter building, using tools and lighting fires. These skills are typically taught alongside or after many of the social and emotional aspects of the approach are fulfilled. As the children progress through Forest School they will become more independent and more responsible for their own learning. Throughout the sessions the holistic approach is at the forefront.

3. Forest School Staff

Our Forest School sessions are organised and run by Mrs Davidson for Key Stage 1 and Mrs Tarr for Key Stage 2. Mrs Davidson is working towards her Level 3 Forest School Leader Award and Mrs Tarr is an accredited Level 3 Forest School Practitioner.

All staff and volunteers that work within Forest School sessions have undergone an appropriate selection process to assess their skills and suitability for working with children.

A qualified first aider attends all sessions. Both Mrs Tarr and Mrs Davidson have the necessary level of First Aid that is required to lead Forest Schools.

4. The Forest School Site

We are very fortunate to have two areas to work in and explore for Forest School.

School Garden: Our school garden is located to the rear of the school building. It contains a few mature trees, a campfire circle, wild flower area, raised beds and an open space to focus on group or individual activities.



Young Woodland: We also have a large school field with a sectioned off young woodland area with several established young native tree species.

5. Code of Conduct

In school, we follow the Golden rules and these continue to be followed during Forest School sessions.

- *We listen*
- *We work hard*
- *We are honest*
- *We look after property*
- *We are kind and helpful*
- *We are gentle*

It is important that these rules are followed by all learners and staff within forest school sessions whether be in regard to each other, tools, fire or the nature around us.

6. Forest School Activities and Sessions

Sessions begin and end in a way that becomes familiar to the children. They make themselves prepared for the activities ahead by getting into appropriate clothing and footwear and helping to bring resources needed. The children gather around our fire circle and we spend time recapping our code of conduct. We reflect on what we did during the previous session and aim to build upon skills and thoughts as we move through the year.

Possible activities include:

- *Shelter building*
- *Fire lighting and cooking over a fire*
- *Tool use*
- *Rope and string work – tying knots*
- *Studying wildlife*
- *Playing team and group games*
- *Sensory activities*
- *Tracking games*
- *Using a Kelly kettle*
- *Creative art or sculpture work*

- Woodland crafts
- Story telling and activities linked to a story

7. Forest School Equipment inc. Safety Equipment

Depending on the activities, certain tools and equipment will be provided and will be easily accessible if and when needed. First Aid equipment will always be available. Forest School leaders carry an emergency bag with them every session. Items may vary depending on the time of year.

Forest School equipment available includes:

<u>General</u>	<u>Tools</u>	<u>Fire</u>
Forest School equipment trolley	Lockable tool box containing sheath knives	Kelly kettle
Spare clothes as appropriate for the weather and age group	Bow saws	Fire gloves
Spare plastic bags or bin liners	Loppers	Fire first aid kit
Wet wipes	Children's rigger gloves	Fire water bucket
Tarpaulins and pegs	Paracord (different lengths)	Fire blanket
Rubber mallet	Billhooks and covers	Fire steels
Whistle	Secateurs	Gas lighter
Water container with tap and soap for handwashing		Tinder box
Sanitizing gel		Cotton wool
Peper towels		Cooking stand
First aid kit (in. PPE)		Frying pan
Walkie Talkie		Dutch oven
Flasks and cups		Cutlery
		Plates and bowls

8. Clothing

Children should be briefed the day before on the expected weather conditions and the appropriate clothing that should be worn during the session. They will dress accordingly, wearing warm (layers, hats, gloves) or cool, loose clothing as required. The children are provided with waterproof jackets and trousers. They will usually need their waterproof bottoms on as they will spend time working on the ground. Children should bring their wellies or boots in a named bag.

We have some spare wellies and clothing in school to enable all children to access Forest School when needed.

9. Health and Safety Policy and Risk Assessments

During Forest School sessions, we adhere to the school health and safety policy, child protection policy and school emergency plan, including any COVID amendments.

We also have a specific Forest School risk assessment that covers the use of tools and fire within the sessions.

Whenever a tool or fire is being used, a safety or tool talk will be delivered by the leader. It is important that other staff, volunteers and learners respect and follow the guidance given to keep each other safe at all times. School behaviour policies will be followed if this is not the case.

10. Safe Use of tools

Using and Storing Tools

- All tools are counted out and back in at the beginning and end of each session in which they are used.
- When not in use in the Forest they are kept secured away in a locked area.
- Before each tool is to be used it will be checked for damage and working order.
- Each tool type is kept in their own suitable containers, many of which are also lockable.
- Children must never be allowed to help themselves and will always have adult supervision when collecting, transporting and using tools.
- Tools are only used for a specific purpose.
- All adults should model correct and safe tool use, storage and transportation at all times.
- When using a tool, they are used well away from others in the group, (two arms and a tool length) and ensuring that others are aware that a tool is in use.
- Only walking is permitted when transporting a tool.
- Tool talks will take place before the use of any tools, the forest school leader will lead these initially but learners should also be able to use these to show their understanding of how to use the tools safely.

General

- Keep tools in good, clean order.
- Check tools are safe to use before the start of each session.
- Carry out tool maintenance (cleaning and oiling) once a week.
- Do not use tools with damaged blades or handles or with loose bolts or fixings.
- When transporting tools do not carry more than can be held securely.
- A blunt blade is more dangerous than a sharp one.

- *Count tools in and out.*

Bow Saws – use for cutting wood with a diameter greater than a 2 pence piece

- *Wear a glove on the non-sawing (helping) hand, not on the tool.*
- *Saw with easy relaxed strokes using the full length of the blade. Let the blade do the work – don't force it, especially if it sticks.*
- *Carry with the frame at your side with the blade facing down, like carrying a handbag.*
- *Keep the blade covered when not in use and especially when transporting.*
- *Ensure the item to be cut is firmly held.*
- *When using with children – Leader and child to kneel on floor with Leader on one side of saw and the child on the other, both in the 'respect position'. The Leader guides the saw and the child follows.*

Billhooks – use for cleaving wood

- *Never wear a glove on the hand holding the tool – it makes the handle hard to grip safely.*
- *Keep a safe distance from other people and be aware of those around you while you work. Stop if anyone comes too close.*
- *Hold billhook away from your body and cut away from yourself.*

Loppers – use for cutting wood with a diameter smaller than a 2 pence piece

- *Always carry with blades closed (and locked if applicable).*
- *When not in use leave with blades closed (and locked if applicable).*
- *Do not exceed the cutting capacity of the tool.*
- *Use away from your body and keep hand not holding tool away from blades.*

Knives – use to whittle small sticks, peel bark and cut string

- *Never wear a glove on the hand holding the tool – it makes the handle hard to grip safely.*

- Wear a safety glove on your other helper hand.
- Keep a safe distance from other people and be aware of those around you while you work. Stop if anyone comes too close.
- Hold the knife away from your body and cut away from yourself.

11. Safe Use of Fires

Fires must only be lit after a risk assessment has been carried out and they must only be within the fire circle area. This includes the use of Kelly Kettles. There must always be a trained adult present within the fire circle when a fire is lit or hot embers remain, never leave a fire unattended. Fires should not be lit on very windy days.

There must be an adequate supply of fire water close to the fire pit to ensure there is enough water available to extinguish the fire if it gets out of control. A fire blanket must be brought into the woodland to wrap round someone if their clothes become alight. Fire proof gauntlets should be kept at the fire area to allow adults to pick up hot items. Also take out the fire first aid kit.

Before visiting the area the children should have had the opportunity to ask questions and be given information about fire safety. When at the fire circle the rules should be demonstrated for the children to see. There should be no more than 4 people, adults and children, within the fire circle next to the fire at any one time. The best position for cooking is on one knee (the respect position) so you can move backwards easily and remain stable. Long hair should be tied back, tassels and ties tucked away and scarves removed.

Kelly Kettle - The Forest leader may use this to heat water. Our Kelly kettle contains a whistle bung that can be left in loosely and will whistle when the water is boiling. Once the fire is going in the Kelly Kettle base carefully add the chimney top to it.

When lit, do not stand directly over, or look straight down the chimney. Never blow into the top. When pouring out the water support the base by holding the bung chain in one hand and the handle with the other.

To put the fire out, pour the remaining water into the base.

When lighting fires, Forest School Leaders will:

- Not wear loose clothing and tie long hair back, and ensure that children have their hair tied back and also have no loose clothing.
- Wear gloves.
- Allow only one child at a time to help with fire construction / approach the fire.
- Try to keep away from the smoke.
- Put out the fire with water when finished.

When using Kelly kettles, Forest School Leaders will:

- Only light a fire in the tray of the Kelly kettle in the centre of the Forest School circle.
- Kneel on one knee for ease of moving backwards.
- Never place the kettle on the fire without containing water.
- Only fill the kettle with water when cool.
- Place the tray of the kettle on a flat surface.
- Place the whistle bung in loosely.
- Keep the spout on the opposite side to themselves and others.
- Remove the kettle from fire when the water starts to boil.
- Remove the kettle from the fire with the handle held vertically, using the chain to support it in an upright position.

12. Toileting and hygiene

Toilets are easily accessible from the school garden but there are no toilets at the young forest school site. Children attending forest school sessions will be informed in advance of the situation, and all children will be asked to go to the toilet before they leave school.

Children who need the toilet. Will go in pairs back into group's toilets in school. An assisting adult will accompany all children.

A handwashing station is set up during forest school sessions including a water container with tap, soap and paper towels. We also carry sanitising gel. Children will wash their hands before eating or preparing any food.

13. Consent

Consent to participate in Forest School sessions is covered by our 'blanket' school consent form.