



St Peter's Church of England Primary
Academy Forest School Handbook

Forest School Information for St. Peter's Church of England Primary Academy

The History of Forest Schools

The concept of Forest Schools traces its roots back to the 19th century, championed by philosophers and educators such as Montessori, Steiner, and Froebel. These visionaries emphasised the importance of children connecting with the outdoor environment for their overall wellbeing and education. Montessori, for instance, highlighted the psychological benefits of outdoor experiences, stating that nature can fulfill the body's needs. This early recognition laid the groundwork for understanding the significance of outdoor education, spanning from fulfilling physiological needs to fostering respect for nature's elements.

Though the 20th century saw advancements in classroom-based education, the essence of outdoor learning persisted. Organisations like the scouts and outdoor education centres provided opportunities for children to engage directly with nature. However, as educational priorities shifted towards classroom-centric learning, the emphasis on outdoor exploration diminished.

In the early 1990s, the Forest School concept, as we recognise it today, emerged in England. Originating from Scandinavia, where space constraints led to outdoor-focused education for preschoolers, the idea was brought to England by a group of nursery nurses and lecturers who observed the benefits of outdoor education during a visit to Sweden. They subsequently developed Forest Schools as a response to the indoor-centric education prevailing in England. Since then, Forest Schools have gained traction nationwide, becoming an integral part of education across the UK.

What is Forest School?

Forest Schools, originating from Scandinavia, offer a unique educational experience that fosters various skills and values, including self-esteem, wellbeing, confidence, emotional intelligence, and teamwork. It encourages outdoor exploration, practical learning, and appreciation for the natural environment, promoting physical activity and responsible risk-taking.

Children participating in Forest Schools engage in a diverse range of activities, from den building to fire lighting and outdoor cooking, nurturing their understanding of nature and its conservation. The approach emphasises child-led learning, ensuring each session maximizes the children's involvement and learning outcomes.

Principles of Forest School

Forest School adheres to six fundamental principles:

1. **Long-Term Process:** Forest School involves frequent and regular sessions over an extended period, fostering continuous learning and development.
2. **Natural Environment:** Sessions take place in woodlands or natural settings, facilitating a deep connection between learners and the natural world.
3. **Supported Risks:** Learners are encouraged to take appropriate risks in a safe environment, promoting personal growth and resilience.

4. **Holistic Development:** Forest School aims to nurture holistic development, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and linguistic aspects.
5. **Qualified Practitioners:** Forest School sessions are led by a qualified practitioner who continuously develop their professional practice.
6. **Learner-Centred Processes:** Forest School fosters a community for development and learning, with a play-based approach that incorporates children's ideas and interests.

Forest School Approach

At St. Peter's Church of England Primary Academy, our Forest School approach revolves around a play-based methodology, incorporating children's ideas into planning and resource allocation. The Forest School Leader (external provider) ensures that all preparations are meticulous and align with the children's interests, facilitating an enriching outdoor learning experience.

Location

Our Forest School area is nestled within the school grounds, offering a small wooded area with diverse trees and shrubs for exploration and utilisation. Forest School sessions occur weekly, regardless of weather conditions, on a Thursday morning. To ensure comfort and safety, children are provided with full wet suits. We encourage parents to equip their children with appropriate gear like wellingtons, hats, scarves, gloves, and coats for an enjoyable experience. Additionally, on warmer days, hats and sun cream are recommended, with water supplied by the school.

Activities

Forest School at St. Peter's fosters a wide array of outdoor activities aimed at nurturing children's understanding of the natural environment and fostering essential social and emotional skills which will be delivered by an external provider.

Some activities include:

Den building

Knot practice

Safe fire lighting and cooking

Plant and animal identification

Nature exploration and conservation

- Sustainable resource utilisation
- Safe tool handling
- Understanding seasonal changes
- Social and emotional skill development
- Outdoor play and risk-taking
- Building relationships and teamwork

Routine

Forest School sessions run weekly during Spring 2 term, accommodating reception and key stage 1 children, each comprising groups of up to 30 children under a 10:1 ratio of children to adults. Children are expected to dress appropriately for the weather and wear splash suits provided by the school during colder or wetter conditions. Sessions typically begin with a learning introduction, followed by structured activities and free play. Children are encouraged to care for the area, use equipment safely, and maintain cleanliness.

Winter Clothing

The following items listed must be worn at the Forest School Sessions. It could be wet, muddy and cold, please make sure clothing is suitable to protect you during the session.

- Hat
- Gloves
- Waterproof Coat
- Warm layers underneath
- Wellies or Sturdy Boots
- Warm Socks
- Long trousers
- Waterproof trousers (if possible)
- Water bottles



Summer Clothing

The following items listed must be worn at the Forest School Sessions. It could get hot but also wet and muddy please make sure clothing is suitable to protect you during the session.

- Sun hat
- Long-sleeved t-shirt
- Long trousers
- Waterproof Coat
- Wellies or Sturdy Boots
- Sun cream
- Water Bottle



Emergency Plan

In the event of an emergency, our Forest School Lead and supporting staff are equipped to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants. The school's address and contact details are readily available, and emergency procedures are in place, including lockdown and evacuation protocols. Regular drills and communication strategies are implemented to keep parents informed and maintain a secure environment.

Conclusion

St. Peter's Church of England Primary Academy is committed to providing a dynamic and safe Forest School experience, where children can thrive outdoors, develop vital skills, and forge lasting connections with nature. Through our comprehensive approach, we aim to cultivate curiosity, resilience, and a profound appreciation for the natural world among our students.

Assessor: Rachel Jukes

Description of Area/Premises etc... School field/ wooded area.....

Description of site: Area is part of the school grounds of St Peter's Church of England Primary Academy. The school field is surrounded by hedges and has a small wooded area in the far left corner. The site is solely used by the school. Large fauna cannot access the area, however small fauna such as cats, hedgehogs, foxes and rabbits could. The site is mainly grassed with small areas of bramble and nettles. There is access for vehicles to the site. The area has no running, still or boggy water sections.

What are the Hazards?	Who is at Risk and how?	Hazard level	Control Measure	Hazard after control	Risk Benefit
Uneven ground	Leader and learners Trips, Falls, slips	High	Daily site check, Red hazard signs to warn of hazardous places Don't play running games in such areas	Low	Benefit of being outside. Develop self-awareness and how to manage risk.
Bramble, Nettles and other thorny plants	Leader and learners Stinging, cuts and grazes	High	Make children aware. Clear pathways and main play areas. Advise on long trousers and sleeves. Teach about plants that sting and prick.	Low	Develop self-awareness and how to manage risk. Knowledge of plants.
Hazardous Plants	Learners Poisonous	High	Inform all children not to pick or eat berries. Wash hands before eating on site	Low	Knowledge of plants Develop self-awareness and managing risk.

What are the Hazards?	Who is at Risk and how?	Hazard level	Control Measure	Hazard after control	Risk Benefit
			Place coloured sign on hazardous plants and trees. Teach children about plants		
Stinging and biting insects	Leader and learners Stings and bites	High	Check area prior to session. Avoid contact. First aid kit nearby during active season Seek medical aid if anaphylactic shock or adder bite present.	Low	Opportunity to study the way different insects move around. Other than bees and wasps' insects are generally safe for children to capture and observe. Positive approach to insect. Teach children to ID insects
Falling branches, dangerous trees	Leader and learners Children falling Branches falling on participants	High	Check area prior to session. Continually checking throughout session. Remove any hanging deadwood. Remind children of risks.	Low	Teach children to be aware of surroundings. Benefit of being outside in natural surroundings.
Holes in ground, animal burrows	All participants	Low	No evidence of animal burrows on site. Continue to check site and amend risk assessment if needed. Avoid when playing running games.	Low	Develop awareness of surrounding area. Learn how to identify risk. Learn how to manage risk.

What are the Hazards?	Who is at Risk and how?	Hazard level	Control Measure	Hazard after control	Risk Benefit
Roots and stumps	Leader and learners Trips	High	Inform everyone to take care around the area Make aware Clear paths to access areas safely	Low	Teach children to be aware. Benefit of being outside in natural surroundings. Develop awareness of surrounding area. Learn how to identify risk.
Faeces/mud and dirt	Leader and learners Contamination	High	Check area prior to session. Continually check throughout session. Remove and discard safely Provide sanitiser and wipes for cleaning hands	Low	Develop awareness of surrounding area. Learn how to identify risk. Learn how to manage risk.
Debris/rubbish	Leader and learners Glass cuts, metal punctures	High	Check site prior to session. Ask children not to handle any rubbish. Dispose of with litter pickers safely Ensure first aid kit is nearby in case of cuts.	Low	Develop awareness of surrounding area. Learn how to identify risk. Learn how to manage risk. Benefit of being outside in natural surroundings
Boundaries and perimeter fencing.	Learners Escape of learners	Medium	Check perimeter fencing is secure. Check gates are closed leading out of school Have colour coded boundary signs in place. Staff to supervise boundary	Low	Develop awareness of surrounding area. Benefit of being outside in natural surroundings Teach children to follow and respect rules.
Mushrooms and fungus	Leader and learners	High	Check area prior to session. Make children aware of where they are. Inform children to look and not touch. If they become an issue remove or cover.	Low	Opportunity to study fungus. Teach children to be aware of surrounding area. Learn how to manage risk. Benefit is being outside.

What are the Hazards?	Who is at Risk and how?	Hazard level	Control Measure	Hazard after control	Risk Benefit
	Poisonous				
Sticks	Learners Hitting	High	Inform children of rules, no stick longer than your arm. No hitting.	Low	Learn how to manage risk Benefit of being outside in natural surroundings
Wild animals	Leaders and Learners Bites, scratches, falling into dens	Med	Check for any signs of wild animals such as foxes. Keep children away from areas animals have been spotted.	Low	Recognising animals habitats and respecting nature
Tools	Leaders and Learners Tool use - Drills/Saws etc Hazard -cuts, scraps and fingers becoming trapped	High	Show the children how to manage and use a variety of tools accurately and safely. Provide PPE equipment if necessary and provide any additional equipment. E.g a clamp/saw horse. Always have an adult present when the children are using tools.	Low	Fine motor skills Boost confidence Improve problem solving How to manage failure Learning a new skill Increase motivation and concentration

What are the Hazards?	Who is at Risk and how?	Hazard level	Control Measure	Hazard after control	Risk Benefit
Fire	Leaders and learners Burns and scalds	High	Ensure that there is a fire triangle around the fire. There is at least a 1.2 metre squared space around the fire area. Adults must always adopt the respect position. Fire blanket and at least 10 litres of water must always be present on site when using fire.	Low	Large and fine motor skills Learning a new skill Increased confidence Increased concentration Increased resilience
Allergies	Learners Allergic reaction	Med	All record of allergies are kept within the School. Any Epi pens/inhalers etc must be taken with the children to the site. All this is recorded on the register	Low	Managing Risk
Low level branches	Learners Children can walk into the branch	Med	Show the children how to move branches using their arm in a way that doesn't harm themselves/others or the branches. Check site and cut back any branches which may be hazardous.	Low	Spatial awareness Managing risk Problem solving
Tree Damage	Leaders Learners	Med	Check site before every session and record any tree damage as soon as possible.	Low	A safe working environment

Emergency Arrangements

Serious Accident: Seek additional adult help, provide first aid, call ambulance 999, inform parents (next of kin). Return all other children into the classroom, keep them calm, read stories, sing songs etc. Write up accident report form, inform HSE, assess risk assessment and make new adjustments for future.

Minor Accident: Provide first aid, complete accident report form, inform parents (carer), assess risk assessment and make adjustments for future.

Weather change: Make dynamic risk assessment, seek shelter or return to classroom.

Safety Advice

Clothing: Long trousers and long sleeves, warm clothing in cold weather, waterproof clothing in wet weather. Safety gauntlets at fire, gloves for collecting rubbish. Spare clothing available in the classroom for emergencies.

Communications: Mobile phone, member of staff to use land line in school.

First Aid: First aid kit to be taken for each visit.

Food and Drink: Wash hands/ use wipes/ antibacterial gel before eating, sit for eating and drinking, take snack and drink for full sessions, take cups, wet wipes and kitchen roll. Children's safety advice: Remind children of rules being outside.

Staff safety advice: Staff to discuss any worries before entering the site, before each session, and decide if it is safe to enter as a team.

Consider weather, environment, state of site etc.