

Forest School Policy Handbook



Date of Amendment: March 2025
Review Date: March 2028

Forest School Policy Handbook

Introduction

Forest School originated in Scandinavia and was brought to the UK in the nineties by a team of nursery staff, who had been to visit pre-schools in Denmark. They were inspired by the creativity and skill development that this holistic approach embraces. The Forest School approach of child-centred learning in natural settings is now growing in popularity.

At St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Primary School, we pride ourselves in the development of Character Education and Growth-Mindset, supporting our pupils to develop their self-esteem, self-confidence and resilience. Implementing Forest School into our curriculum aims to help our community develop this further, as it has a similar ethos and aims to develop children's emotional intelligence considering: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, social skills and empathy whilst creating a connection with the natural world around them.

Aims and Objectives

Through this policy we aim to deliver the six main principles developed by the Forest School Association (2011):

- 1) Forest School is a long-term process of frequent sessions which take place in a natural environment.
- 2) Forest School takes place in a natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- 3) Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- 4) Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- 5) Forest School sessions are run by trained Forest School Practitioners.
- 6) Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

To fully instil Forest School into our curriculum all classes from Year 1 to Year 6 will receive a six-week block of Forest School sessions and these will continue every year.

Term	Year Group
Autumn 1	5
Autumn 2	6
Spring 1	3
Spring 2	4
Summer 1	2
Summer 2	1

What happens at Forest School?

Every Forest School session is led by the children and how they wish to develop their ideas and learning. They will have the opportunity to participate in a range of activities to support their holistic development. Some examples of activities are:

- Circle games
- Environment exploration including: bug hunts, nature identification and nature trails
- Den building and Shelter building
- Tool use
- Building fires and cooking
- Designing natural artwork

The main intent of Forest School is for the children to use play as a key learning tool and to ensure the children have as much outdoor fun as possible.

All Forest School sessions end with a reflection, which can be based on a discussion whilst enjoying a hot chocolate or hot squash or by playing a game or show and tell from the session. During this time the children can also begin the planning of the next session as it is led by them and what they would like to do.

Over time the children will build their skills and use a range of tools and develop their fire interaction activities.

All activities have been analysed using a Benefit Analysis form which also helps to create a Risk Assessment for each activity. Fire and tool activities will all be led by qualified Forest School Leaders.

Forest School Essential Clothing List

"There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing!"

As part of our Forest School experience, we will be visiting the forest school site in all weathers. It is important that children are dressed in suitable clothes to ensure that they are comfortable, dry, warm and ready for adventure!

Cold/Wet Weather – Seasons – Autumn, Winter and Spring

- Warm, waterproof coat or all in one
- Layers including a long sleeved top and a jumper
- Long thick trousers or leggings (waterproof if possible!)
- Trainers, walking boots or wellies and thick socks
- Hat, scarf and gloves

Hot Weather – Seasons – End of Spring and Summer

- Lightweight waterproof coat
- Long sleeved top

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- Long trousers or leggings (no shorts, skirts or bare legs)
- Trainers or walking boots (no open toed or shoes with a mesh on) spare socks
- Sun hat and sun cream

All participants will change after lunch and go home in their Forest School Clothing, it should then be washed and returned for the next session.

Forest School Location

Forest School will take place in two locations: St Thomas' Forest School area & main field and Merrymeade Country Park. These two sites give us ample space to explore and develop skills. All tool and fire activities will take place on the school's Forest School area. The area will be further developed over time with the planting of Hazel and other helpful resources. All activities have been carefully considered to ensure ecological impacts are positive or rectifiable over time.

Adult Roles at Forest School

Forest School Leaders (FSL) should:

- Plan sessions that are underpinned by the interests of the children understanding the ethos and principles of the child-centred Forest School process.
- Ensure all activities have a benefit analysis.
- Ensure all activities have been risk assessed and these assessments are updated regularly.
- Ensure the site in use has been assessed before each session.
- Ensure weather reports have been checked.
- Ensure all participants are appropriately dressed.
- Ensure all participants are safe whilst participating in Forest School sessions.
- Ensure all resources are well maintained and kept in safe workable conditions.
- Communicate with all supporting adults so they are aware of risk assessments, safety procedures and expectations during a session.
- Communicate with parents and carers about Forest School expectations.
- Join in with all activities and scaffold learning when needed whilst also acting as a role model for having an open-minded approach to learning experiences.
- Always reflect on practice and each session to further create opportunities for learners and themselves.

Additional Adults should:

- Ensure all risk assessments and safety procedures are read, understood and adhered to.
- Ensure all participants are safe whilst participating in Forest School sessions.
- Join in with all activities and scaffold learning when needed whilst also acting as a role model for having an open-minded approach to learning experiences.

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- Ensure the sessions are child-centred by asking questions and being directed by the children rather than directing.
- Observe the children working with them and feedback to the FSL to support impact tracking and session planning.
- Help prepare resources for sessions and ensure they are cleared away appropriately.
- Observe the school's volunteer code of conduct.

Communication

Good communication is vital to running a successful Forest school. It will be vital to communicate with those assisting with the Forest School programme and other interested parties.

Other staff members - During a Forest School session, at least one other Forest School leader will be present as well as up to 3 other staff members. It is important that all involved understand the ethos for Forest school and are aware of any health and safety issues, as well as being aware of what the session will entail. In order to communicate this clearly a handout will be created for each session which outlines all necessary information.

Approved volunteers - During a Forest School session, there may be up to 3 volunteers. It is important that all involved understand the ethos for Forest school and are aware of any health and safety issues, as well as being aware of what the session will entail. In order to communicate this clearly a handout will be created for each session which outlines all necessary information.

Other interested parties:

School Management - When the session is taking place off of school grounds communication will be maintained with the school via a mobile phone held by the Forest School leader. Frequent updates on Forest School will also be given to SLT by Forest School leaders.

Parents/Carers - We will communicate with parents/carers via the school's normal channels – Parent Hub, the school website, google classroom and Marvellous Me. At the end of each session a photo will be upload to Marvellous Me with a brief description of the activities done.

Landowners - We use a woodland owned by Essex County Council for some of our Forest School sessions. We also need to be able to report any problems that we find on their site and will do this via the appropriate channels – phone or email.

Our Forest School Rules:

At St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Primary School, we follow Character Education Values of: Fairness, Trustworthy, Caring, Responsibility, Honesty, Respect and Forgiveness, which are derived from the gospels and our mission statement is:

"Let all that you do be done in love." 1 Corinthians 16:14

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Forest School is a further opportunity to demonstrate these values as adults and model them to the children of our school giving them a social, emotional and spiritual platform to develop them further themselves. The Character Education Values are directly entwined with the ethos of Forest School, therefore, all behaviour will be managed in line with our Character Education Policy.

In addition to our Character Education Policy the children will also learn some specific Forest School Rules to keep everyone safe and happy:

- We use our Character Values to demonstrate, fairness, trust, caring, responsibility, honesty, respect and forgiveness towards each other and our environment.
- We are respectful to plants and animals as we acknowledge that Forest School is their home.
- We clean our hands after touching plants or animals and before having snacks.
- We don't pick any living things unless we have confirmed that they are in abundance and it is acceptable to do so.
- We don't put anything in our mouths.
- We consider risks of all activities and think about how to complete them safely.
- We listen to tool talks carefully if we are joining an activity with tools and follow the procedures using tools sensibly and returning them to designated tool areas.
- We stay within the agreed Forest School boundary in each session.
- We leave the Forest School area as we found it or in a better state, packing away all equipment and removing all rubbish.
- We respond to the FSL call and return to the fire circle.
- If we hear the whistle blown three times, we know there is an emergency and gather together immediately.
- We work as a team and have FUN!

First Aid at Forest School

All Forest School sessions must be run by a FSL who has Outdoor Paediatric First Aid Training. School staff supporting will also have first aid training.

Minor accidents will be treated using the First Aid Kit at the Forest School site. The Forest School First Aid Kit contains:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a rugged waterproof bag with a roll top and clip fastening• 6 Medium Dressing Bandages• 1 Large Dressing Bandage• 2 Eye Bandages• 2 Triangular Bandages• 2 Cohesive Bandages• 20 Saline Wipes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 packs of 5 5cm x 5cm gauze swabs• 6 pairs of vinyl or nitrile gloves• 40 Assorted plasters• 3 x 7.5cm x 10cm Adhesive Dressing• 3 x 5cm x 7.5cm Adhesive Dressing• Zinc Oxide Tape• Micropore Tape• Rounded end scissors
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5 x 20ml Saline Wash• Resuscitation Face Shield• Foil Blanket• Tick remover card	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tuff Cut Shears• Tweezers• 6 safety pins
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The first aid kit will be checked before each session and replenished when needed. Minor injuries will be noted on the Medical Log at school if needed and parents/carers will be notified if required.

In the event of a major accident or injury the Emergency Action Plan Procedure will be followed:

Forest School Emergency Action Plan

Most emergencies can be resolved in the moment by the Forest School Leader removing the group from threat and providing any required First Aid. However, in the event of a serious incident, which could arise as a result of an injury, illness or threat, emergency services should be contacted and the following procedures followed:

1. Secure safety of whole group from further danger. Stop all work/activities if safe. Call in (whistle blow – three whistles) and locate group promptly as agreed with group in advance. If possible, remove whole group from any further danger or threat of danger.
2. First Aider to attend to any casualties with adult helper. At least one First Aider must be on site at all times. A record of changes in casualties' state and anything administered to them to be made if possible.
3. Emergency services contacted as necessary, ideally by an adult helper. Charged mobile phones are carried by staff. Designated member of staff to meet emergency vehicle at the entrance where possible/necessary. Give following grid references to 999 operators: TQ599947 (Merrymeade Country Park Grid Reference) or school address. FSL will have the What Three Words App and give this too.
4. Safety of the rest of group will be maintained by the remaining staff and adults away from the scene of the incident. They will be walked safely back to school building.
5. Informing next of kin should be carried out as soon as practicable after the incident by the School Office.
6. School management must be informed of any major incident as soon as possible. Following this as soon as is possible it must be reported via EVOLVE, MySafety and OFSTED.
7. Incident report and/or first aid book should be filled in on site if possible and then logged back at the School Office. This should be filled in whenever the emergency plan is used even if no one was harmed and it was just a near miss.

8. Aftercare program for the persons directly involved in the management/ dealing of the incident: make sure they are okay, if not then stop the session and future sessions if necessary. Wellbeing of the Forest School leader and staff/ volunteers is extremely important.

Forest Schools: Fire procedures, management and safety

Fire Procedures:

- Fires only to be used at School in the Forest School Fire Pit. Local woodland areas are not permitted.

Fire Circle / Fire area:

- Area designated for the fire and participants aware of where this area is – any obvious trip hazards removed and clear evacuation/exit from space established.
- Introduction of a 'fire circle' – participants to practice movement around a fire circle to prevent them walking across the space or bumping into those tending the fire. Ensure movement around is in one direction and participants know they have to ask permission to enter the 'fire circle'.
- Clear entrance and exit should be signposted.
- Only introduce fire when deemed the group is ready and safe to do so.
- Collect all the firewood and burning materials first.
- Clear demonstrations about the materials, ground protection, fire building, fire size, fire lighting, fire management & use of PPE, behaviour, movement around, cooking on the fire (if necessary) and putting out of fire given by Forest Schools Leader and monitored and supervised by Forest Schools Leader at all times
- Fire circle around 2m diameter from the fire and the sitting area should be at least 1.5m from the fire. Forest School Leader to be with any participants tending to the fire or cooking.
- Watering can or bucket of water available nearby (easily accessible and shown to all participants before the fire is lit)
- Fire blanket available nearby (easily accessible and shown to all participants before the fire is lit)
- First aid kit, first aider, and emergency procedures/contacts to be known by all and followed
- Ensure the fire is thoroughly extinguished and heat removed from materials and remove traces as necessary.

Storm/Kelly Kettle Specific Procedures:

- Ensure the base is on a flat area and stable.
- Ensure that the twigs are well within the base 'fire' area and not going to prevent the chimney/flask from sitting securely.
- Fill the kettle with water (DO NOT HAVE THE CORK IN AT ALL FROM THIS POINT ONWARDS).

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- Light the fire and get the fire going with participants sat at least 1m from the Storm/Kelly Kettle unless the Forest School Leader is supporting an individual on a 1-1 basis.
- As soon as the fire is going put the chimney/flask on top and feed the fire through the top of the chimney/flask by resting the stick on the edge of the chimney and letting the stick fall in. Participants supporting this must be monitored by a Forest School Leader. Do not over fill.
- When the water starts to steam and is warm/hot take care when removing the flask from the fire – wear fire gloves & use the handle to hold it at right angles to remove so hands are not over the top of the flames and heat.
- Use the handle and the chain to pour drinks. Put cups or bowls on the floor so if any is split or knocked over it doesn't go onto hands and is well away from arms, legs (feet will be protected with shoes).
- Put the fire out as above.
- Storm/Kelly Kettle to be supervised by the Forest Schools Leader at all times.

Food safety and Hygiene Procedures:

Children at Forest Schools are taught a strict NO eating rule, unless it is a specific activity led by an adult to prepare and cook food. Initially, when children are ready they will participate in experience/age appropriate cooking on the fire.

Food Preparation, transport and storage:

- There is always a staff member present, when food is being handled and prepared.
- Hands will be washed thoroughly and any cuts/grazes covered in the correct manner (blue plaster or ideally gloves) before handling and preparing food.
- Any food needing preparation will be prepared in the staffroom.
- Food will be stored in clean containers and transported in a cool bag to and from the site, with any clean utensils and cooking pans required. The box will remain closed in between use with food covered in bags or boxes; to avoid attracting flies and other insects.
- Raw meats will be stored separately to any other foods.
- All 'use by' dates will be checked on foods before eating.
- Water for cooking will be provided in clean sealed storage containers.

Handling, cooking and eating Food:

- A fresh, clean, bucket of warm soapy water will be available for children to wash their hands before handling food or utensils.
- Children will be taught how to cook food safely by the Forest School Leader following the activity risk assessment and fire procedure. All food will be checked by an adult to ensure it is fully cooked before eating.
- Children will be asked to sit still around the fire circle or to move to a designated eating area from the fire to keep numbers to a minimum near the fire circle.

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Clearing away and cleaning up Procedures:



- ALL food not eaten or cooked will be placed in black bin bags and disposed of in the school bin at the end of the session by one of the adults.
- The area is checked to ensure there is no food traces to avoid vermin being attracted to the area.
- ALL utensils and pans will be washed at the station in hot soapy water and stored away correctly.

Tool Use at Forest School

As children grow in age and capability they will have evolving access to a wide range of equipment to develop trust, risk understanding, enjoyment, practical skills and communication. This in turn will enhance their self-confidence.





To ensure that this is safely carried out, all tools will be maintained and kept in good order by the Forest School Leader. The Forest School leaders will inspect the tools before each session to ensure safety.

- Children and adults will be taught how to handle tools properly and to treat them with respect by learning 'Tool Talks'.
- Whilst using hand tools, the staff to child ratio is increased depending on the tool in use and the age/ capacity of the participants. The ratios will vary from 1:1 to 1:4.
- Tools will be kept in the tool bag and only removed by the Forest School Leader. Only one tool can be carried by participants at a time and they must do this in the demonstrated way.
- Adult and child sized gloves will be available and are only to be used for the 'helping hand'. It is not advisable to use any hand tools with gloves on as it detaches the user from the tool.
- All tools must be returned to the designated tool area as soon as the user has finished using them. All tools should be kept in locked toolboxes or in adult only access areas outside of Forest School sessions.
- All participants must be aware of where the first aid kit is and it must be close to the tool use area. All adults must be aware of the Emergency Action Plan.

Tools	Tool Procedures
<p>Palm drill</p> 	<p>The palm drill is used to bore small eyelet holes or indentations into pieces of wood. A 'helper hand' glove should be worn on the hand that is stabilising the wood.</p> <p>Return to the toolbox after use.</p>
<p>Potato Peeler</p> 	<p>The potato peeler is used to peel vegetables for cooking, strip bark from & sharpen sticks and is a good introduction to whittling. A 'helper hand' glove should be worn on the hand holding the stick and the peeler should be used in the direction away from the body.</p> <p>Return to the toolbox after use.</p>

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<p>Bowsaw</p> 	<p>The Bowsaw is used for cutting wood which is greater than a two pence piece in diameter. A 'helper hand' glove must be worn on the hand not placed on the tool. Participants must have 2 arms and a tools length of space around them when using the Bow Saw.</p> <p>The kneeling respect position must be taken when using the Bow Saw to provide stability when sawing. The saw should be used to the side of the body, not in front. Helper hand must be kept away from the blade when sawing.</p> <p>Place opposite hands through the Bowsaw to make initial grooves which provide stability for the blade. Remove arms and keep a firm hold on what is being cut, once the blade is embedded-ensure helper hands are kept away from the moving blade. When sawing use the full length of the saw, use light strokes and do not force the blade. When using the Bowsaw children will work in pairs or with the Forest School leader. One child will hold the handle of the Bow Saw and the other child will hold the handle on the opposite side. The Forest School leader must model to the children how to use good communication with the lead person (with the main handle) saying 'to me'/'to you' each time the blade is pushed/pulled.</p> <p>The cover should always be replaced on the blade once use has finished and the bow saw should be placed in the designated tool area.</p>
<p>Sheath Knife</p> 	<p>The Sheath Knife is used mostly for whittling and cutting string/rope. A 'helper hand' glove must be worn on the hand not placed on the tool. A sheath covers the blade of the knife and should be removed with caution. Participants must have 2 arms and a tools length of space around them when using the Sheath Knife. When using the knife, the 'respect position' must be used-kneeling on one knee to have a stable position. The knife must only be used in the direction away from the body.</p> <p>When finished, replace the sheath cover and return to the toolbox after use.</p>
<p>Loppers</p> 	<p>The loppers are used for cutting branches with a diameter of less than a two pence piece. Participants must have 2 arms and a tools length of space around them when using the Loppers. Loppers should not be used to cut anything wider than a two pence piece. The blades of the loppers should be used away from the body. One hand should be used on each handle and no gloves would be worn. Loppers are only ever carried with the blades closed and tucked under an arm with the blades resting in the hand.</p> <p>When finished, return to the toolbox.</p>
<p>Billhook</p> 	<p>The billhook is used for cleaving/splitting wood. The billhook is used in a pair with one partner holding the tool and the other hitting the billhook with a mallet. The partner holding the billhook holds the handle in one hand with their thumb tucked under and the other hand at the top of the curved part of the blade.</p> <p>Communication between the pair using the billhook is incredibly important. Once the billhook is in place and ready to use the pair must make eye contact and then the partner holding the tool will give instructions about how hard to strike the mallet on the billhook. This should be a combination of hard and gentle hits.</p> <p>When finished, replace the cover and return to the toolbox.</p>

Links to Current School Policies

Whilst conducting Forest School, all other school policies should be adhered to, below is a list of policies which directly link to Forest School:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Whistle Blowing Policy
- SEND Policy
- Character Education Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Health and Safety & Wellbeing Policy
- Equality Policy

Forest School creates an environment of trust and therefore, it may be a time that participant disclose concerns to adults. All adults must be aware of the school's DSL and DDSs and what to do if a disclosure is made that they are concerned about. Staff should follow the school procedures and report incidents and add them to CPOMs. All volunteers will be DBS checked and expected to read this policy and sign confirmation of this prior to working with children.

All school policies are available on the school website: www.stthomaspri.org

Risk Assessments (See Appendix)

All Forest School Activities undergo a benefit analysis and risk assessments are made where needed:

- General weather and welfare risk assessment
- Site specific risk assessment
- Collecting natural materials risk assessment
- Building shelters risk assessment
- Rope use risk assessment
- Tool use risk assessments (bowsaw, loppers, billhook, sheath knife, palm drill and potato peelers)
- Fire use and cooking risk assessments
- Leaving the ground risk assessment
- Using blindfolds risk assessments
- Water risk assessment

Forest School Ready Confirmation Sheet

Additional adults to sign and date in acknowledgement of reading this policy and understanding the safety procedures, policies and risk assessments which apply to the implementation of our Forest School curriculum. These adults also agree to adhere to all of the above whilst supporting the participants at St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Primary School.

Name	Role	Signature	Date