



St Joseph's Catholic primary school

Forest School Policy

September 2026

This policy should be read in light of our Mission Statement that states:

'At St. Joseph's, we live, love and learn by the example of Jesus.'

Our Vision

To ensure each pupil attending our forest school and outdoor areas has the opportunity to develop an inquisitive and positive relationship with the natural world.

Increasing confidence, self-esteem and respect in preparation for an ever changing world, and for every pupil to have the opportunity to achieve their holistic, full potential.

Our Aims

- To provide an opportunity for individuals to develop, to learn and to enjoy themselves in the outdoors.
- To provide a safe and non-threatening environment in which children can take risks, make choices and initiate their own learning.
- To help children understand, appreciate and care for the natural environment.
- To provide ways of developing practical life skills in an outdoor environment.
- To develop self-esteem, confidence and a positive disposition to learning through the completion of small, achievable tasks.
- To develop social and team working skills
- To enable children to be independent, self-motivated and considerate.
- To develop a secure, happy and welcoming environment.
- To provide stimulation and varied learning activities appropriate to the child's needs and stages of development.

Forest School Philosophy

The philosophy of Forest Schools is to inspire individuals of any age through positive outdoor experiences and provide them an opportunity to appreciate the wider, natural world to encourage a responsibility for nature conservation in later life.

Forest school Involves

- Child initiated learning;
- Being outdoors;
- Integration with the National Curriculum;
- Delivery by a trained leader– Mrs Smith

At St. Joseph's we live, love and learn by the example of Jesus.
Aspiring for excellence for all, together as a catholic community.



- Fun

Forest School helps to develop:

- Confidence and self-esteem;
- Communication and social skills;
- Physical skills;
- Greater understanding and awareness of the natural environment;
- Natural motivation and a positive attitude to learning;
- The ability to recognise and manage risk;
- Healthier lifestyles.

Statement of Aims.

It is a matter of principle that the Forest School personnel respect the policies of the school and Local Education Authority. However, there are particular issues relating to the woodland, the specialist tools used there and with lighting fires which are not included in the standard Health and Safety policy and for which this document is an addendum. This document should be regularly reviewed, dated and signed along with the rest of the Health & Safety Policy.

Forest school sessions offer learning opportunities for children and young people. Part of their purpose is to encourage participants to face new challenges and to learn to take reasonable risks. In order to do that safely, the adults involved must know their role and ensure that the necessary risk assessments are carried out regularly and thoroughly. Risks can rarely be eliminated entirely, but they can be reduced to a minimum without unduly limiting opportunities for children to explore and learn.

Objectives of the document.

- To identify the roles of those involved in Forest Schools, with respect to Health & Safety.
- To identify safety procedures so that they can be carried out effectively and without difficulty.
- To identify suitable and sufficient risk assessment processes to ensure that risks are adequately controlled.
- To develop effective communication systems throughout the setting.
- To ensure that all those involved in Forest School are aware of all relevant Health & Safety documents.
- To develop effective inspection/monitoring procedures to ensure compliance with the schools Health & Safety requirements.

Health and Safety Organisation.

Statement of Aims.

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The Legal Framework.

(Health & Safety At Work Act 1974 and Regulations 1992)

Employers must:

- Assess the risk of activities.
- Introduce measures to control those risks.
- Tell their employees about the measures they have introduced.
- Follow LEA Guidance on Educational visits and journeys for arranging school visits (but decisions about visits are usually delegated to the head teacher).

Employees must:

- Take reasonable care of their own and others' health and safety.
- Co-operate with their employers over health and safety matters.
- Carry out activities in accordance with training and instructions.
- Inform the employer of any serious risks.
- Act in accordance with the teacher's common law duty (as a reasonable parent would do in the same circumstances).
- Follow the written procedure for arranging school visits, including obtaining the head teacher's prior approval.

Responsibilities.

- Maintain appropriate insurance cover.
- Have procedures in place to monitor and review safety of visits to Forest School sites.

Governors

- Ensure they are aware of Forest School procedures and objectives.
- Ensure they are informed of the health and safety procedures in place for Forest School.

Head Teacher

- Ensure visits comply with the regulations and guidelines.
- Be confident that the Forest School Leader/Group Leader is competent to monitor the risks throughout the visit.

They should also ensure that:

- Adequate child protection procedures are in place.
- The risk assessment has been completed and appropriate safety measures are in place.
- The Forest School Leader or another member of teaching staff is competent to lead the activity and is familiar with the site.
- The adult: child ratio is appropriate.
- The governing body has approved the visit.
- Parents have signed consent forms.
- Arrangements have been made for the medical and special educational needs of children attending.
- Adequate first aid provision will be available.
- The mode of travel is appropriate.
- Travel times, pick up and drop off points are known.



- There is adequate and relevant insurance cover.
- They have the address of the site and the numbers of the Leader's mobile phones.
- A school contact has been nominated, with details given to the group leader.
- The Forest School leader, teacher and school contact have a copy of the emergency procedures, the names of everyone in the group and contact details for the next of kin.
- There is a contingency plan for any delays, including a late return home.

Teaching staff

- Must ensure that the head teacher is provided with the information and details as above.
- They must do their best to ensure the health and safety of everyone in the group, follow the instructions of the Forest School Leader and help promote positive behaviour.
- Ensure an appropriate ratio of adults: children.
- Ensure that adults have details of the school contact and that they and the contact have details of the emergency procedures.
- Ensure that adults have details of children's medical or special educational needs.
- Observe the guidance for teachers and other adults.
- Consider stopping the visit/activity (notifying the Forest School Leader) if they consider any risk unacceptable.

Forest School Leader

The Forest School Leader should have the overall responsibility for the supervision and conduct of the visit. The leader should:

- Obtain the head teachers permission for visits to the Forest School site.
- Follow the health and safety guidelines and policies.
- Undertake a comprehensive risk assessment.
- Clearly define each group supervisor's role and ensure all tasks have been assigned.
- Be familiar with the site.
- Be aware of child protection issues.
- Ensure that adequate first aid provision is available.
- Undertake the planning and preparation for the visit, including briefing group members.
- Review activities and advise teacher where adjustments may be necessary.
- Ensure that teachers/adults are aware of what the visit involves.
- Observe the guidance for teachers and other adults.

Additional Adults/Volunteers

Other adults should be clear in their roles and responsibilities. They must:

- Do their best to ensure the health and safety of everyone in the group.
- Not be left in sole charge of children. Follow the instructions of the forest school leader and teacher adults and help with the control and discipline.
- Speak to the leader/adults if concerned about the health and safety of children at any time during the visit.
- Observe the guidance for teachers and adults.

Children



The group leader must make it clear to children that they must:

- Follow the instructions of the leader and any other adults.
- Look out for anything which might be a threat and tell an adult about it.

Attendance at Forest School by children and young people whose behaviour may be considered to be a danger (to themselves or to the group) will be reviewed, and strategies put in place to allow them to participate wherever possible.

Parents

The Forest School Leader/teacher should:

- Provide both written information and briefing sessions to help parents decide whether their child should go on the visit.
- Tell parents how they can help prepare their child for the visit.
- Invite parents to support Forest School sessions as a volunteer if they wish.

Parents will need to:

- Provide the teacher with emergency contact numbers
- Sign a consent form
- Give the teacher information about the child's emotional, psychological and physical health.

Health & Safety Guidance.

Statement of Aims

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Supervision

Nursery/Primary Schools

During Forest School sessions for Nursery/Primary school children, they will be fully supervised by at least one member of staff from the setting, plus a Forest School Leader and one other adult.. Additional helpers may accompany the group and will be taken through a health and safety briefing session. Although adults are not left alone with children and young people, it is essential that adults who regularly help as volunteers are police checked. Usually a group will be no larger than fifteen children and an appropriate ratio of adults to children will be observed according to the setting. The number of adults to children will be increased if necessary to accommodate larger groups and children with special educational or other needs.



The Shelter

Where possible a shelter will be constructed within a Forest School site. This will be both sturdy and waterproof and will be regularly checked for stability and safety.

Firesite

Normally a designated area for fires will be present within a Forest School site. Seating will be arranged for the children to sit on at a safe distance from any fires lit. The children and young people will be encouraged to walk around the designated area at all times and they will not approach any fires unless specifically supervised to do so. Water will always be available to safely extinguish fires and the fire site will be designed to reduce the risk of any spread of fire.

There is no running water, but for each Forest School session there will be a container of water on site. Hand wash, towels and antiseptic wipes will also be available.

First Aid

At least one adult will have the relevant first aid training and a First Aid Kit, along with relevant emergency equipment, which will always be readily accessible. There will also be a mobile phone on site and in the event of a serious accident the emergency procedures will be followed.

Weather Conditions

Assessments of weather conditions will be taken prior to a visit and if the weather is too extreme the session will be cancelled. Where possible, alternative indoor provision will be arranged. If the weather deteriorates suddenly during a session, the adults will decide whether to leave the site.

All participants are asked to bring Wellington boots and suitable warm/waterproof clothing. If possible the setting will provide them with any missing essential items. The nature of woodland means that Forest School sites are quite sheltered and most will have a shelter on site. Participants will experience hot, cold and wet weather but this will harm no one if they are properly dressed. If cold, they will be more active in order to maintain warmth. In extreme heat, care will be taken to stay in the shade and plenty of water for drinking will be available.

Ground Conditions

On some sites the ground conditions may present a higher risk and these will be assessed and dealt with accordingly, for example mud or steep slopes. Paths steps or even boardwalks may be constructed to avoid or reduce the risks. Discussions will also take place on how to safely access/cross/use such areas.

Vegetation

The areas of woodlands used are checked for toxic plants and participants will be instructed not to pick or eat any plants. Areas of nettles, brambles and other potentially harmful plants will be cut regularly to open up areas for access, but some areas will be left uncut to support dependant wildlife.



Using Tools/Lighting Fires

Participants will only be involved in using sharp tools/fire when the Forest School Leader deems that they are confident and competent at working in the woods. When tools such as penknives and small saws are used the younger participants will always be appropriately supervised. Fires will only be lit in the designated areas and again the participants will be appropriately supervised.

With older groups, tools will be used after individual risk assessments of each child have been carried out to determine the degree of supervision necessary. Children will always be in sight of an adult. Proper instructions will have been given and safety issues discussed prior to the use of any tools. Where appropriate, participants will use safety and protective gear such as gloves etc.

Forest School Leaders Personal Safety

When working alone, ie when carrying out visual checks prior to site visits, a mobile phone will be carried and the relevant authorities will be made aware of their intentions and whereabouts. The setting where a Forest School Leader is expected will contact the relevant authorities if they do not appear within a reasonable period after the agreed time, and cannot be reached on their phone. Whilst in the woods with the children, the Forest School leader will usually be within sight of another adult

Risk Assessment

A full and comprehensive site risk assessment will be conducted prior to the first visit to any new site. This will be done by the Forest School Leader and, if possible, in conjunction with a member of staff from the site setting. This risk assessment will be reviewed regularly. A visual check will be undertaken immediately prior to every session. Individual generic risk assessments will be used for the use of tools and some activities/actions. Individual activities will be risk assessed previously by the Forest School Leader. Ongoing risk assessments will take place at various times during a visit – this normally consists of judgements and decisions made as the need arises, which will then be recorded after the visit.

Risks can be minimised, but they cannot be eliminated altogether, and health and safety concerns need to be balanced against the potential benefits of any activity. Children, young people and adults will suffer the occasional bumps, cuts and bruises which are a part of everyday life. The application of common sense will ensure that everyone is as safe as they can be, whilst enjoying all the physical and intellectual challenges of Forest School!

Policy to be considered in line with the schools health & safety policy

To be reviewed September 2027