



# Forest School Handbook



**Forest Schools Lead / Coordinator: Sarah Bell**

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## **What is Forest School?**

The Forest School movement originated in Denmark. It has been an integral part of Early years education since the 1980's when it was introduced as part of an expansion of nursery provision. It is based on the idea that young children can develop enthusiasm for education through the appreciation of nature. In Denmark, Forest schools have found to boost pupils' confidence and improved their behaviour and social skills. Forest school is holistic learning through play and exploration, children learn about the environment, how to handle risks and use their initiative to solve problems and to co-operate with others.

## **Where?**

Our Forest school site is part of our school grounds. It is fully fenced within the school perimeter and comprises of a small broadleaf woodland, an orchard and is habitat to a variety of flora and fauna and woodland creatures.

*(See Ecological Assessments in Appendix).*

## **Who?**

The Forest School leader at present is: Sarah Bell

## **Mission statement:**

*Through weekly visits to our Forest schools site every child will access learning and development within the natural world around them. Every child will succeed through inspirational, stimulating, hands on experiences, developing their self-esteem, confidence and responsibility.*

## **Our school vision is to develop:**

- 21st Century Citizens - providing children with learning experiences that raise awareness of other cultures, British values, a sense of community, rights and responsibilities and a broad understanding of the wider world to prepare them for living in the 21st Century.
- Independent Learners -through developing the personal characteristics of: independence, resilience, the ability to solve problems, opportunities to be creative and curious and the ability to think critically learners will become increasingly independent.
- Learners who can make Healthy Choices – our curriculum and wider opportunities will give the pupils the knowledge and understanding of the importance of healthy eating, being active, a healthy mind, having healthy relationships and outdoor learning.

## **Forest School Code of Conduct**

Children will always be made aware of how far they can explore before a session begins. If we are unable to see all the children, shout '1, 2, 3, come back to me.' This will have been introduced to the children through a game and practised many times.

### **Picking up and playing with sticks.**

Children will be allowed to carry sticks shorter than their arm's length but made sure they think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks can be dragged or carried with a child at both ends. Sticks must not be thrown, nor should children be allowed to pull them from living trees.

### **Tree climbing**

A risk assessment is carried out prior to the session. Areas below climbing trees must be checked for sharp objects and the tree checked for loose branches. Children are not to climb higher than an adults arm length or chest height. (This will be taught). Unsafe or tempting trees can be marked with a hazard tape. Children are reminded that only one child can climb at a time with the supervision of an adult.

### **Rope and string use**

Children will be encouraged to connect and transport materials but prevented from tying up other children or themselves! If a child has a good idea and wants, for example, to try and build a rope swing we do help them and use the opportunity to model appropriate knot tying.

All string and rope must be collected up at the end of the session. We leave nothing in the forest that wouldn't naturally be found there.

### **Carrying and transporting materials**

The children should be encouraged to roll, lift, drag and pull materials either by hand or using ropes. The safe way to lift, by bending your knees and keeping your back straight should be modelled by all adults. Heavier objects will be rolled, dragged or carried by more people.

### **Digging**

There will be a designated area for digging. Children will be shown how to look after the tools. Children will be shown how to look carefully for insects and their habitats and look after them when they have found them.

## **Toileting**

Children will always use the toilet before leaving the classroom and going to the forest school area. If we are in the forest school area a member of staff will escort younger children back to the classroom. Older children would be able to walk back to the school toilets independently once informing teachers where they intend to go.

## **Eating and Drinking**

Children will be taught not to eat anything found in the woods through 'stop, no pick, no lick'. We will discuss this together so that children are secure in their knowledge. If we take drinks or snacks outside we will ensure children use wipes to clean their hands before eating their snack or drinking.

## **Fire circle**

At our forest schools site we have a fire circle with a fire wok in the middle (5 metres in diameter). Children will be seated on other logs, 2 metres from the fire. There must be no running within the fire area and anything being carried must be placed on the ground behind the seating. We then step over the logs to sit down. The fire is never left unattended at any time and an adult is always there until it is extinguished. Only 4 people are allowed in the fire circle at any one time and they have to be invited in by an adult. You must walk around the fire circle in an anti-clockwise direction and there is a designated entrance and exit to the circle. When tending to the fire you must always adopt the 'respect position' with one knee on the ground and then other for firmly on the ground. Children will be taught that before eating anything cooked on the fire they must wait at least 20 seconds before eating and must stay seated until finished.

## **Collecting Wood**

Wood can only be collected from the ground layer of our woodland. '

## **Leaving the site**

The site must always be left as it is found. If artefacts are made using 'found materials' these may be taken off the site and back to school. Shelters should normally be demolished and imported materials taken back into school at the end of each session.

## **Forest School Rules**

- Look after your Forest School
- Do not pick anything growing
- Do not put your fingers or anything else in your mouth
- Stay within the boundaries marked, 'we don't go over it and we don't go under it'.
- Stay outside of the fire circle.
- Look above, below and around for hazards.

## **Travelling / Walking to and from the Forest**

Forest schools takes place every Thursday afternoon (unless otherwise informed). Children come to school dressed appropriately in long sleeved tops and jogging bottoms. The school provides suitable waterproof clothing and children keep their own wellies in school at all times.

Children walk in a line behind the lead teacher across the school grounds to access the Forest School session. An assistant follows at the back of the line.

In case of an emergency the assistant must contact the school reception immediately or contact the appropriate emergency services, giving them details of location and grid reference. Mrs Bell has paediatric first aid training and always carried a first aid kit to the forest school area.

## **Forest School Routines**

### **Procedures to be carried out before each session**

- A through sweep of the site will be done half termly and then before each session to check for litter, glass, animal faeces, etc. Any such items should be collected using disposable gloves and a plastic bag.
- At the same time boundaries, fences, gates and hedges should be checked to ensure that they are secure and safe.

- Trees should be checked for any broken or dead branches which may fall.
- Checks should be made that no dead twigs, etc. protruding at eye-level from bushes etc.
- Check weather conditions, if it is unduly windy or a thunder storm is imminent or has commenced. Then it is not advisable to carry out a Forest school session.

#### **Procedures to be carried out at the end of each session.**

- Clear away everything.
- Ensure if used that the fire is completely extinguished, wok taken down and packed into the trolley.
- Count all the tools back into the storage bags and boxes.
- Count children and adults and ensure that all are accounted for.
- Collect any assessment sheets or observations from adults. Discuss next steps/ideas with adults back at school site present.

#### **Insurance**

The children Act 2004 and the Health and Safety Work Act 1974 place a number of legal responsibilities on the school. The school has insurance cover appropriate to its duties under this legislation, including Employer's and Public Liability Insurance. Responsibility will in most cases rest with the school but staff will take reasonable care, both for themselves and other people who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work. (Copy of school insurance in appendix)

#### **Health and Safety**

*Kirk Merrington Primary School sets out a clear statement of intent regarding the schools' approach to the health and safety of the children, staff and visitors to the school. The following list is additional measures relating directly to Forest School sessions.*

1. However many adults accompany Forest School sessions the person in charge is always the Forest School Leader.
2. The Forest School Leader has overall duty of care for the children in his/her charge, but all adults are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure children are safe.
3. All adult helpers must read this handbook and appropriate risk assessments and understand and agree to comply with the general operating procedures for Forest School.
4. The Forest School Leader or assistant will carry a first aid kit and Emergency bag. The emergency bag will contain:

- Essential survival equipment
- Contact list for each child undertaking activities

The emergency bag is usually used if children are going off site. This would always be prearranged.

5. The Forest School leader will always carry a mobile in the case of an emergency.
6. In the event of an emergency, the Forest School leader will ensure that the school contacts the emergency services.
7. The Forest School leader will review the risk assessments before every trip to the Forest site.
8. When tools are used the Adult/child ratio will be always be 1:1 There is only one exception to this- the use of potato peelers for stick whittling.

### **Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Forest School**

Kirk Merrington Primary School is committed to the idea that there should be equal opportunity for all. Our policies help to ensure that we promote the individuality of our children, irrespective of ethnicity, attainment, age, disability, gender or background.

We undertake that all children:

- Feel secure and know that their contributions are valued
- Appreciate and value the differences they see in others.
- Are able to participate safely in clothing that is appropriate to their religious beliefs.
- Are taught in groupings that allow them to experience success
- Use materials that reflect a range of social and cultural backgrounds
- Have a common curriculum experience that allows for a range of different learning styles
- Are set challenging targets that allow them to succeed
- Participate fully, regardless of disabilities or medical needs.

### **Safeguarding Children, Confidentiality and Forest School**

Kirk Merrington Primary recognises its responsibilities for Child Protection and for confidentiality. The school recognises that effective Child Protection work requires sound procedures, good inter-agency cooperation and a workforce that is competent and confident in responding to child protection situations. A full copy our Safeguarding Policy is held in the school.



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## **Emergency Incident Procedures during Forest School**

- Children with minor injuries will go back into school with another child and go to school office.
- Major injuries will be dealt with by Forest School Leader. Nominated assistant will phone through to school so that the emergency services can be advised. Assistant(s) will support other children bringing them back to base camp.
- Evacuation of site children will be called back to base camp (1, 2, and 3) counted and then lined up and walked back into school.
- Record full details through school incident procedure back at school.
- **Missing child.** Children will be taught 123 where are you?
  1. **Search vicinity**
  2. **Assemble rest of children**
  3. **Call into school to alert and school calls police(parent/guardian)**
  4. **Follow school critical incident procedure.**

### **Risk assessment guidelines and forms:**

A site risk assessment will be carried out half termly and a check made before every Forest school session will take place. In addition an activity risk assessment will be in place for any activity that may require it.

The risk assessment process is as follows.

- We look for hazards
- We decide who might be harmed and how this might happen
- We evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done.
- We record our findings
- We review our assessments and revise them if necessary
- We inform all adults accompanying the group.
- We have a copy with us on an observation board.

**Designated person responsibility:** The Forest School Leader is Sarah Bell. She is a member of the teaching staff at Kirk Merrington Primary School and is the Reception Teacher as well as EYFS and Key Stage 1 Leader. She commenced Forest School Level 3 training in October 2022 and also holds a 3 year Paediatric First Aid Certificate. Sarah Bell will carry out all role- safety sweeps, risk assessments and will plan for the sessions (so that relevant curriculum subjects can be incorporated into session). Sarah Bell and the relevant class teaching assistant will check everyone is wearing the correct clothing etc.

To ensure that the children gain the confidence, feel safe and gain maximum benefit from Forest School it is important that all Teachers and support staff, act at all times as good role-models. Sarah Bell will give staff any support they need to in turn support the children's experience. She will advise staff who and what we may be observing during Forest School. But as other lessons it is important to record any fabulous 'wow' moments of other children. All staff will have a camera/ipad. The Teaching Assistant will ensure we have any snacks or drinks and will ensure we have our tool kit with us if needed and spare clothes. Sarah Bell & the teaching assistant will each have their own Emergency bag. Sarah Bell will be responsible for carrying and issuing the medication of children who require it to and from the forest (Inhalers, EpiPens etc.).

# Risk Management of Tools and Equipment

## General rules for tool use:

- All tools must have additional risk assessment in the Forest Schools Folder.
- All tools to be stored in school securing, with Forest School leader having overall responsibility and access.
- Forest School Leader has responsibility and safe storage of tools at Forest School site.
- A designated area will be used for activities involving tools.
- Adults and children to sit when using tools.
- Never walk around with tools.
- Children will be taught to ensure they have 'a blood bubble' around them, when using tools.
- Tools are to be clean and sharp before use.
- Children can only use tools with Forest School Leader.

## Forest School Emergency Kit

In addition to tools/resources suited to the planned activity. The Forest School leader will always take an emergency bag.

- First Aid kit
- Emergency procedures
- Medical information and emergency contact details of all in group
- Risk assessments
- Mobile phone
- Clean water
- Accident sheets
- Individual medication
- Blanket
- Wet wipes
- Tick remover
- Spare clothing
- Torch

## **Appendix**

Insurance – See School Insurance Policy

Health and safety school policy – School Website

Copies of Ecological Assessment of our Woodland Site – In Coursework Document

Tool Talks / Handling of Tools Documents – Oases Documents Attached

Fire Lighting Procedures – Oases Documents Attached

