

Stretton Handley CE (VC) Primary School Forest School Policy



The Site

The Forest School site is located, behind the school, to the left of the school garden. It is accessed over the school field. It is made up of a small wooded area with bushes and a grassed area. The children are able to access the Forest easily, but when they do so they must make an adult aware or have permission to. We may also take the children on 'Forest School' sessions to other local parks and open spaces such as Jubilee Playing Fields, walks around the village and on the Woolley Moor Trail.

Our 'Forest School' Ethos

We believe everybody at Stretton Handley CE Primary School should have regular, long-term access to a natural environment which provides them with inspirational and challenging outdoor learning opportunities. Forest School offers a learner centred approach, where children can learn through self-directed play and exploration in an outdoor woodland environment. Children who have access to the Forest School area will be given the opportunity to develop their curiosity, confidence, self-esteem, creativity, empathy, communication skills, knowledge of the natural environment and ability to assess risk.

The ethos of our Forest School programme is to foster self-esteem, independence, emotional, resilience, co-operation, personal responsibility, autonomy and motivation, as well as a deeply personal knowledge, respect and care for our environment. The approach of the Forest is learner-led, play-centred, holistic and experiential.

Children will be encouraged to take constructive risks in order to develop skills, good judgment and to learn and develop through managing their own and others' risks. In planning activities we consider not only the risks but also the potential benefits for the learner.

Equal Opportunities and Inclusion

Our Forest School is committed to equal opportunity for all our children. We will make the forest school inclusive for all and we provide clear access, support and activities for all children to participate and enjoy irrespective of ethnicity, attainment, age, disability, gender or background.

Ratios

The following minimum adult ratios will ensure appropriate support and supervision: For children

Foundation Stage: 1 adult: 4 children

Key Stage 1: 1 adult: 6 children

Key Stage 2: 1 adult: 10 children

These ratios are for guidance only for groups of children and suitable levels of support should be determined in advance depending on the types of activity and needs of the group.

Activities

Activities in the Forest School depends on ability and experience of children. Examples of activities are:

- Woodland management and nature exploration
- Building dens and other structures
- Fires and cooking
- Games and invitations for imaginative play
- Natural crafts
- Safe using tools, such as knives and saws
- Scavenger hunts and adventure
- Seasonal celebrations

Health & Safety

The Forest School project is led by Mrs Forest who is trained in Forest School delivery.

Forest School programmes may include activities that are considered higher risk than usual for the children. It is our general approach of The Forest School to consider not only the risks of each activity but the potential benefits too. However, we seek to minimise risk by following appropriate procedures for more risky activities, such as tool use and fires, and by carrying out risk assessment (these are made accessible by Mrs Forest) covering key hazards that children may come into contact with during a session.

Suitable clothing will be worn eg) winter: waterproofs/coats, fleece/jumper, hats and gloves Summer: waterproofs, fleece, sun hat, long sleeved tops and trousers Footwear: wellies or strong/sturdy (ideally waterproof) outdoor shoes. Sun cream will be issued on particularly sunny days.

Some sites (Jubilee Playing Fields) will be open to the public and so there may well be other people out enjoying the woods. There may be dogs, which some children may be unused to or even afraid of. If this is known to be the case for any particular child a member of staff shall support the child.

During Forest School sessions it is important that all members of staff are aware of children that may have behavioural/SEN issues, this is the responsibility of the class teacher and then with respect to group safety and risk/benefit analysis we will put in place strategies that may be needed for the specific. Sometimes it may be necessary to have a specific risk assessment for a child.

Any visitors to a Forest School session eg) work experience students, will be shown the Forest School Policy and are confident and competent when following the policies and procedures.

Knowledge and understanding of the Safeguarding Policy is the responsibility of the Forest School leader to ensure the safety of children.

Risk / Benefit

We believe that, while there are risks that must be considered, there are also a wide range of potential benefits that can be gained by those involved. We also recognise that taking risks is an important part of learning and developing and we want to provide a safe and supportive environment in which children can learn about risks, challenges and personal safety. Consequently, we will use a risk/benefit analysis in our assessment of our activities.

During our assessment we will seek to identify significant hazards and take action or precautions to reduce the risk to a safe level.

Environmental Policy & Environmental Impact Assessment

We aim for all our children and staff to engage a high level of respect for the natural world and encourage all to be involved in decisions about their environment and safety. On site activities such as fires will follow practices that minimise impact on wildlife through being mindful of what is burnt and how any residues are disposed of. Before leaving the site we will ensure that litter is collected and disposed of suitably.

Photos & Video Permission

Is requested via an annual consent form from school and this will allow staff to take photographs of children for monitoring and evaluation purposes and suitable use in publications for leaflets/materials/website. Where permission is refused, we will not include the child in group or individual photos.

During the weekly sessions the photographs will also be put on Class Dojo, but again only with the parent's permission.

Appendix 1

Tools, Fires & Activity Guidance

Tool Use Procedure - Using a range of tools will be necessary in many site based activities and is an important part of our work as it enables children to develop new practical skills that help develop self-confidence. At Forest School we aim to ensure that all children participating in sessions with tools do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. Tools that may be used include potato peelers, bow saws, loppers, knives and drills. The following guidelines are to be followed when using tools:

- The forest school leader will check all tools are fit for continued use before the session
- Only tools that are in safe working order shall be supplied for use
- Correct and safe use of sharp tools will be demonstrated to all staff and children
- Tools should be counted when handed out and counted back in again when finished
- All groups are to be supervised closely by competent leaders until deemed competent to work with limited supervision
- Tools should be kept in a designated safe area when not in use - none should be left unattended outside this area
- All knives will be closed/ sheaved immediately after use
- Saw guards will be replaced immediately after use
- Walking around with open/ unmasked tools will not be permitted
- Safe working distances and suitable ratios must be maintained at all times

All group members will wear suitable boots/shoes and outdoor clothing for the activity they take part in. Where any cutting or felling is taking place, helmets should be worn, and gloves provided for handling brash etc.

Guidance on Knife Use

We have designated a specific zone for using knives. We will always carry knife with sheath firmly on and pass knives with sheath firmly on. Always keep knives in sheath when not in use. Leader to count knives out & back in. Ensure children have had demonstration before use (& leader is confident of child's ability) including grip and body position. Knife work is always supervised by a responsible adult. Each person to sit well out of reach of others.

Appendix 2

Emergency & Serious Incident Procedure

All leaders are familiar with appropriate emergency procedures. Most emergencies can be resolved on-the-spot by the leader removing the group from potential threat and providing 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 will be followed:

- 1. Secure safety of whole group from further danger. Stop all work/activities if safe. Remove whole group from any further danger or threat of danger.*
- 2. First Aider to attend to any casualties with adult helper and with regard for maintenance of required supervision ratios for the rest of the party. 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.*
- 4. Safety of the rest of group will be maintained by the remaining staff and adults away from the scene of the incident.*
- 5. Informing next of kin should be carried out as soon as practicable. After the incident is resolved it is important that accident/incident form is completed by the relevant member of staff. Staff may need to refer to the school health and safety policy.*
- 6. Inform the head of any major incident as soon as possible.*
- 7. An incident report or entry in the first aid book must be completed, signed and dated*
- 8. First aid kits must be restocked after use and a stock check carried out every 6 months. Any incident or near miss must be subsequently investigated by staff team to review existing controls and procedures.*

Appendix 3 - Fire Procedure

Fires and the use of storm kettles are an important part of Forest School and other sessions. The aim is to ensure that all children participating in sessions with fires and/or storm kettles will do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. Fires will only be used where it is appropriate to do so and where there has been an agreement with the site owner prior to the session.

- *Leaders will explain to children the importance of using only dead wood for fires and also of the importance of dead wood as a habitat*
- *Smoke inhalation will be reduced by burning dead wood. Those in smoky areas will be encouraged to move to less smoky areas*
- *Fires will only be lit in suitable defined spaces or in a fire pit*
- *Children will only be allowed to light fires under direct supervision of a trained leader using suitable materials and equipment*
- *All children will be given clear guidelines about how to behave and move around the area when the fire or kettle is lit*
- *A lit fire will be supervised by an adult at all times, as will all cooking activities*
- *Related safety equipment, including heat-proof gloves, a fire blanket, a burns kit and water will be kept within close range of fires*
- *All fires should be fully extinguished and all traces removed at the end of a session, except where the landowner has agreed that a designated fire pit may be used repeatedly*

Appendix 4

Lost or Missing Person Procedure

When visiting Pioneer or Victoria Park, these may be unfamiliar sites to the children and can be disorientating, especially if a participant is unused to this kind of environment. These woodland sites are not surrounded by walls or fences, and whilst we appreciate this sense of freedom can be beneficial to all, there is also the possibility that a participant may get lost. There are a number of ways we can prevent this:

- *We encourage all our children to take an interest in their surroundings so as to help them find their bearings. Ultimately we would like to inspire all who are able to become responsible for their own safety with respect to staying close to the rest of the group.*
- *Boundaries will be chosen, clearly marked and made known to the group. Going outside the boundaries will require all of the group to go or a sub group, with at least one leader – allowing at least two leaders to stay with remainder of group.*
- *The group will be counted in and checked at start and end of day, then at other relevant points in the day – particularly after activities that include members splitting up.*
- *Good communication within the group will encourage collective responsibility for each other's safety – leaders are always approachable and should be made aware if there are any concerns as to a participant's whereabouts.*

In the event of leaders fearing that a child of the group has gone missing:

- 1. All the group will be immediately called back in, by prearranged call or whistle, and counted and missing member determined. The time will be noted.*
- 2. The Group Leader must ensure the safety of remaining pupils. At least two adults must stay with them at all times.*
- 3. One or more adults should immediately start searching for the missing group member – calling and whistling as appropriate.*
- 4. If the missing group member is not found within 5 minutes, the group Leader must contact police by telephoning 999 (this will result in the emergency plan coming in to action). Also contact school immediately.*

Leaders must recall and write down a description of what the missing person was wearing and any distinguishing features. Any information on their last known location and time should be noted. Also if they have any special medical or learning needs then these need to be noted down. All information then must be passed to police or other agencies.

Appendix 5

Hazardous Plants, Fungi and Insects

Part of the risk assessment will be to identify any particularly hazardous plants and point them out to the group so that all members are aware of the dangers. The sap or hairs from some plants can cause rashes and blistering when in contact with skin, or after the skin is then exposed to sunlight. Most rashes are caused by stinging nettles, though giant hogweed may also be a problem. Both of these plants are easily distinguishable and if either is seen growing on site all members of the group will be taught how to distinguish and avoid coming into contact with it.

If a member of the group is exposed to a hazardous plant or fungi, so that they have a reaction a leader must be informed and appropriate First Aid given.

Insect bites and stings can be common, particularly in spring and summer, and usually cause only minor irritation. In rare cases, children can have a serious allergic reaction to a bite or sting that requires immediate medical treatment. If there is prior knowledge that a child will have an allergic reaction if bitten, the Forest School Leader, must be informed before any activities take place on site.

Group walking

When the group goes for a walk the following procedures will be followed:

- *The destination will be communicated to all adults present*
- *Children will be counted at the beginning and end of the walk, and at any necessary points in between, such as after a rest or play*
- *Walking on roads will be avoided, but where necessary will be in single file, with an adult at the front and the rear, and remaining adults interspersed between children*
- *For longer walks and those which venture beyond the Forest School site, the route and projected timings will be communicated so somebody who is not with the group, and arrangements made for a check-in system between that person and the group leader*

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