



St Joseph's Catholic Academy, Matlock

**“Jesus is the heart of all that we are and do together.
We seek to excel in every area of our learning”**

Forest School Policy

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Introduction

Forest Schools originated from Scandinavia in the 1950's, the approach promoted outdoor exploration and encouraged children to understand their surroundings. Forest schools allows children to develop confidence, independence, self-esteem and awareness and knowledge of the natural environment. Forest school sessions are planned and risk assessed however the main ethos of Forest Schools is that it is child led and children are encouraged to lead their own learning.

This fully supports our Mission Statement:

**“Jesus is the heart of all that we are and do together.
We seek to excel in every area of our learning”**

This is achieved by setting small achievable tasks. The child is never put in a position where he/she will fail so success is attained. It is a child centred and child led programme that provides the opportunity for the children to use their personal learning style to complete their chosen tasks.

Purpose/ Aims

Forest School supports children's development by enhancing children's:

- Independence, confidence and self esteem
- Communication and social skills
- Physical skills
- Understanding and awareness of the natural environment
- Ability to recognise and manage risk

Suggested Activities for Forest Schools

- Activities for Forest Schools are diverse and numerous but it should be reminded that we are trying to create independent learners who are inspired to try out their own ideas, explore their own interests and to attempt new ideas. Some activities might include:
- Shelter building
- Fire lighting
- Tool use
- Studying wildlife
- Playing team and group games
- Sensory activities
- Tracking games
- Cooking on an open fire
- Using a Kelly Kettle
- Rope and string work
- Art and sculpture work
- Woodland and traditional craft
- Developing stories and drama, and meeting imaginary characters
- Physical movement activities

Environmental Considerations and Conservation

One of the principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. The children are taught about respect and responsibility for the world around them. Both the children and adults are encouraged to respect their environment and to be aware of conservation issues of the wild area around them.

The aim is to promote respect for wildlife, which will be achieved through detailed session plans, evaluation. If appropriate, reclaimed, recycled and sustainable resources will be used to maintain and develop our forest school site.

Encouraging children to care for the environment is an essential part of Forest Schools. In order to encourage the children to look after the site we will always leave it tidy and never damage anything growing in it. We will only collect things that are on the ground and leave the area as we found it when we leave. The Leader (Miss Doxey) will monitor the site so that it does not become overused.

Legislation and Forest School

Legislation of importance to Forest School includes the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This act makes it a statutory that an employer has a duty to ensure the Health, Safety and Welfare at work of their employees (in the case of schools adults and children) and any equipment used by them, and that employees are responsible for the Health and Safety of themselves and others they may be affected by their acts. The risk assessments carried out for Forest Schools are written with the Health and Safety of all participants in mind; children, volunteers and members of staff.

The Children's Act 1989, makes it important to consider adult ratios for all activities, equal opportunities and access, clear communication with parents and CRB checks for staff and regular volunteers. Routines and procedures at Forest Schools are developed with reference to this act and safeguarding practices.

St Joseph's School Policies and Forest Schools

Staff attending Forest School sessions should be familiar with the following school policies:

- Health and Safety Policy
- Equal opportunities Policy
- Accident and incident policy
- Risk Assessments for group, site and activities
- Child protection Policy
- Lost policy and procedure
- Tool maintenance policy and procedure
- Site policy
- Weather policy

Copies are included in the back of this policy and in the Coordinator's File.

Particular attention is paid to the following areas:

Health and Safety

The Forest School curriculum supports children to develop responsibility for themselves and others. It will encourage early risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others.

A site risk assessment has been carried out and a copy is held in the Forest School Coordinator's File in school.

The Forest School Leader has an up-to-date certificate in ITC Outdoor First Aid and is in charge of first aid arrangement. A first aid kit is taken on all sessions. In the case of an accident requiring further assistance, a Walkie

Talkie is carried by all leaders and where possible a mobile phone. The school will contact the parents. For more information please see the Health and Safety policy.

Fires are a valuable part of the Forest School experience but will only be lit according to the procedures below.

Safeguarding

Forest School sessions are led by a trained Forest School Leader (Miss Doxey) , supported by members of staff, volunteers or parent volunteers.

Everyone involved in Forest Schools is fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities. Staff and volunteers are made aware of the relevant school policies and procedures and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them.

All St Joseph's staff and regular volunteers have current DBS checks.

Any concerns about a child's physical or mental well-being will be shared with our named DSL and will be documented on 'My Concern' so that our school's child protect Policy can then be followed. Confidentiality should be maintained at all times. Any concerns should only be shared with those who need to know such as the class teacher who can then ensure the correct channels are then informed.

Equality and Inclusion

During Forest School all persons are treated equally. We aim to provide a secure environment in which children can flourish and in which all contributions are valued.

Behaviour

At Forest School we operate within the Behaviour Policy of St Joseph's. We praise and reward good behaviour using the established school systems.

When a child's behaviour threatens the well being of him/herself or others, and he/she does not respond to a verbal warning, he/she may be returned to school.

Medical and Emergency Contact Details

All Medical Care Plans and Emergency contact details are held at the school office.

Emergency Action Plan

This EAP (Emergency Action Plan) is kept in the top of the tool box at all times:

Emergency access to the site

The site has a private school road in front of it which leads all around the school grounds, it clearly signposted and easy to follow. There are multiple places for an emergency vehicle to park and there are clear, wide and safe paths for them to access the site.

Emergency contacts

I will carry a Walkie Talkie with me at all times to contact school. Where possible a mobile will also be carried to contact school or the emergency services.

Contact	Number
School	01629 583616
School office-Anne Thomas (First Aider)	Available in school
School office- Marie Griffiths (First Aider)	Available in school

Emergency procedure.

Ring 999 (If required)



Volunteer to go to school, Walkie Talkie or ring: Mrs Thomas (Office)/ Mrs Griffiths (Office) or Mrs Chadbourne (Acting Head of School)
If the volunteer is not present a child is to take the red card up to the office to signal that help is needed.



Mrs Thomas/ Mrs Griffiths will ring parent if required.

Fire

- Ensure the children are out of the Forest School site by evacuating to the School fire assembly point the top playground.

Ring 999 (If required)



Volunteer to go to school, Walkie Talkie or ring: Mrs Thomas (Office)/ Mrs Griffiths (Office) or Mrs Chadbourne (Acting Head of School)
If the volunteer is not present a child is to take the red card up to the office to signal that help is needed.

Contingency plan

The children will take part in indoor activities based on the learning objective. They may be able to work outdoors in a safe area if materials are required.

In the event of an adult needing emergency attention it must be judged whether they need to be accompanied or support may be required. Decisions taken must ensure the safety of the children within the group and accompanying adults.

In the event of the Forest School Leader needing emergency assistance it would be expected that another member of staff would return the children to school and another adult would stay with the casualty.

Accident and incident forms would be completed back at school.

Minor injuries would be treated as they would within school and recorded and reported to parents and carers in line with school policy.

Risk Assessments and Risk Management

Risk assessments are in place to cover the following:

- Site risk assessment
- Group risk assessment
- Weather risk assessment
- Collecting natural materials risk assessment
- Blindfold activities risk assessment
- Team games risk assessment
- Fire lighting risk assessment
- Tool use risk assessment
- Eating and cooking risk assessment
- Shelter building risk assessment

These risk assessments can be found at the back of the Forest School Policy and in the Coordinator's File.

Safety Sweep and checklists

The Forest School leader will carry out a thorough sweep of the site for hazards and risks before the group enter the site and appropriate measures will be put in place, e.g. the removal of an object, or warning the group of specific dangers related to the site. The safety sweep will be recorded on a dynamic risk assessment form and kept in the Forest School file.

Policy and Procedures for Use of Tools and Equipment at Forest School

Tools and safe use of tools are an important part of Forest School. Their use will be carefully managed by the Forest School Leader with an area of the site set aside for tool use.

- Introduction to each tool will be by an official 'Tool talk'. (These can be found in the Forest School File).
- Good practice will be demonstrated by the Forest School Leaders at all times.

- Tools will be introduced to the children only when the Forest School Leader feels the children are ready.
- All tools will be used on a 1:2 adult to child ratio when using them.
- Risk assessments of tool use are carried out in addition to other Forest School activities and reviewed on a regular basis.
- It is not expected for any other adult attending Forest School to use tools with children, only the Forest School Leader.
- All tools will be returned to the tool bag and locked away at the end of each session. This is the Forest School Leaders responsibility.
- All resources and equipment are checked regularly.
- Any unsafe, worn out, dirty or damaged equipment is repaired and cleaned, or replaced.

Policy and Procedures for Lighting Fires at Forest School

Before lighting a fire at Forest School, the following should be in place:

Children must have a secure knowledge of log circle safety:

Stand behind the log

Step over and sit down on log

Stand up, turn around and step over log

Children are not allowed to cross the circle or step into the circle

In addition to the other resources, we will take a large container full of water.

When lighting a fire:

- Only a trained Forest School Practitioner (Miss Doxey) will take responsibility for the fire. This will be their sole responsibility for the session. They shall be responsible for lighting it, manning it while it is burning and putting it out at the end of the session.
- The fire shall be contained within the area marked out within the centre of the log circle. The ground around shall be cleared of flammable material.
- Check for low overhanging trees.
- Have a container of water beside the fire to put it out and deal with burns.
- The flames of the fire should never reach higher than the knee.
- While the fire is being lit, the children will be engaged in activities elsewhere.
- The fire will be extinguished before the session ends.
- NO fires will be lit during peak fire risk periods.

All adults are aware of the following when cooking and eating at Forest School:

- Everyone should wipe their hands before handling food and drink.
- All foods are stored in air tight containers.
- Only clean equipment is used.
- Everyone is aware of any special dietary needs of the children who have food allergies and any medication and copies of Care Plans will be in the tool box.
- Food will be cooked correctly.
- All equipment and waste is cleared away.

The Forest School Leader will follow the Fire Lighting risk assessment.

The role of the Forest School Leaders

- The Forest School Leader (Miss Doxey) is a trained Level 3 Forest School Practitioner and holds an up to date ITC Outdoor First Aid certificate. They are responsible for organising the planning and running all Forest School sessions.
- The Forest School leader has the safety of the children uppermost at all times. The leader will carry out a detailed safety check before each session and comply with health and safety risk assessments.
- The leader will ensure that all documentation is relevant and up to date.
- The leader will carry an emergency pack at all times.
- The leader is responsible for all equipment and will ensure that it is checked before use and returned to the resource area after use.
- The Forest School leader will keep an accident book and keep parents fully informed of any incidents that may occur during a session, eg, trips, falls, stings, etc.

Designated Person Responsibility for each Forest School session

Overall responsibility for the session– Adele Doxey

(Risk assessments, safety sweep, and essential equipment, rucksack, planning, observations and next steps for learning).

Forest School Rules

- Keep your hands away from your mouth
- Leave things to grow
- Keep within the set boundaries

Routines and Procedures For Forest School

Preparation - The Forest School Leader (Adele Doxey) will do a dynamic risk assessment of the site prior to the weekly sessions.

Miss Doxey will check the tool box contains all essential items. The Emergency Action Plan is kept in the top of the tool box and all Adults are aware of this. First Aid kit, inhalers, wipes and spare hats and gloves

(children's and adults) are kept in the tool box. The tool bag, water containers and other equipment will be taken as appropriate.

Waterproofs will be taken to the classroom prior to session.

Prior to the session children will go to the toilet, put on their waterproofs. Children will put wellies on the outside the classroom door and walk in pairs or single file to the site.

During the session rules and expectations will be shared, children participate in a variety of activities which are totally inclusive, thus catering for all ability levels. They are taught a variety of woodland skills through practical hands on activities. They also learn how to light fires safely. The children learn the care and safe use of a wide range of tools. This is a tightly supervised activity on a 1:2 ratio of adult to children. It is introduced gradually in small steps. Children are encouraged to listen attentively to instructions and to take responsibility for their actions. This is achieved by games that also encourage respect for the environment.

Back at school children will remove wellies out doors or standing on sheeting (if very wet), before entering the classroom.

After the session Equipment will be washed and stored as appropriate. Waterproofs will be dried and hung on rails. Flasks and water containers will be emptied and cleaned out. Tools (if taken) will be cleaned and locked away in the WAH shed. The essential equipment including the tool box will be put away and any items used replaced.

Cancelling Forest School

Forest Schools may need to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions, e.g. high winds, or blizzards. Adapted classroom activities will take place instead.

Forest School may not be able to go ahead if there are not enough adults to accompany us. If no replacement adult can be found then the session will be cancelled. The session will be cancelled if the Forest School Leader (Miss Doxey) is unable to attend. Campfires cannot take place without a Qualified Forest School Leader – Adele Doxey (Level 3 Forest School Practitioner).

Essential Equipment Needed at Forest School sessions

A tool box - containing the following essential items will always accompany the group:

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT:

- First Aid Kit (See contents list, contents review record)
- Emergency Procedures
- Medical information for each individual and Emergency contact details for every member of the group (adults & children)
- Risk Assessments
- Communication Devices (mobile phone and/or walkie talkie – checked for working order and signal strength)
- Clean Water
- Emergency whistle
- Emergency Life Blanket
- Accident forms
- Medication for individuals (if not appropriate for the individual to carry the medication for themselves it should be clearly labelled – staff must have been trained to administer it and parental consent must have been received)
- Appropriate Clothing
- Sharps box and gloves

Other Possible Equipment:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Wet wipes, hand gel▪ Nappy sacks and toileting things▪ Trowel▪ Sun cream (parental permission required)▪ Spare Clothing▪ Thermos of hot water▪ Chocolate/sugary food▪ Plastic bag▪ Roll Mat and Blanket	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Fire blanket▪ Torch▪ Bucket of water▪ Emergency fire kit▪ Knife▪ Emergency shelter▪ Burns kit▪ Tick remover▪ Bivi Bag
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Clothing Requirements For Forest School

The following clothing requirements are for everyone attending a Forest School session (even adult volunteers).

- Woolly hat/sunhat
- Gloves
- Jacket/waterproof coat
- Fleece/sweatshirt
- Waterproof trousers

- Spare socks
- Stout shoes/wellies/boots

Toileting considerations

All children will visit the toilet before leaving the Classroom. Any children needing the toilet during the session will use the nearest school toilets.

Written by: Adele Doxey

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