



# **Forest School: Policies & Procedures**

Updated: January 2023

Up for review: January 2024

For procedures, please see Forest School Safety & Policies folder

In our school our Christian vision shapes all we do.

St Mary's CE (Aided) Primary School is:

'A Christ-centred school, with a child centred curriculum' where wisdom and love guide and influence learning and teaching for our whole community.

We treasure each child and enable them to flourish, using their God-given potential, establishing a secure foundation for them to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

## **1. The Forest School Ethos at St. Mary's Primary School, Pulborough**

Forest School is a unique educational experience and process that offers children the opportunity to succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment.

Children engage in motivating and achievable tasks and activities throughout the year and in almost all weathers, with the appropriate footwear and clothing.

Children will work with tools, play, learn and begin to understand the boundaries of behaviour, both physical and social. They will grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world.

The Forest School concept originates in Denmark, originally aimed at pre-school children, where it was found that children who had attended forest school then arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, having the ability to work in groups effectively, generally had high self-esteem and a confidence in their own abilities. These foundations helped them to raise their academic achievements.

A Forest School encourages children to:

- Develop personal and social skills.
- Work through practical problems and challenges.
- Use tools to create, build or manage.
- Discover how they learn best.
- Pursue knowledge that interests them.
- Learn how to manage failures.
- Build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk.
- Develop practical skills.
- Understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle.
- Explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth.



- Regularly experience achievement and success.
- Reflect on learning and experiences.
- Develop their language and communication skills.
- Improve physical motor skills.
- Become more motivated.
- Improve their concentration skills and improve their communication.
- Explore the world through all the senses available to them.

## **2. What happens at Forest School?**

Typically our children take part in a programme of six weekly sessions. The sessions involve practical hands-on activities which aim to build up participants' skills, abilities and confidence week by week.

Early Years take part in Forest School sessions each week.

All sessions are designed and led by our trained staff, with the help and direction of our Forest School practitioners. However, Forest School strongly encourages participant-led learning, so as the weeks progress, learners are given more freedom and responsibility to explore their interests and therefore initiate and direct their own learning. Forest School uses natural resources to stimulate imagination, creativity and investigation. Activities can include:

- Shelter building.
- Natural art.
- Using knots and lashings.
- Fire lighting.
- Animal tracking.
- Bug hunts.
- Tree investigations.
- Climbing and balancing.
- Woodwork using tools, e.g. making musical instruments, jewellery, decorative items.
- Creating bug homes and bird feeders.
- Collecting, identifying and sorting natural materials such as leaves.
- Team games.

## **3. The benefits of Forest School**

Forest School is suited to all ages and abilities. The aim of Forest School is to develop the person as a whole. It is particularly suited to people who have a low sense of self-worth and who, for various reasons, struggle to learn in a traditional classroom setting. Completing small, achievable tasks, coupled with genuine praise from Leaders, helps to boost confidence and self-esteem. For children at school, attitudes to learning are improved as they find that learning can be fun and



enjoyable. This new positive outlook is then transferred to the classroom where they are found to be more motivated and able to concentrate better.

Forest School can also:

- Develop physical abilities and help participants to stay active and healthy.
- Heighten self-awareness and improve emotional and social skills.
- Promote co-operative and group working.
- Encourage participants to take care of themselves and others.
- Foster care, appreciation and respect for wildlife and wild places.
- Broaden knowledge and understanding of the natural world.

#### **4. Forest School Staff**

Our Forest School coordinator is Mrs. Maggie Cullen who has a Level 3 Award for Forest School Practitioners. She runs Early Years sessions with Mrs. Emma Huntley-Hart - Level 3. She also organises sessions for Key Stage 1 assisted by Mrs. Amanda Tiller – Level 2. All staff and volunteers have undergone an appropriate selection process to assess their skills and suitability for working with children and have been subject to enhanced DBS checks. All sessions are staffed by a qualified first aider and all staff have access to a recommended first aid kit.

#### **5. The Forest School site**

Our Forest School takes place in a small woodland area on our school field. It is made up of mixed deciduous trees, mainly oak, hawthorn and lime. Around the fence area there are a mixture of English hedgerow shrubs which our children have planted. The woodland is managed carefully at the moment and as our Forest School progresses we hope to allow the site to go a little wilder and develop a deeper diversity.

Children taking part in Forest School will also be encouraged to minimise their impact on the site. This will include:

- Finding out about the different animals and plants that live in and amongst the trees.
- Learning to respect animals' homes.
- Careful observation of live animals.
- Leaving lying deadwood in place.
- Taking all materials and litter with them when they leave.
- Ensuring that the site is left as they found it.



## **6. A typical Forest School session**

Each Forest School session follows a simple routine. The session starts with participants getting ready to go outside by putting on appropriate clothing – waterproof coats, trousers and wellington boots. We go through rules and routines whilst still in class and children help gather any resources we need to take out with us in our trolley. The group then walks to the Forest School site and gathers in the Forest School circle. The circle is central to everything that happens at Forest School. It is a focal point where the group assembles and socialises. At the start of the session, participants and Leaders sit together and talk about what they did and particularly enjoyed doing at the last session, and what they are planning to do during the current one. Many activities take place in or around the circle, such as natural art and woodwork. Half way through or at the end of each session participants gather together to have a drink and a snack. This often includes helping to light a fire at the base of a Kelly Kettle to heat water for warm drinks.

## **7. Forest School Handbook**

All other policies regarding Forest School can be found in the handbook, copies of which can be provided by Mrs Cullen on request.

All members of staff and volunteer helpers have a duty to follow these policies and should be familiar with their contents. A sheet is provided at the front of both the 'Policies and Procedures' sections of the Forest School Handbook for all Forest School leaders/assistants and volunteer helpers to sign, thus stating they have read the handbook, including all policies and risk assessments.

