

Forest School Policy and Procedures

Introduction

This policy applies to all children participating in Forest School sessions who attend the Stephen Perse Foundation (the **Foundation**) including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Guiding principles

Forest School is holistic learning through play and exploration. Children learn about the environment, how to manage risks and use their initiative to solve problems and to cooperate with others.

This policy ensures that all parents, staff, volunteers and governors at the Foundation have a shared understanding of the Forest School ethos and the implementation of Forest School at the Foundation.

The Forest School ethos follows the 6 principles for good practice:

1. Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.
2. Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
3. Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
4. Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
5. Forest School is run by a qualified Forest School practitioner who continuously maintains and develops their professional practice.
6. Forest school uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

A Forest School Leader (**Leader**) is a member of staff who holds a fully recognised Level 3 Forest School Practitioners qualification and is present at all Forest School sessions.

Our aim is to provide a long term programme of Forest School sessions which will offer the opportunity to create resilient, life-long learners with transferable skills, in a child led environment using open ended play and learning. Children will have opportunities to take and manage their own risks to help achieve emotional intelligence.

Health and Safety

We believe that the health and safety of children and adults is of paramount importance. We make Forest School a healthy and safe place for children, parents, staff and volunteers by assessing and minimising the hazards and risks enabling the children to develop a responsibility to themselves, others and their environment.

The law does not require that all risk is eliminated but that “reasonable” precaution is taken. We put reasonable and sensible precautions in place to ensure the suitability and safety of our visits (as far as reasonably possible) and to reduce any risks to acceptably low levels. We recognise that it is important to balance the need for children to be able to take appropriate risks through physically challenging play and the benefit for children to be given the opportunity to work out what is safe and what they should do when faced with a risk.

Risk Management and Assessment

A site risk assessment is carried out prior to the children entering the Forest School site each time to assess the area for any dangers. Following the site risk assessment, the Leader will carry out anything that is needed to make the site safe (e.g. remove any hazards, mark off any unsafe areas). At the same time the risk assessment will consider specific circumstances which make it appropriate to cancel or limit a Forest School session.

Benefit risk assessments are carried out for all activities and these are monitored and reviewed regularly. All staff and volunteers are made aware of the importance of allowing children to self-assess situations and to assist only if there is imminent peril to the child or another person.

Particular activities the children may take part in are classified as ‘higher risk’ and these activities will not be available to the children until the Leader is confident that their behaviour is appropriate to ensure their safety. Alternatively children will only access this activity under full adult supervision.

First Aid Provision

All staff present at Forest School are able to take action to apply first aid treatment in the event of an accident involving a child or adult. The Leader holds an Outdoors First Aid qualification and at least one member of staff with current paediatric first aid training will be in attendance at Forest School for EYFS pupils.

A first aid kit is taken to the Forest School site for each session and this is easily accessible to adults and is kept out of reach of the children. The first aid kit complies with the Health and Safety (First Aid) regulations 1981. All relevant individual child prescribed medication (e.g. auto adrenaline injectors, asthma inhalers and antibiotics) is brought to Forest School and administered in accordance with the Foundation’s Medicine Policy and Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy.

Directions to emergency A&E departments are carried in the Leader’s kit bag.

Equipment and tools

Forest School sessions are greatly enhanced by the use of various types of equipment which may include tool use. Children are encouraged to use the equipment available to increase learning and build confidence.

The risk assessments carried out will include tool and equipment operation. Clear guidance will be given on the use of tools before an activity begins, through the use of tool talks. Children can only use tools when under the supervision of an adult with adequate knowledge in the relevant tool/fire use. When high risk tools and fire are used, the adult to child supervision ratio will always be 1:1. Personal Protective Equipment, such as safety gloves, should be used during activities (including fire) as appropriate and when using certain tools.

All equipment is checked, cleaned, maintained and stored safely before, during and after every session. Tools and knives are contained in a lockable box and stored out of reach of the children. When using tools during a session, a designated tool area will be set up to store tools safely when not in use.

Fire Safety

Campfires are an important part of Forest School and are used in many sessions. We aim to ensure that all children and adults participating in Forest School sessions with fires will do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. When a fire is lit at our Forest School, a level 3 Forest School Leader is always present and supervises the fire at all times. Another member of briefed staff can supervise the fire once they have read and understood the fire risk assessment and protocol. Fires will never be left unattended. Safe Fire Practice is always adhered to.

FIRE PROTOCOL (all adult participants must read and adhere to this fire protocol)

- Children will be taught the fire circle rules, and these will be reinforced during every session in the lead up to a fire
- There will always be a water bucket, fire gloves and fire blanket next to the fire
- There will be a 2 metre gap between the fire and the children's log seats or tarpaulin
- There will be two clear exits between the log seats to enter and exit the fire area
- There will be water and a first aid kit available outside of the seating area
- When the campfire is in use, children are not permitted to access the area immediately surrounding the fire without permission
- There will be logs or a rope surrounding the fire area as a visual clue and for security
- Children will assume the kneeled on one knee stance (respect position) when tending or cooking at the fire
- Only 1 child at a time will help tend the fire 1:1 supervised by the nominated fire feeder
- Children, adults and volunteers will not cross through the centre of the fire circle/seating area
- Children, adults and volunteers will step back behind log seats and walk around the outside of the fire circle
- Children are not permitted to throw anything on to the fire
- If wind direction is variable, the seating should be rearranged when appropriate, if at all possible
- If there is a clear wind direction, seating in the line of smoke is to be avoided

- When the fire is extinguished, the area will be tidied
- The fire area will be checked after the group have left to ensure the fire is completely extinguished

Welfare Requirements

Toileting needs

Children are encouraged to use the toilet before departing to travel to Forest School. At some sites, there is a toilet available should the need arise. In certain circumstances children will be allowed to discreetly use a secluded part of the Forest School area. Only an adult who is DBS checked can assist children with their toileting needs.

Food and drink

We may occasionally cook food on the fire to promote a community feel and for the children to experience open fire cooking. We may also include a snack and a packed lunch picnic as part of Forest School. Staff ensure that children are given food and drink consistent with their dietary needs and preferences.

The children wash their hands in a separate area using soap and fresh water/hand gel before eating snacks or picnics.

If cooking on the fire the children will be closely supervised by an adult and will stand outside the logs denoting the fire area, using long handled cooking utensils. Food will be checked for thorough cooking and temperature control before consumption.

Weather and clothing

Forest School is run outdoors throughout the year therefore children and adults must wear appropriate clothing and footwear to enable the children to achieve the best possible experience in a woodland environment in all seasons. We follow the Forest Schools' ethos of 'there is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing!'.

Parents are informed about what their children should wear and to provide appropriate clothing and footwear for their children.

- In the colder months (October – April), layers should be worn along with waterproof coats and trousers, thick socks and boots, hats and gloves (not mittens)
- In the warmer months (May – September) long sleeved T-shirts, long trousers, waterproofs, wellies or sturdy trainers and sun hats should be worn. Woodlands can still be quite cool and damp even in the warmer months.

Contingency and cancellation

Forest School sessions are run throughout the year to enhance and develop the children's learning by being exposed to the woodland in all seasons and elements. Weather reports will be checked leading up to and on the day of a Forest School session. If a decision is taken not to proceed with a session for any reason, such as high winds or an unsafe site, we will try to use open field areas. We may shorten a session due to severe cold or weather conditions. Forest School may be cancelled in full due to high winds, with the possibility of trees/branches coming down, electrical storms or if the site or conditions become unsafe for any reason.

Emergency and Incident Management

We follow the guidelines of the Reporting Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences (RIDDOR) for the reporting of accidents and incidents. Staff on the Forest School session will have readily accessible telephone numbers for emergency services including the local police to use if required. Any incidents are reported following the Foundation procedures, see Health and Safety Policy, using the IRF form.

Missing child

Children's safety is maintained as the highest priority at all times at Forest School. Every attempt is made through carrying out the exit/entrance procedures along with supervision and appropriate boundaries to ensure the security of children is maintained at all times. In the unlikely event of a child going missing the Foundation's Missing Child Policy is followed.

Unwanted visitors

The Foundation will work with children, parents and the community to ensure the rights and safety of the children. We ensure our Forest School sites are safe and that if an unwanted visitor enters the site, the Leader will assess and deal with the situation.

- In Saffron Walden and our Cambridge schools, our Forest School is held on private land so an unwanted visitor is unlikely. If an unwanted visitor has been recognised and if it is safe to do so, the Leader will ask the unwanted visitor to leave the site. If the unwanted visitor does not leave the site, the Leader will advise a member of staff to ring the police and will advise staff to call children back to circle, conduct a head count and if safe to do so, take the children back to the carpark.
- In Maddingly the 800 Wood woodland, local playground and Hall used are public places, children are briefed about strangers and staff are vigilant in the presence of the public.

Behaviour management

The Behaviour and Discipline policy and the relevant School Rules and Code of Conduct apply during Forest School sessions but we take into account that behaviour considered inappropriate in the classroom setting may be considered appropriate at Forest School. For example, stick play, climbing or rough and tumble interaction between the children.

We ensure all staff and volunteers know the policies for Forest School behaviour management. We understand that Forest School may be the only environment providing the opportunity for students to express a wide range of emotions. We allow them to occur whilst managing behaviour in a way that keeps everyone safe. The Forest School ethos is maintained to promote holistic development and provide opportunities to take risks and the outcome of those risks operating a learner centred process.

We recognise and respond to factors that could affect and/or be a trigger for unsuitable behaviour at Forest School.

The Leader will create the emotional environment and expectations of the session for all participants – children and adults – by modelling behaviour. The physical, social and emotional boundaries are set and embedded at every session - "We look after ourselves, our friends and everything around us".

Staff will acknowledge the existence of emotions expressed, use reflective listening, show genuine concern and understanding, give reassurance and offer support to the child. The Leader will try to

bring calm, order and clarity to a situation. Children can be encouraged to use a spot to sit to have some time to calm down and reflect on their emotions and have some quiet/silent time, if appropriate.

Supervision Ratios for Forest School

For supervision the usual minimum ratio of adults to pupils for pupils is:

- EYFS ratios for Nursery children on school facilities
- 1:4 for EYFS age 3-5 in public areas off school site
- 1:6 for EYFS age 3-5 on school facilities
- 1:10 for KS1 on and in public areas off school site
- A minimum of three adults at all times during sessions off school site

However, consideration is given to an appropriate supervision ratio when risk assessments are carried out and in accordance with published guidance. Please see the Foundation's Trips and Visits Policy for further information.

The Leader will find out about all participants' individual needs and impart information to staff and volunteers, as appropriate, to assist with the provision of support.

Related policies

- Assessment and Reporting Policy
- Behaviour and Discipline Policy
- Code of Conduct - school specific Trips and Visits Policy
- First Aid Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Ill Health Procedures
- Medicines Policy
- Missing Child Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy
- Supervision Policy
- Trips and Visits Policy

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