



# Village Primary Academy

## Forest School Handbook



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## **Village Primary Academy Ethos Statement**

At Forest School, we believe that it is important to provide outdoor learning; it has fundamental links to building self-esteem; developing a child's moral, social and emotional well-being, which in turn promotes positive behaviour and motivated learners. Forest School believes that well-being individuals may become inspired to fulfil their full potential and be better placed to realise the difference their actions, skills and knowledge can have. Forest School encourages child-led activities which enables the children to develop their ability to make decisions. This will affect them in all areas of their lives

***'All that is valuable in human society depends upon the opportunity for development accorded the individual' Albert Einstein.***

## What is Forest School?

Forest School is an educational process that supports holistic development of children through a mix of child initiated play, exploration and learning.

Through careful observation and positive encouragement, Forest School builds on the skills shown by the children. The Forest school leader matches activities with preferred styles of learning which sets children up to succeed. This helps learning; develops self-confidence and promotes self-esteem.

## Aims of Forest School:

- ✓ To develop the social and emotional well-being of the children through play in a natural and safe outdoor environment.
- ✓ To support the physical and mental development of children through games, tasks and problem solving activities.
- ✓ To build self-confidence and self-esteem in children.
- ✓ To give children the skills and tools to succeed elsewhere in their lives.

## Environmental impact:

**Village Primary Academy** adheres to the 'no trace' ethos of Forest School, which means we try our best to leave the wooded area as we find it. Activities carried out in the outdoors can have an impact on the immediate environment. Our school aims to keep this impact to a minimum. This is done by regularly assessing the impact activities are having and by developing a three-year sustainable woodland management plan to help take the necessary steps to amend and regulate these activities.

## Example of types of activities that may take place at Forest School

- Den/ shelter building
- Campfire building and lighting\*
- Making hot food on the campfire\*
- Bush craft - Working with Forest school tools\*
- Nature and wildlife discovery, observation and appreciation
- Nature and wildlife identification
- Learning about code of conduct and respect for the countryside
- Problem solving activities
- Physical challenges (e.g. obstacle courses)
- Teambuilding activities
- Child initiated play
- Nature Art and Craft work
- Music making
- Campfire storytelling
- Collaborative games and activities

All activities aim to support the children's social and emotional development which in turn can help raise their confidence and self esteem.

\*Under close adult supervision

## Rules of Forest School

- ✓ Follow Forest School Rules:
- ✓ Stay in Forest School boundaries;
- ✓ Speak politely to each other;
- ✓ Treat each other with respect;
- ✓ We do not eat anything we find;
- ✓ Our hands must be kept out of our mouths;
- ✓ We must wash our hands after Forest School;
- ✓ We must stay within the given boundaries of Forest School;
- ✓ We come back straight away to "base" when the whistle is blown;
- ✓ No walking through the fire circle;
- ✓ Children must come to Forest School dressed appropriately for the time of year;
- ✓ At Forest School we care for all living things and take particular care of our special site;
- ✓ We do not pick living flowers or plants.

### Role of the Forest School leader:

The Forest School leader is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the children and risk assesses the site, daily conditions and all activities before and during the session.

A leader will develop the children's confidence and self-esteem by planning activities which, once known, can be child-led during

Forest School: promoting decision making by the children.

Observations and evaluations will help to develop the children during further Forest School sessions and ensure that Forest School caters for all the children.

### **Role of adult helpers:**

- ✓ To support the Forest School leader with tasks such as head counting and ensuring children stay within the designated area.
- ✓ It is important adults alert the Forest School leader immediately if a child is missing, seriously hurt or misbehaving in a way that could lead to others getting hurt.
- ✓ We ask all adults to praise good behaviour and allow children the freedom to explore and play without adult interruption whenever safely possible.
- ✓ Before going to FS area, check that children are wearing clothing and footwear appropriate for the weather and time of year.
- ✓ To assist keeping the children healthy and safe by helping them to recognise and avoid hazards such as harmful plants, germs, trip hazards etc.
- ✓ To support children's learning and development as modelled by the Forest School leader.
- ✓ Support the children's learning and development through answering questions and responding to activity cues without 'over influencing' the activity.

## **Procedures and Policies**

### **Toileting**

Seeing as FS is within school grounds, children will be allowed to go to the toilet. They will be told the designated toilet at the start of each session. Children will ask an adult for permission to go to the toilet so that all adults know where children are.

### **Behaviour**

It is our responsibility to ensure all children feel safe, respected and valued. Praising and drawing attention to good behaviour will be used as the primary behavioural management strategy. Rules and expectations will be made clear at the beginning of all Forest School sessions and displayed on the display and school website. As a preventative measure and as a core value of Forest School, all adults shall be made aware of any specific social and emotional needs of the children in the group. If there are parent helpers, they should refer any challenging behaviour to the Forest School leader. If a child's behaviour puts themselves or other children at risk, they will be asked to stop however if the behaviour does not stop, adult and Forest Leader will intervene. We expect the children to follow the Forest School rules and behave accordingly. We expect children to respect the plants and animals and help us to look after the wildlife and our special site. Forest School will not tolerate bullying of any kind.



## **Safeguarding children**

Forest School takes safeguarding of the children seriously and the leader is First Aid trained and a designated child protection officer. All adult helpers and parent helpers are asked to read child protection policy of the school including procedures that are in place to respond to disclosures or allegations. Any incidents are recorded by the FS leader and given to the Head of School (designated child protection officer). Permission slips are filled in by parents or carers so that photographs of the children at FS can be taken and shared on displays and on the school website. All adult helpers at FS have a DBS check.

## **Missing child**

Boundaries and expectations are made clear to the children and all leaders and volunteers are responsible for maintaining regular headcounts. If a child is discovered missing, the group will meet back at the designated spot and the child's name will be called. An adult will go back into school and check office, class and toilets.

## **Food hygiene**

Hands will be washed or anti-bacterial wipes used before handling food. Food will be stored in fridges before used as the FS area is on the school site. Alternatively, food will be stored in appropriate picnic bags if taken outside at the start of the session. Food containers will be cleaned after each session with anti-bacterial wipes or washing up liquid once back inside the school. No wipes will be left behind as bin bags will be taken out each session.

## **First aid and emergency**

The Forest School leader is a first aider and will carry the first aid kit and be primarily responsible for administering first aid. The Forest School leader also carries a mobile telephone to contact the school staff if further help or an ambulance is required. In the event of a serious accident an ambulance will be called, the Forest School leader will remain with the casualty and the volunteer helpers will escort the remainder of the group back into school.

In the case of a serious accident involving the Forest School leader, other adult leaders are informed of the whereabouts of the school mobile phone and all emergency procedures and phone numbers.

## **Equal Opportunities/inclusion:**

Forest School allows all children to participate and have this experience of the outdoors. All children are included and shown the FS rules which they follow.

## Tool use policy

Children using tools will do so as instructed by FS leader. They will be seated in their "blood bubble" (usually arm's length from each other) and must have tools facing towards the floor. When carrying tools, tools must face downwards and when not in use, must be safely kept in the tool hula hoop. When using the tools, children will be taught to move the tools downwards, away from their bodies. Children will be reminded of the safety rules when using FS tools before each session. "How to use tools safely" sign will be displayed during each session. (see attached)

## Tools available for use are:

### **Pen knives, loppers, trowels, bow saw**

- All tools are cleaned, maintained and stored securely by the Forest School leader.
- Prior to use, the Forest School leader will check the tools for any damage or instability and check for sharpness.
- Tools are transported to Forest School in a secure container.
- Only the Forest School leader's tools can be used at Forest School.
- How to use all tools will be demonstrated on a group basis and then assessed on a 1:1 basis.
- Only the Forest School leader will decide if the age group/ individual child is ready for a particular tool by assessing for competence on a 1:1 basis

## **Fire Safety (see attached diagram of fire circle)**

### **Fire Circle Rules**

- ✓ do not run around or in the fire circle
- ✓ walk around the outside of the fire circle
- ✓ no loose clothing or loose hair in the fire circle
- ✓ only children invited to the fire circle may be there

### **Fire Safety Procedures**

Fire safety rules are reinforced whenever a fire will be part of the Forest School session. Fire safety rules are repeated to remind the children of how to behave before, during and after the fire. A fire pit is established with log seats all around the outer circle. Only after the behaviour is one of "trust" will a fire be introduced as part of the sessions. Before fires are built, provision for putting out the fire is made with water buckets at hand. The Forest School leader will assess the site for overhanging vegetation and clear forest floor debris to avoid fire spread. Fire is never left unattended and the Forest School leader will ensure that the fire is completely out before leaving the area. The fire pit used during Forest School at Village Primary School is a portable fire pit and will be transported safely back into school and put away after the sessions. One sterile bucket of water will be available in the event of burns to children or adults.

## **Parental communication:**

Parents/Guardians/Carers have been made aware of Forest School and the activities the children will be participated in through a letter going home (see attached). The letter makes them aware of what Forest School is; what the children will need to wear and the type of activities the children will participate in. It included informing them that the children may, on occasions, be using a variety of bush craft tools such as: loppers, pen knives, trowels and bow saws and participating in a Forest School fire.

## **Cancellation**

Forest School will continue in most types of weather with the exception of high winds, thunder or severe cold. If in any doubt, the Forest School Leader will visit the site directly before the visit to have up to date information of weather conditions at the time.

## **Essential equipment**

### **First Aid Kit containing:**

- Latex gloves
- Bandages
- Plasters
- Burns gel
- Burn dressing
- Dressings
- Eye wash
- Scissors
- Cotton wool
- Antiseptic wipes
- Tick remover

- Sterile water
- Cling film
- Bites and stings cream or spray (parental permission required)

### The forest school kit bag:

- ✓ First-aid kit
- ✓ Emergency procedures document
- ✓ Medical information for each individual child
- ✓ Risk assessment
- ✓ Mobile phone, charged
- ✓ Clean water
- ✓ Accident forms
- ✓ Medication for individuals
- ✓ Wet wipes, hand gel
- ✓ Nappy sacks and toileting things
- ✓ Sun cream
- ✓ Spare clothing
- ✓ Plastic bags
- ✓ Roll mat and blanket
- ✓ Fire blanket
- ✓ Burns kit
- ✓ Bivi bag

## **Risk assessment:**

Risk assessment of Forest School site is carried out by the Forest School leader at the beginning of the day and at the beginning of each session. This short check list is carried out at the beginning of each session. The standard Village Primary Academy Risk Assessment form is already filled out with minimum risk to the children required before a session can take place. Attached is a copy of these Risk Assessment form.

## Shelter Building safety checklist:

- ✓ ensure children carry sticks dragging along the ground holding the end
- ✓ consider strength of branches leaning material up against
- ✓ care about eyes/faces being poked by twigs and branches
- ✓ care about falling items from trees
- ✓ take care when leaning sticks over the top of others, can't fall through gaps
- ✓ consider wind strengths and direction
- ✓ consider the type of shelter to be built according to weather/use
- ✓ think about the level of ground and comfort inside shelter
- ✓ keep clear of trees with dead material, falling seeds like conkers
- ✓ do not build under beech trees in particular
- ✓ first aid kit

## Daily operating procedure

The Forest School leader will complete a daily risk assessment before each Forest School session. Factors such as the weather conditions, and changes to the Forest School site such as fallen braches, litter etc.

are considered and risk controls are put in place to minimise risks.

If the session will involve tool use, the Forest School leader will check the tools for safety before the session. Safety checks include checking the blades are sharp and sharpening or replacing if necessary, checking there is no damage to the tool or handles, visually and manually by flexing the tool.



The required tools are put into a secure container for transporting to the Forest School site.

The essential equipment is checked and packed into a rucksack and carried by the Forest School leader to the site. The Forest School leader will also hold emergency contact details.

If there are any changes to any risks, the appropriate controls are put in place and the risk assessments are reviewed and amended.

The Forest School leader will lead the session, ensure the group are safe and happy, and observe the children's interests and learning styles. The Forest School leader will reflect and evaluate the session to aid planning for the next sessions.

After the session, the Forest School leader will carry out cleaning and maintenance of tools, using oily rags, sharpening or replacing if necessary and storing away safely.