



*An aspirational school that encourages every child regardless of their background to 'soar on wings like eagles' in their learning and personal development (Isaiah 40:31)*

# Forest School Policy

Approved By:	Quality of Education Committee
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To Be Reviewed:	Spring 2029



# St. John's Church of England VA Primary School

## Introduction

This Forest School Policy documents a range of policies and procedures that must be adhered to ensure that the learners can experience risk-based learning within a controlled environment. All leaders present during the sessions and volunteers will be expected to read and follow the procedures and policies outlined in this document to minimise the risk from any potential hazards as outlined in the separate Forest Schools Risk Assessments found at the end of this document

## Mission Statement

*'Forest School is an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees'*

**(Forest School Association)**

At St. John's Church of England VA Primary School (**St John's** or **the school**), through our Forest School sessions, we hope to encourage independent, enthusiastic and creative learners who develop holistically through a well-planned and interesting child-centred approach.

## Ethos and Forest School Principles at St John's

1. Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions for children to visit in blocks of at least six to eight weeks each season. Ideally Forest Schools should be offered over a longer period to truly see the developmental benefits.
2. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are all integral parts of the Forest School process. Planning is flexible and the learners take responsibility for their learning and development.
3. It takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment –
4. We aim to promote the holistic development in all of those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners who are emotionally literate.
5. We will offer learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and themselves and encouraged risky play where appropriate.
6. It will be managed by a qualified Forest School level 3 Practitioners. Further staff may be trained in the future to help plan and facilitate in the sessions.
7. We will use a range of learner centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

The Forest School Principles and other information can be located at:

<http://www.forestschoollassociation.org/full-principles-and-criteria-for-goodpractice/>

## Our rules and routines at Forest School

Expectations of behaviour will be set by the Forest School Leader and discussed with the children in the classroom beforehand, in conjunction with the school's Behaviour Policy. Children will also help set rules, which will be revisited at every session. Children are expected to remember and follow the guidelines the sessions. These include:

- 'No pick, no lick, be careful how you carry a stick.'
- Respect for plants, trees and animals.



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- Staying in view of the Leader and supporting adults at all times.
- Always use walking feet around the site.
- When scavenging, only collect the natural debris on the floor.
- If you find anything you think could be dangerous, let the Leader or grown up know.
- Staying within the designated areas at all times.

### Rationale/Aims

The outdoors can provide space and freedom for a type of learning that is difficult to replicate within the confines of classroom walls. It provides an alternative context to apply knowledge and skills necessary to understand and appreciate the world we live in no matter the season or the weather. We strongly believe that all children have the right to be given the opportunities afforded by outdoor learning and the managed risks associated with it. It can provide relevant, engaging experiences that support learning in all areas of the curriculum. These can be presented as building on existing outdoor play, transferring activities normally carried out indoors, school garden projects, environmental education or off-site visits.

Providing positive opportunities for active learning, the outside environment can promote skills of enquiry, problem solving, communication, co-operation, creativity and evaluation, therefore we seek to offer outdoor experiences that allow children to:

- Find space to be alone or interact in social groups of different sizes.
- Plan, build, evaluate and sometimes demolish.
- Find similarities and differences, observe and classify.
- Be energetic, adventurous and assess risk.
- Make mark, use large scale media, be messy.
- Plant, grow and harvest.
- Hide, explore and discover.
- Investigate, make predictions and test theories.
- Imagine, pretend and reflect.
- Measure, locate, transport and record.

Forest School education at St John's will focus on the key principles behind emotional resilience. Groups of learners will be assessed on the resiliency framework prior and after the block of sessions to gauge their strands of emotional need and the effectiveness of Forest Schools as an intervention.

### Environmental Considerations

One of the main principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. Each activity carried out as part of Forest School will have impact on the environment, some positive and some negative. We aim to keep the negative impact to a minimum by regularly inspecting the site as detailed in the school's Climate Action Plan. All those involved in Forest School will be encouraged to learn greater awareness of the world around them and to show respect to the wildlife by 'nurturing nature'.



## Site Policy

The site will be left in a safe and ordered manner at the end of each session. The Forest School leader is responsible for the pre-session Site Risk Assessment by:

1. Completing a pre-session site risk assessment form, recording any necessary hazards in the logbook (to be acted upon as soon as possible) and ensuring hazardous areas are cordoned off using the hazard tape.
2. Checking trip hazards and ensuring all safe storage of wood at the sides of fences or in the designated cordoned off area (pond area).
3. Fire area is safe; seating is 2 metres away from the fire pit and walkways around the pit circle are clear.

The Forest School leader is also responsible for ensuring a site risk assessment is completed after the session by:

1. The removal and disposal of all left over food.
2. The safe storage of non-perishable items.
3. Safely storing all wood to the sides of the fences and/or in the designated area (pond area).
4. Turning fire bowls so they do not collect water.
5. Leaving all areas clear of litter.

## Emergency Action Plan

In the event of an emergency ring the Emergency Services on 999 stating your name and the following location details:

St Johns Primary School,  
Hertford road  
Digswell  
Hertfordshire  
AL60BX

The emergency action plan will be followed by the senior leadership team.

An emergency bag will be accessible at all times during sessions (see following page for first aid & emergency equipment available). All minor accidents and incidents will be logged in the usual way through CPOMs or the medical tracker.

## Essential Equipment

In addition to tools suited to the planned for activities, the Forest School leader will always take an emergency bag with them. The contents of the emergency bag will vary depending on the time of year and weather conditions, the site being used, and the planned for activities according to the relevant risk assessments and daily risk assessment. Equipment may include:

- First Aid Kit
- Communication Devices (mobile phone and/or walkie talkie – checked for working order and signal strength)
- Clean Water
- Emergency whistle



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- Medication for individuals will be kept in school in the designated area as usual and a FS Assistant (with the appropriate First Aid training) will retrieve and administer this if/when necessary
- Appropriate spare clothing
- Wet wipes, hand sanitiser
- Chocolate/sugary food
- Plastic bag
- Fire blanket
- Torch
- Burns Kit

### Poor Weather

Forest School sessions will go ahead in all weather conditions with only a few exceptions:

- Strong winds that make woodland areas hazardous for use due to falling debris.
- When it is dangerous to get around the site by foot due to snow, flooding or ice etc.
- Very wet cold conditions where hypothermia is a real possibility.

Exposure to the elements is part of the magic of nature and therefore an integral part of forest school. In more adverse weather we will review the planned activities and site areas and may change plans and, in some cases, may complete some of the session indoors or within the shelters. In the summer the trees in the woodland area and our shelters will provide good sun cover. Please remember to apply sun cream to your child and/or supply it so that they can put it on. We will use the BBC weather online forecast to make judgments about the expected conditions. Ultimately, our Headteacher and Forest School Leader will make the decision deeming if the weather is unsuitable for Forest School. Any session that is cancelled will be, wherever possible, rescheduled.

### Clothing and Toileting

To ensure that the children are sufficiently protected from the weather and the forest environment we require children to be wearing appropriate clothing and footwear. Clothing will get muddy, so old home clothes are required. Forest School sessions will take place in all weathers unless the safety of the participants is in question, due to high winds or icy ground (The General Welfare and Weather Risk Assessment will be consulted).

*'There is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing.'*

The general rule is to wear lots of layers which keep in the heat and can be removed if needed. Suitable clothing is essential for everyone participating.

In their kits, children should have:

- Long sleeved t-shirt, even in warm weather to help protect against bites, stings and scratches.
- Trousers will be worn to reduce the risk of bites, stings and scratches.
- Waterproof over trousers or dungarees and a waterproof jacket (really important when wet to prevent under clothing getting wet/damp as we have no-where to dry clothing between sessions).
- Long socks, wellies, walking boots or old trainers (in very hot dry weather)
- During the summer, a sunhat and sunscreen should be supplied



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- During the colder months, extra layers such as a fleece, leggings, tights, hats and gloves etc are required.

We will ask the children to use the toilet before leaving the setting. If the children need to go to the toilet during the session, they are to alert their class teacher, who will allow them to go back into school to use the toilet. It will be the class teacher's responsibility to ensure the children leave and come back to the session safely by following the procedure. With really young children and depending on where we are working on the site, it may be necessary to release a participating adult to go with the child (ren) (TA or teacher) to escort them to and from the toilet.

### Tools and Tool Use

We are committed to providing children with access to a wide range of equipment that stimulates enjoyment, learning and development, both indoors and outdoors. Using small hand tools is an important part of Forest School as it enables children to develop new, practical skills that help them develop self-confidence.

To enable that this is safely carried out, hand tools are to be maintained in good order by the Forest School Leader.

The Forest School leaders will inspect the tools before each session to ensure safety. Children and adults will be taught how to handle tools properly and to treat them with respect by learning 'Tool Talks'.

Whilst using hand tools, the staff to child ratio is increased depending on the tool in use. The ratios will vary from 1:1 to 1:8.

Tools will be kept in the tool bag and only removed by the Forest School Leader.

Adult and child sized gloves will be available and are only to be used for the 'helping hand'. It is not advisable to use any hand tools with gloves on as it detaches the user from the tool.

Running with tools is prohibited as is pointing with the tools.

Children will lose permission to use tools if the guidelines are not followed.

### General rules for tool use

- All tools have a separate risk assessment.
- The Forest School Leader is nominated to ensure safe storage of tools on school premises.
- All staff to ensure safe storage whilst at the Forest School Site.
- We do not walk around with tools, wherever possible.
- Tools should be kept clean with oily rag, sharp and checked before every use.
- Tools should only be used with a designated trained adult.

### Knives

- Children must be supported 1:1 to 1:8 depending on age range by an adult, preferably the Forest School Leader, initially demonstrating good practice.
- Users should preferably be sat down in a designated area.



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- Knives should be used away from the body.
- Ensure knives are clean and covered when not in use.

### **Bow Saw**

- Children will be supported 1:8 by an adult preferably the Forest School Leader and good practice demonstrated and when confident and competent, can be paired up with the Forest School Leader observing.
- Guard is in place when not in use.
- Use in a designated area away from others.
- Use with a glove on the non-sawing hand (helping hand).

### **Loppers**

- Children must be supported 1:8 by an adult preferably the Forest School Leader and good practice demonstrated and when confident and competent, can be paired up with the Forest School Leader observing.
- Use in a designated area, away from others.
- Loppers must be kept closed except when in use.
- Loppers must only be used above the ground if possible.

### **Links with Existing School Policies**

The following school policies should be read alongside this policy:

- Behaviour Policy
- Inclusion Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- Play Policy
- First Aid Policy
- Intimate Care and Toileting Policy
- Equality Information and Objectives

### **Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be monitored by the Headteacher and reviewed and approved every 3 years by the Quality of Education Committee.



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## Forest School Policy Document Control

2 March 2026	Approved	Quality of Education Committee
24 January 2026	Created	Arnold Worton-Geer