



# **Forest School Handbook**

***Rooted in faith  
Growing in love  
Learning for life***

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## 1. What is Forest School?

Forest School is a program of learning, based in a natural environment, designed to develop children's self-esteem, independence and confidence through outdoor, child-led play. Sessions are planned to encourage children to participate in engaging and achievable activities to help to develop their personal, social and emotional skills. In Forest School sessions, children are offered opportunities to choose their own learning, to play, to work with their peers, to solve problems and to learn new practical skills. The children are at the heart of Forest School learning, and sessions will be planned to follow the children's interests.

Forest School sessions create a positive atmosphere of support where the children learn to become independent in their physical skills and mental thought processes. They learn to trust their own ideas, believe in their capabilities and recognise their own needs. They understand that support comes from trusted adults and friends alike as they are nurtured to develop positive relationships with themselves and other people. It is a safe place where they can be themselves and leave day to day stresses behind. Central to all of this is the environment, God's world. Children experience the wonders of nature, enabling them to build a strong, positive relationship with their natural world and to feel awe and wonder in what they see.

## 2. Forest School Intent

At St Francis we aim to give pupils a wide range of learning opportunities. Forest School is a holistic approach to learning which caters for all learning styles. Our Forest School sessions are engaging and challenging, aiming to nurture pupils' mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing through being outdoors, being free to choose their own learning, to build their confidence in taking risks and trying new activities, building relationships with their peers and building their own resilience. In doing so we hope to build children's self-esteem, self-worth and sense of belonging so they can approach all learning and future challenges in life with motivation, resilience and positivity.

## 3. Provision at St Francis

Children in Years 1, 2 and 3 will have weekly half-day sessions for one half term per year. All Forest School groups at St Francis will have approximately 15 pupils and will be led by our level 3 Forest School trained practitioner, Rachael Rankin. There will always be at least one other adult present with the group, so the child-adult ratio will always be at least 15:2. We welcome parent helpers.

## 4. Curriculum

Forest School sessions are planned to develop children holistically, working on social, physical, intellectual, communication, creative, emotional and spiritual development. Forest School sessions may be planned around a theme which may link to the season, an aspect of nature or a celebration such as Easter. These themes will also be tailored to the interests of the children. The leaders will observe and engage with the children in each session to see where their interests

take them, and future sessions will be planned to further this area of interest. Each session will have a group game to develop social and communication skills and a circle time discussion. The children will then be free to choose their learning, from many of the resources which will permanently be on our site, to activities set up specifically for the week's theme.

## 5. Forest School session routines and activities

Our Forest School sessions will vary to meet the interests of the children and follow the seasons. Some elements will always remain the same, however, so the children know what to expect and what is expected of them.

### Boundaries

During the first Forest School session, children will learn where they are allowed to go, and where the boundaries of the Forest School site are. The group will work together to establish Forest School rules and these will be revisited each session to remind the children of expectations to keep them safe.

### Example activities

Each session will have a mixture of group activities, and time for children to choose their own learning. There will be several activities set out, and children may opt to do these activities or choose their own learning. This is a short list of the many possibilities for Forest School learning:

- Den building
- Bug hunting and identification
- Natural art e.g. clay, weaving
- Making miniature villages from sticks
- Learning to use tools
- Learning to tie knots for different purposes e.g. putting shelters up.
- Treasure/scavenger hunts
- Digging in the digging pit
- Mud kitchen
- Swinging in hammocks
- Pond dipping
- Making and using obstacle courses
- Campfire building and lighting
- Making hot food and drinks on the fire
- Campfire stories

### Eating and drinking

Children will bring their own water bottles to the Forest School site and leave them in the designated place. A snack will be provided during each Forest School session, and allergies and dietary requirements will always be adhered to. Before eating the snack, children will wash their hands at the hand washing station.

## Toileting

Children will be encouraged to go to the toilet before sessions begin. If children need the toilet during Forest School sessions, they may return to the school building.

## Ending the session

The Forest School session usually ends with a short reflection, which may take the form of a discussion or a practical activity for the children to reflect on what they have learnt. If the session has involved a fire, we will have a fire-closing ceremony, with each child pouring a cup of water onto the fire with the opportunity of saying something they are thankful for. In keeping with our Mission Statement, the children will have time during this reflection to consider our world and their responsibility to care for it. Children will assist in clearing the site and will take all of their belongings and water bottle with them.

## 6. Clothing and weather

In order for children to get the most out of Forest School sessions, they must be suitably dressed. They will get muddy, so must have old clothes which do not matter if they get dirty. Forest School sessions will go ahead no matter what the weather is. Sessions will only be cancelled if thunderstorms or high winds are forecast in the area.

Parents will be asked to send the following clothes in a named bag:

| Summer sessions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Winter sessions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trousers (not shorts)</li><li>• Waterproof trousers</li><li>• Long sleeved top</li><li>• Waterproof coat</li><li>• Warm layers if it is a cooler day</li><li>• Wellies or waterproof walking boots</li><li>• Sunhat</li><li>• All-day suncream to be applied at home before school</li></ul> <p>Please note, in summer, wellies, waterproof trousers and light long sleeves are still essential, to protect from thorns, nettles, insect bites etc.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lots of layers to keep warm</li><li>• Jogging bottoms</li><li>• Extra pair of tights/ leggings/ thermals under their trousers</li><li>• Waterproof trousers / ski trousers</li><li>• Long sleeved top</li><li>• Warm jumper</li><li>• Warm, waterproof coat with a hood</li><li>• Warm socks</li><li>• Wellies or waterproof walking boots</li><li>• Warm hat</li><li>• Gloves / mittens</li></ul> |

## 7. Forest School leaders

The Forest School leader (Rachael Rankin) will be supported by a teaching assistant as well as volunteers.

Their role is:

- Help check that children are wearing clothing and footwear appropriate for the weather and time of year. Help younger children with getting changed.
- Support children's learning and development as modelled by the Forest School leader.
- Allow children the freedom to explore and play without adult interruption whenever safely possible.
- Help the children to recognise and avoid hazards such as harmful plants, germs, trip hazards etc.
- Alert the Forest School leader immediately if a child is hurt or behaving in a way that could endanger the health and safety of others.
- Support the Forest School leader with tasks such as assisting with activities, preparing snack, offering guidance, and ensuring children stay within the designated area.

## 8. Health and Safety

Rachael Rankin is a qualified Level 3 Forest School Leader. She holds a FAA Level 3 Award in Outdoor First Aid and is fully insured to lead Forest School sessions. The children's safety is of the utmost importance in Forest School and extensive risk assessments have been completed. The Forest School ethos considers it important for children to experience small, carefully managed risks, such as creating an obstacle course and balancing along it, swinging in a hammock and working out how high they are comfortable swinging, and walking on uneven ground, navigating tree roots and bramble patches. This all builds children's resilience and ability to manage risks in life.

## 9. Behaviour

Forest School is a curriculum activity on the school site and therefore our usual school rules apply. If these rules are not adhered to, the adults will follow up in the same way, following the school's Behaviour Policy.

Forest School environment is an environment that offers greater freedom for children, with a primary focus on keeping ourselves and others safe, in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and respect.

Our Forest School leader will:

- Agree necessary and appropriate boundaries with all participants, in line with risk assessments and appropriate policies, and ensure participants are reminded of these at the start of each session and additionally as required.
- Lead by example, ensuring safety and learning through care, respect, and positivity.

- Create a positive environment which encourages and reinforces caring and respectful behaviour between all participants as well as towards the natural environment and equipment.
- Promote and foster effective relationships through observation and interaction, in which all are accepted, valued and treated fairly.
- Be mindful of the need to maintain safety at all times.
- Place the needs of the children, including needs linked to their developmental levels, preferred learning styles, social, emotional and behavioural needs at the centre of the Forest School experience to maximise individual success and promote positive outcomes.
- Give specific feedback and praise to children when demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviour.

## 10. Tool policy

Tools will sometimes be planned into Forest School sessions, and are used for the purpose of making something, and usually focused on skills of communication with a partner. Children will be taught the correct way to use tools at Forest School. “Tool talks” will always be done before any session involving tools, and children will be taught about any safety measures they must take. Some tools will have a marked zone to use and all tool use will be under adult supervision.

Tools we may use include:

- Wood peelers
- Bow saw
- Hand drill
- Wooden mallets
- Fixed blade knife
- Loppers
- Bill hook

We will use tools with a minimum ratio of 1:4 supervision and depending on the activity and age of children, a smaller number of children to adult ratio may be used.

The Forest School leader is responsible for overseeing the safe use and maintenance of tools. Sharp tools are stored in lockable boxes and are kept locked at all times when not in use. Rigger gloves will be used where specified by the tool talk. Risk-benefit assessments are completed for all tools used.

## 11. Fire policy

### The Fire Circle

Children will be taught they must not walk through the fire circle at any point, even when there is no fire lit. These rules will be continually practised with the use of games, and children will be

taught how to safely enter the fire circle, when invited, through the entrance, and how to leave via the exit. Children will be taught to sit at the fire circle by sitting on the seating and swinging their legs over, and to leave the same way, so they are never walking through the fire circle. Only once children have demonstrated they can consistently follow these rules, will fires be lit during sessions.

Fires will be lit during some, but not all Forest School sessions. Fires will be lit in the fire square within the fire circle. The fire square will be approximately 1 metre squared and all seating for the fire circle will be at least 2 metres away from the fire square. Children may be invited to approach the fire square for cooking or fire lighting but only with adult supervision. Children will be taught to adopt the respect position near the fire, with one knee on the ground and one raised for optimal stability.

### Fire lighting and extinguishing

Fires will only be lit if the fire safety equipment is present; water bucket, fire blanket, burns kit. The Forest School leader will always take the lead during fire lighting and a lit fire will never be left unattended. All fires will be extinguished at the end of a session, doused down with water and stirred until all the smoke and steam has ceased.

## 12. Risk-benefit assessments

Risk-benefit assessments are undertaken for specific areas and activities in Forest School.

## 13. First aid and emergencies

The Forest School leader is qualified as a Level 3 outdoor first aider. There will always be a first aid kit on site as well as fire safety equipment and a mobile phone for emergencies. The Forest School site is also a short walk away from the school buildings.

In the event of an emergency, the following plan will be followed:

- Gather the group of children and keep together in a safe area e.g. gazebo
- Assess the incident and prioritise actions/injuries.
- Know the postcode
  - RH10 6HD
- Seek help if necessary, using mobile phone. Contact the emergency services if necessary, and the school office.
- If necessary, first aider to offer first aid.
- Keep casualty comfortable and warm.
- Check the rest of the group are safe. If waiting for emergency services, one adult to return rest of group to school building. If possible, move casualty inside to warmth of school. Stay on Forest School site if injury prevents this level of movement.

The Forest School leader will take a First Aid Bag to each session, including:

- First aid kit (regularly checked and restocked as necessary)
- Medical details for all participants
- Mobile phone
- Accident book
- Whistle
- Medication for individuals

#### 14. Equal opportunities and inclusion

Forest School strives to maintain equal opportunities for all children and young people. The Forest School leader will make the sessions as inclusive as possible, ensuring all children have equal access to provision.

#### 15. Safeguarding

The Forest School leader has a duty of care to promote the wellbeing and security of all participants.

At St Francis we take the safeguarding of children very seriously. All staff are trained in safeguarding procedures and any disclosures will be handled in the same way as in school. Any incidents will be recorded in writing and reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as is possible.

Parental photograph permission is applied to Forest School activities in the same way as any other school activity.

#### 16. Volunteers

We welcome volunteer helpers to assist with Forest School sessions. If you would like to help with Forest School sessions, please speak to Mrs Rankin or contact the school office.

#### 17. Policies

This handbook acts as a Forest School policy for activities specific to Forest School, and will be reviewed each year. As Forest School is a curriculum enhancement within the school day and site, all other school policies will be adhered to.