



Newchurch Primary School

Forest School Handbook



Policies and Procedures

2023-2024

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Forest School – The Ethos

Forest school originated in Denmark in the 1950's and developed from their nature schools where children play and learn in an outdoor environment. The forest school ethos has six principles, which were agreed by the UK Forest School Community in 2011. The six guiding principles of Forest School are given below.

Principle 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, adaption, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.

Principle 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.

Principle 3 : Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, foresting resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

Principle 4: Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

Principle 5: Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

Principle 6: Forest school uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

This child-centred approach allows the children to develop more holistically in terms of their mind, body, emotion and spirit. It can lead to improved academic achievement, character development, physical development and good mental health and wellbeing. When children are allowed to develop their social and communication skills, are able to work in groups effectively and have a strong sense of worth and high self esteem, then the foundations have been laid for a positive attitude towards learning.

The Forest school setting is adaptable and allows for a flexible approach to learning, accommodating a range of learning styles and schemas, which allows children to make links and connections. Practitioners can shape learning to individual child's preferred learning styles. Forest school leaders are able to plan opportunities for children to practice 'schemas' (the building blocks of the brain) which are repetitive behaviours that in turn, forge connections in the brain.

Children develop in the context of relationships and the environment that surrounds them. Children who play in natural environments with positive role models and skilled practitioners undertake more diverse, creative and imaginative play, forming an important part of the child's development. Forest school provides endless opportunities for this high engagement and therefore high level play.

The 'Characteristics of Effective Learning ' (EYFS Statutory Framework, England and Wales) is interwoven throughout the Forest School ethos and children are encouraged to play and explore, keep trying, enjoy what they set out to do and create and think critically. 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. Children will work with tools, play, earn boundaries of behaviour: both physical and social, grow in confidence, self esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding and an appreciation of the natural world and respect for others.

Our Forest School environment aims:

- * To provide an opportunity for individuals to develop, to learn and to enjoy themselves.
- *To provide a safe and non threatening environment in which children can take risks, make choices and initiate their own learning.
- *To help children understand, appreciate and care for the natural environment.
- *To provide ways of developing practical life skills in an outdoor environment.
- *To develop self-esteem, confidence and a positive disposition to learning through the completion of small, achievable tasks
- *To meet the needs of children with different preferred learning styles
- *To develop social and team working skills
- *To enable children to be independent, self motivated and considerate
- *To be true to the forest school ethos and approach
- *To develop a secure, happy and welcoming environment
- *To provide stimulation and varied learning activities appropriate to the child's needs and stages of development
- *To help each child build self- esteem, confidence, independence, self-control and interpersonal skills

Activities for Forest School are diverse and numerous, but it should be child led, following the children's interests and fascination in order to create independent learners who are inspired to try out their own ideas, explore their own interests and attempt new ideas. Some activities might include:

- *Shelter and den building
- *Fire lighting
- *tools use
- *Studying wildlife
- *Playing team and group games

*Woodland and traditional craft

*Developing stories and drama

*Sensory activities

*Tracking Games

*Cooking on an open fire

*Using a Kelly Kettle

*rope and string work

*Art and sculpture work Physical movement activities - swinging, balancing, climbing

Code of Conduct

Entering the Forest

We enter the forest respectfully and know that when at Forest School specific expectations are in place. We will explore, investigate, learn and play in a manner that will not damage our forest environment. We understand that we share our Forest School with plants, insects and animals and that when we are in our Forest School we are sharing the environment with them. We respect each other and agree to abide by the Forest School rules;

- I will be gentle
- I will be kind
- I will try my best
- I will be honest
- I will listen to others
- I will look after living things

Boundaries

Before each session begins children are made aware of how far that they can explore and of any fixed boundary markers (eg blue rope). If children move to explore hidden areas an adult should also move into the cover deep enough to be able to see the children but allowing the children the freedom to explore independently. If you lose sight of a child shout '1,2,3 where are you?' The children have been taught to respond '1, 2,3 I'm here' through classroom games that are practised regularly. (see site risk assessment document)

Lighting a Fire

When lightening a fire the Forest School leader will take control of the operation and all accompanying adults will be briefed before starting. A lit fire will not be left unattended at any point. A fire may not be lit until it has been confirmed to all that our fire safety equipment is in place along with fire emergency first aid kit. Open fires will be built within the designated fire area/square. (see fire risk assessment)

At the Fire Circle

An open fire will be lit within a fire square. A fire circle using log sitting stools may be established around the perimeter, 2m from the fire square. No one may enter the fire circle perimeter unless invited to do so by an adult. There is no running past the fire circle. No items must be carried and placed within the fire circle unless by an adult. If you wish to move around the fire to a new stool you must step out of the circle and walk around the outside of the log circle. Even when the fire is unlit we will treat it as if it is lit. (see fore risk assessment)

Using Tools

All tools have their own clear code of conduct for correct use which will include consideration of specific personal protective equipment, correct use of a specific body posture, and consideration of the appropriate types of activity that each tool may be used for. (see tool use guides and risk assessment)

Picking up and playing with Sticks

Children can carry sticks shorter than their arm's length but are encouraged to think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks may be dragged or carried with the help of another person when each person is at either end. Sticks must not be thrown. Sticks must not be pulled from living trees, only from branches that have fallen from the trees. Sticks must not be used as weapons unless the children understand the rules of using the sticks as weapons.

Picking up and playing with stones

Stones may be picked up and transported (transportation schemas). Children often like to make patterns and pictures with them. Stones may not be thrown. They may be dropped but thought must be given to whether it is safe to do so.

Digging

Digging large holes is not encouraged. Children may carefully move soil to look for insects and their habitats using lolly pop sticks, fingers or small sticks found within the forest but deep holes should not be made.

Collecting wood

Wood collecting for fire lighting purposes. It is collected in four thicknesses – matchstick sized, pencil sized, thumb sized and wrist sized. Sticks may be collected for creating pictures and patterns, but should be collected sparingly so as not to disrupt creature habitats.

Eating and drinking on site

Nil by mouth policy for anything found in the forest, unless this activity has been specifically planned for during the session (eg blackberry picking). Children must be reminded not to put their fingers or hands in their mouths or noses. When having drinks and snacks children will use wipes and soap/water to clean their hands before consumption.

Rope and string use

We encourage the collection and transportation of materials. Children are not permitted to tie each other up. If a child wants erect a tarpaulin or a rope swing, an adult should support them as needed, modelling appropriate knot tying and modelling how to talk through ideas, suitable locations and decisions.

Carrying and transporting materials

Children are encouraged to roll, lift, drag and to pull materials, either by using their hands or by using ropes. We encourage safe lifting by bending our knees and keeping our back straight. Safe lifting should always be modelled by adults. Heavier objects should be rolled, lifted or carried by more people working together. (safe lifting risk assessment)

Toileting

Children are invited to use the toilets before we leave the school building. School toilets are close enough for children to be taken to by a responsible adult in groups of no more than three at a time. (Toileting Policy)

Tree Climbing

An adult must be present when wanting to climb trees in the forest school. The ground cover should be checked for 'sharp objects' and the tree marked as suitable for climbing. A visual check must be made for loose and rotten branches. Children are permitted to explore to their own limits or to a maximum height of 1.5m. Adults should be near enough to catch if a child should fall but far enough away to not be invasive to the children's exploration. (tree climbing risk assessment)

Leaving the site

It is important that the children understand the idea of 'leave no trace' as much as it reasonably possible. Shelters should be taken down, imported materials need to be removed. Very occasionally large items may be left between sessions. All rubbish and toileting items must always be removed. If artefacts have been found or made these may be taken off with the consent of an adult.

Equipment for forest school

In addition to tools suited to the planned for activities, the forest school leader will always take an emergency bag (HAPPY BAG) with them. The contents of the emergency bag will vary depending on the time of the year and weather conditions. , the site being used and the planned for activities according to the relevant risk assessments and daily risk assessment. There is a list of essential items that should be carried out for every session. A session MUST NOT commence without the Happy Bag being present.

Essential Equipment

- First Aid Kit
- Emergency Procedures
- Medical information for each individual and Emergency Contact details for every member of the group (adult and children)
- Risk Assessment
- Communication Devices (mobile phone)
- Water
- Emergency whistle
- Emergency Blanket
- Accident forms
- Medication for individuals (if not appropriate for the individual to carry the medication for themselves it should be clearly labelled – staff must have been trained to administer it and parental consent must have been received)
- Appropriate clothing

Additional recommended equipment (Must be taken if lighting fires)

- Wet wipes, hand gel
- Nappy sacks and toilet roll
- Small trowel
- Sun cream (parental permission)
- Spare clothes
- Thermos of hot water
- Chocolate /sugary food
- Plastic bag
- Roll mat and blanket
- Torch
- Knife
- Emergency shelter
- Burns kit
- Bucket of water

- Fire blanket
- Emergency fire kit

Essential Equipment: clothing

Adults and children will not be permitted to go to forest school without appropriate clothing that will protect them from extremes of heat and cold, keep them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes. Clothes should fit appropriately for comfort and meet any individual's religious requirements.

Children and parents are encouraged to think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities and to be aware they are likely to take some of our mud home with them after a session. In the forest it can often be cooler than expected under the shade of the trees.

Clothing list:

- Waterproof trousers
- Waterproof coat with a hood
- Long sleeved top
- Full length trousers
- Warm boots (willies can be very cold during winter)
- Warm socks and a spare pair
- Gloves and woolly hat – cold weather
- Sun hat: that fits well to ensure good visibility – sunny weather

“There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing “

Essential Equipment: First Aid Kit

- Contact cards
- Latex gloves
- Bandages
- Plasters
- Burns gel
- Burn dressing
- Dressing
- Eye wash
- Scissors
- Cotton wool
- Antiseptic wipes
- Medication for individual children
- Sterile water
- Cling film
- Bites and sting creams or sprays (parental permission required)

Essential Equipment: when having a fire

- Flame retardant gauntlet gloves
- Fire blanket
- Bucket of water
- Fire steel
- Vaseline
- Cotton wool
- Matches

Using and Storing Tools

All tools are counted out and back in at the beginning and end of each session in which they are used. When not in use in the forest they are kept secure away in a locked shed on the school premises. Before each tool is to be used it will be checked for damage and working order.

Each tool type is kept in their own suitable containers, many of which are also lockable. Children must never be allowed to help themselves and will always have adult supervision when collecting, transporting and using tools.

Tools are only used for a specific purpose. All adults should model correct and safe tool use. Storage and transportation at all times. (tool box talk) When using a tool, they are used well away from other groups and ensuring that others are aware that a tool is in use. Only walking is permitted when transporting a tool.

Potato Peelers and Knives – for peeling or sharpening sticks (whittling)

As ratio of 1 adult to 2 children will be observed. This tool must be seated on a log with elbows placed upon knees and using the tool in a downward motion between the legs. A safe space must be determined ensuring a safe distance away from others. If someone wished to pass through your space they must verbally ask and you must stop whilst they pass. Safe, very temporary, storage is to store the blade end of the peeler in the soil. When carrying peelers you must walk with them held down by your side. Once a child is deemed to be competent by the forest school leader they may be allowed to use a fixed blade knife to whittle. The same rule as above still apply. When carrying a knife return it to its sheath and walk with it by your side. Tools must be returned to the storage container when no longer in use.

Bow saws- for cross cutting wood up to 12cm diameter (larger than a 2 pence piece)

Children may be taught how to use a bow saw with 1:1 supervision, or with a 'buddy' helping in a 'push pull' fashion. Adults must always supervise closely and should place their hand (gloved) between the child's hand and that of the saw blade. The safest method of use is to brace the wood through the bow saw itself. The saw blade must be covered when not in use. When being carried the bow saw blade (in its cover) should be pointing downwards, and to the back. When not in use the saw should be in a locked tool box located in the forest school shed.

Kelly Kettle

The forest school leader may use this to heat water. Never leave the bung in whilst heating water. This is only to be placed during storage so as to keep the chamber clear from forest debris or insects and mini beasts. Once the fire is going in the Kelly kettle base carefully add the chimney top to it by holding the handle parallel to the ground, and supported on each side by your hands. When lit, do

not stand directly over, or look straight down the chimney. Never blow into the top. When pouring out the water support the base by holding the bung chain in one hand and the handle with the other. To put the fire out, either leave to burn out in the designated fire square or tip the contents onto the forest floor and extinguish as a regular fire.

When not in use, all tools will be securely locked away in the tool shed. Tools should be checked and cleaned before they are put away. Each half term, the forest school leader will ensure that each tool is thoroughly cleaned and oiled. Wear and tear will be monitored with each use.

Health and Safety Policies

Newchurch Primary Health and Safety Policy sets out clear statements of intent regarding the whole school's approach to the health and safety of its children, staff and visitors to the school and the school site.

Provided below is a list of additional points and measures which relate directly to our forest school sessions.

1. The trained and named forest school leader is always the person in charge of forest school sessions.
2. The forest school leader has overall duty of care for the children in their charge. However all adults involved in the forest school sessions are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe.
3. All adult helpers MUST sign and date a form to show that they have read and understood this handbook and the risk assessments appropriate to the session in which they are helping. They must sign and date the form stating that they comply with the general operating procedures for the forest school (code of conduct)
4. The forest school leader or assistant will always carry and take a first aid kit into the forest at every session.
5. The forest school leader or assistant will always carry an emergency bag into the forest for every session.
6. The forest school leader will ensure that the emergency bag contains:
 - Essential survival equipment
 - A contact list for each child undertaking the activities and
 - The schools telephone number (and location details for the emergency services)
7. The forest school leader will always carry a mobile phone and will ensure that there is easy access to a land line if the group is out of range.
8. In the event of an emergency, the forest school leader will ensure that the school contacts the emergency services. If contact with the school is lost the leader will contact the emergency services.
9. The forest school leader will review the risk assessments before every trip into the schools forest site.
10. When tools are used the adult child ratio will be 1:1
11. There is an exception to this – when using peelers for whittling the ratio can be 1:2
12. The forest school leader is responsible for the maintenance and checking of all the tools and equipment to be used at the forest school, prior to their use.
13. The forest leader is responsible in training the children in how to use the tools and equipment safely and appropriately.
14. The forest leader will be responsible for the pre visit check of the forest school site prior to each forest school session.

Safeguarding Children

Everyone at Newchurch Primary has a responsibility in relation to child protection. (see school safeguarding policy)

We are committed to :

- Taking all reasonable measures to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child in our care.
- The practice of safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children and young people
- Protecting each pupil from any form of abuse, whether from an adult or another pupil.

Our Aims:

- To raise awareness of individual responsibilities in identifying and reporting possible cases of abuse
- To provide a systematic means of monitoring, recording and reporting of concerns and cases
- To provide guidance on recognising and dealing with suspected child abuse
- To provide a framework for inter-agency communication and effective liaison
- To ensure that any deficiencies or weaknesses in the child protection arrangements are remedied without delay
- To ensure that safe recruitment procedures are operated
- To design and operate procedures which promote this policy and which, so far as possible, ensure that teachers and others who are innocent are not prejudiced by false allegations
- To contribute to the operation of appropriate health and safety procedures
- To have regard to and be consistent with relevant statutory and regulatory requirements and guidance.

In addition, adults working within Forest School need to appreciate that when children feel comfortable and content, when their instinct to trust and risk take is encouraged, they may be moved to disclose information which they might have otherwise kept to themselves. Any volunteer, or member of staff, who finds that a child is telling them something that concerns them should follow the specified course of action set out below in the simple steps:

1. Listen to the pupil but ask NO leading questions. Allow the child to lead discussion but do not press for details.
2. Keep calm and offer reassurance. Accept what the child says without challenge.
3. Make NO promises. You cannot 'keep a secret'. You should make it understood that there are limits to confidentiality at the start of the disclosure.
4. Any concerns should be immediately communicated to Head Teacher- Mrs Jayne Narraway or to the DSL's - (John Duckett, Debbie Conreen and Rachel Sizer) , as soon as possible and follow the school procedures.
5. Keep an accurate , written record of the conversation, including the date, time, the place the conversation occurred in and the essence of what was said and done by whom and in

whose presence. Keep the record secure and complete on a pink form and hand it in to the DSL. (remember to write in pen)

Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Forest School

The mission statement of Newchurch Primary emphasises that all children are unique. We are committed to giving our children every opportunity to achieve the best that they can be, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, attainment, age, disability, gender or background. We actively seek to remove the barriers to learning and participation that can hinder or exclude individual children or groups of children. We aim to provide all our children with the opportunity to succeed and to reach the highest level of personal achievement.

We will:

- Ensure equal access for all children
- Employ a range of styles, including collaborative learning, so that children can value working together
- Seek to involve all parents in supporting their children's education
- Take account of the performance of all children when planning for future learning, next steps and setting challenging targets
- Make best use of all available resources to support the learning of all groups of children.

Our practitioners ensure that our children:

- Feel secure and know that their contributions are valued
- Appreciate and value the differences in others to take responsibility for their own actions
- Participate safely, in clothing that is appropriate to their religious beliefs
- Are taught in groupings that allow them all to experience success and use materials that reflect a range of cultural backgrounds, learning styles and linguistic needs without stereotyping
- Have a common curriculum experience that allows for a range of different learning styles
- Have challenging targets that enable them to succeed
- Are encouraged to participate fully, regardless of disabilities, SEN, or medical needs.

We encourage a level of risk taking, always under close adult supervision, and actively foster positive relationships and friendships as well as collaboration between all children and adults. Forest school activities are always designed to produce success and enjoyment.

The forest environment is an environment to which we are all entitled and we strongly believe that the experience we will have there will linger in the memory for years to come. Children with medical needs or disabilities will be helped so that they can take part fully in each forest school session. All children are entitled to participate in forest school sessions.

Risk Assessment Guidelines

A SITE risk assessment is undertaken each week and a DAILY risk assessment and checks made prior to every forest school session at our forest school site.

In addition, an ACTIVITY risk assessment will be established prior to any activity that may require it. These will include: Whittling, cutting wood, shelter building, fire lightening and cooking on an open fire, and palm drilling.

Specific additional risk assessments will be undertaken for children whose medical conditions or whose behaviour requires them.

- The risk assessment process is detailed below:
- We look for potential hazards
- We decide who might be at harm
- We consider how harm may occur and the worst outcome that we could face
- We evaluate the current risk
- We decide on a course of action or set of precautions that will be put in place to minimise the potential risk
- We then re-evaluate the level of risk once our course of action and precautions have been put in place.
- We create a risk assessment and collate them in the forest school file
- We inform all adults who are accompanying the group and require them to sign each relevant risk assessment to show that they have read and understood the assessments
- We regularly monitor and review each risk assessment, half termly and as an action is needed.

Accident and Emergency Procedures

First Aid

1. Follow policy and procedures document. Any illness or injury to be treated by a qualified first aider
2. A B C administer First Aid
3. Remove others in the group from the situation, ensuring they are safe
4. Notify school office. And if necessary call for further assistance or notify emergency services.
5. Have medical details available in medical bag, and notify parents/guardians as appropriate.
6. All accidents, however minor, must be reported to the head teacher who will complete an accident report form.
7. Follow up to parents as usual.

Lost or missing child

1. On discovery of missing child use '1, 2, 3 where are you?' procedure and recall rest of the group.
2. Assemble rest of the group to ensure they are safe
3. Commence immediate search of vicinity
4. Immediately notify school office
5. School to follow critical incident procedure

Death or serious incident

1. Follow First Aid Procedures
2. Remain with causality and remove others in group from the situation, ensuring they are safe
3. Immediately notify school office
4. School to inform emergency services, specifically the police
5. The police will notify the parents/guardians/next of kin
6. Gain advice on follow up from the police
7. Report to RIDDOR and Ofsted

Stranger or Uninvited Person

1. Challenge intruder, asking them to leave immediately. Escort them from the site.
2. Inform the school's office and DSL.
3. If a child is involved the police must be called, and the child/children involved are to be removed from situation and made to feel safe.
4. Parents/guardian should be briefed by forest school leader ASAP or in accordance with advice from the police, ASPA.

Behaviour Problems

1. Talk child involved down using de-escalation techniques
2. Remove other children from the area of risk, if it is deemed necessary
3. Inform the school office and call for help if needed
4. Debrief child after calm down period
5. Log incident
6. Inform parent/guardian
7. Create risk assessment, if necessary
8. Close supervision and monitoring of behaviour

Inclement Weather Procedures

We will not go to the forest school if the conditions are deemed dangerous such as high winds, during thunder storms, or during periods of extreme cold. We will use the BBC weather online forecast to make judgements about the expected conditions. In accordance with our health and safety policy our head teacher (Mrs Jayne Narraway) will ultimately make the decision deeming if the weather is suitable for forest school.

When it is wet, a shelter will be built immediately by a trained adult so that there is a sheltered area that is available from the start that can be used.

Many of our activities can be carried out within the EYFS outdoor area so no child will miss out if conditions do not allow us to go into the forest area.

Designated Person Responsibilities

Forest school leader:

Rachel Sizer

First Aider 1:

Rebecca Sullivan

First Aider 2:

Sharon Price

Additional First Aiders in the school include:

Lee Singleton, John Duckett, Jenni Monks, Kerri Shepherd, Nathan Boon

Designated Safeguarding Lead:

Jayne Narraway, John Duckett and Rachel Sizer

School Parent Agreement

The School

We will aim to work in partnership with parents and carers to:

- Provide high quality teaching and learning through a broad and balanced curriculum
- Value each child as an individual
- Understand that each child has their own learning style
- Encourage each child to achieve their personal best in all areas
- Provide opportunities for children to learn and practice new skills
- Encourage collaborative learning
- Encourage children to take risks in their own learning

The Family

I/will aim to work in partnership with the school and its staff to:

- Ensure that my child will attend school regularly and on time]
- Ensure that my child is equipped appropriately for Forest School
- Let the school know about any concerns and problems which might affect my child's behaviour or progress
- Support my child in opportunities for learning at home
- Attend parent consultations and discussions about my child's progress and school life
- Support the school policies and their rules for promoting good behaviour
- Respond promptly to school correspondence

The child

I will aim to follow the rules of the forest:

- I will be gentle
- I will be kind
- I will try my best
- I will be honest
- I will listen to others
- I will look after living things

Forest school leader signed: _____ Dated _____

Parent/carers signed: _____ Dated _____

Child signed : _____ Dated _____

I _____ (volunteer at Forest School)

have read and understood all that is stated in the handbook and had the opportunity to have any questions answered about the contents or my role. I understand that the Forest School Leader is in charge of the activities within the session, and have read the relevant risk assessment for the activities to take place during my session. I have provided my medical and emergency details to the forest School Leader.

Signed _____ Dated _____