

**Forest School Policy 2023-2024**

**What is Forest School and how do we define it at Ss. John & Monica’s?**

The Forest Education Initiative defines Forest School as;

*“… an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults, regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a local woodland environment”*

*“…The philosophy of Forest schools is to encourage and inspire individuals of any age through outdoor experiences.*

*By participating in engaging, motivating and achievable tasks and activities in woodland environment, each participant has the opportunity to develop intrinsic motivation and sound emotional and social skills. These, through self-awareness can be developed to reach their personal potential.”*

This approach to outdoor learning encourages children to: become independent, use their imagination, take appropriate risks within boundaries and initiate learning for themselves.

Forest School is a holistic approach to learning, incorporating children’s individuality and develops their skills for lifelong learning. It can cover a wide area of learning, including the emotional and spiritual aspects of learning where self-esteem and self-confidence can grow and positive relationships with peers can be formed. It also uses an accelerated, active learning approach by: involving the whole person, using physical activity, creativity, images and colour designed to get children deeply involved in their own learning.

Forest School explores the outdoors and the natural environment with practical, useful activities all year round. It develops peer learning with the adults providing support and enabling activities to take place. The child’s interest will be at the heart of any activity, therefore learning is often explorative and child-led.

**Aims and Objectives.**

At Ss. John and Monica, Forest School will aim to develop;-

* **Self-awareness**- the ability to recognise oneself as an individual separate from the environment and other individuals.
* **Self-esteem**- a person's overall emotional evaluation of his or her own worth.
* **Self-respect**- pride and confidence in oneself.
* **Self-regulation**-the ability to control their own behaviour and contribute to a team project.
* **Intrinsic motivation**-the ability to direct their own learning
* **Empathy** with other children and creatures in their natural surroundings
* **Emotional Intelligence-**Creating positive relationships both with themselves and others.
* **Emotional Literacy-**
* **Resilience-** Overcoming difficulties and facing challenges.
* **Good social and communication skills**.
* **Independenc**e.

**Implementation**

Risk assessments, good practice, Forest School activities, rules for tools and fire etc. can all be found within the Forest School area on staff-shared. This contains everything you need to know about our Forest School sessions, for example, procedures, risk assessments, environmental impacts, overview and design.

The class medical box will be easily accessible and the leader and staff members will be aware of any medical issues that need managing. The forest school leader holds a first aid qualification.

All staff involved will be aware of emergency proceedures.

**Access and Inclusivity.**

Ss. John and Monica has an Inclusion, Special Educational Needs Policy and an Equality and Diversity Policy which will be adhered to during Forest School sessions.

Forest School activities are available to **all** children in the school with no exceptions. As far as is practicable, we will make all reasonable adjustments to allow children to have access to the Forest school area and to all activities provided. Reasonable adjustments include: staffing ratios, group size and resources.

Reasonable adjustments will be made to ensure inclusivity for all. Inclusion is a thread which runs through all of the Forest School activities regardless of a child’s: ability, SEND, gender, race or culture.

Protective clothing and footwear will be required. The children are encouraged to become independent in dressing themselves from the Early Years and beyond. This secures an awareness of the importance of appropriate clothing in relation to weather and environment. Children also gain understanding about the properties and suitability of materials used in making suitable clothing.

Forest School activities are designed to be accessible to all children, a differentiation of support being made for children with SEND or who have English as a Second Language.

We do not make adaptations to the forest other than those required by Health and Safety Risk Assessment, in order to preserve the natural state of our forest.

**Health and Safety**

Forest School sessions by their nature encourage children to develop their own risk management skills and will support them to become responsible for themselves and others around them. Children will be reminded of rules and safe play if they are considered too dangerous. Ratios within the woodland area remain the same as indoors as we are still on the school premises.

Risk assessments will be carried out before each session and for the use of all tools and equipment. The Forest School Leader will assess weather conditions regularly and will evacuate the area if they become too extreme. All children and adults will wear appropriate clothing depending upon the weather conditions. The Forest School Leader will be present at all times and children will be reminded of safe practice. The school has a Health and Safety Policy, Safeguarding Children Policy etc. to enhance aspects of health and safety

Risk Assessments will include:

* The site of the Forest School
* Individual Risk Assessments for tools (bill hook, bow saw, mallets, knives)
* Individual Risk Assessments for all activities.

**First Aid.**

The Forest School Leader has a Forest School Activity First Aid Certificate to specifically cover outdoors. There will be a first aid kit taken into the woodland area along with the Forest First Aid folder. Emergency procedures are within the Forest School Sessions Folder which is taken into the woodland each session. Ensure all staff are aware of medical conditions of the children, and medication such as inhalers and epi pens are taken into woodland.

**Use of Tools**

Children and adults will be trained in the use of each tool before they use it. Tools will be counted in and out and checked against an inventory. Tools will be stored safely and kept out of the reach of children. They will be cleaned after each use to prolong their life, broken and damaged tools will not be used.

Children and adults will be informed of rules, safety and how to use before they use.

**Use of Fires**

A Forest School Leader must always be present when a fire is lit and the fire must never be left unattended. There must always be water available to extinguish the fire and fire gloves.

Children will be reminded of the fire pit procedures at each and every visit.

* Walk behind the log seats and stand behind the log.
* Step over and sit down on the log seat.
* Stand up, turn around and step over the log.
* Children are not allowed to cross the fire circle
* When lighting a fire correct seating position is to be adhered to at all times.

**Environment.**

Wherever possible, environmentally friendly products and recycled materials will be used. Ss. John and Monica will promote environmental awareness and care for our environment. Conservation issues and sustainability will also be supported as well as links to current global climate issues and our responsibilities outlined within our Catholic faith.

The woodland will be maintained to ensure the survival of all native flora and fauna, and new flora will be introduced if needed.

We will remove all litter and debris we take into the woodland and have regular litter picks to remove other refuse which is in the area. We will be caring towards our neighbours and try to minimise the amount of smoke and noise produced.

Brambles and nettles will be removed from the main pathways but will be allowed to grow in other areas of the woodland. Branches at eye level and below on the main pathways will be removed to avoid injuries for people entering the woodland. Dead and fallen branches will also be removed, cut down and stored in the log store and used as fire wood.

During the winter months, large stones and logs will be left alone to avoid disturbing hibernating creatures. There will be areas created where wood is allowed to rot to encourage insects to thrive, flowers will be allowed to grow and the children will be encouraged to enjoy them growing rather than pick them.

**Roles and Responsibilities.**

The Forest School Leader will have a level 3 Forest School Leader qualification, CRB enhanced disclosure and an Outdoor First Aid qualification.

The Forest School Leader will have the overall responsibility for:

* Risk assessments for each session, pre-visit site checks and continuous safety monitoring.
* Planning for sessions, differentiation for individual children’s needs.
* Ensuring necessary equipment is taken into woodland.
* Administration of first aid and first aid kit.
* Supervision of tools use, cleaning and storing.
* Organising emergency procedures.

Staff/ students / volunteers will model good practice throughout the session by: carrying out delegated roles and responsibilities, extending children’s learning where appropriate by asking extending questions, supporting children to manage their own risk, reminding children of rules and boundaries, being aware of dangers within Forest School, monitoring levels of safety at all times and supporting the Forest School Leader to run the sessions.

**Contribution to other curriculum areas.**

Activities engaged in at Forest School are often linked to work that the children are covering in their formal class lessons. (Forest School supports this learning by providing an environment in which children can develop their learning in a more engaging and self-directed way.)

Our Forest School activities are planned to develop all areas of the class curriculum with a focus on the holistic learning and accelerated learning approaches.

Forest school activities are planned by the Forest School leader through consultation with class teacher to ensure that links can be made between Forest School sessions and classroom learning (where relevant.) After the session, the class teacher is able to use the children’s outdoor experiences to stimulate children’s learning.

**Resources**

The school will keep a limited stock of resources but in general, activities will be based upon the use of natural materials found in the Forest School area. This may entail a degree of creative planning, - it is important that children see Forest School as different from their usual class activities but supporting their learning in an alternative way.

**Timetabling of Forest School Sessions**

Over the course of the school year, each class will be allocated a series of at least six sessions led by our Forest School teacher who is employed 2 full days every week. SS John and Monica’s also offers a Forest School club twice weekly to further embrace children’s love of this.

Currently, children bring their own protective clothing and footwear if possible. This allows for more time in the forest as less time is spent locating school clothing items that fit, and less time is spent changing. We have a limited amount of kit available in case appropriate clothing isn’t brought.

**Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually or before should any incidents arise or laws and policies change.