



## Forest School Policy

### 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 a 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 that incorporates children's individuality and develops their skills for lifelong learning. It can cover a wide range of learning, including the emotional and spiritual aspects, where self-esteem and self-confidence can grow, and positive relationships with peers can be formed. It also uses an accelerated, active-learning approach that involves the whole person through 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 their 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.**
- **Independence.**

### **Principles of Operation**

Forest School at SS John and Monica's adheres to the six nationally recognised Forest School Association (FSA) principles. Sessions are delivered as a long-term programme to enable continuity, relationship-building, and developmental progression. Activities are learner-centred, allowing children to direct aspects of their exploration and learning, and are facilitated rather than dictated by adults.

Sessions take place in our designated woodland area, offering children an authentic natural environment that promotes curiosity, discovery, and imaginative play. While sessions are delivered throughout the year and in most weather conditions, the Forest School Leader will continually assess safety. Activities will pause or be relocated indoors during extreme conditions such as high winds, thunderstorms, or excessive heat, where safety cannot be assured.

### **Implementation**

All Forest School procedures, risk assessments, environmental guidance, and activity plans are available in the Forest School folder located on the Staff Shared drive. This includes detailed operational guidance that all staff involved with Forest School are expected to be familiar with.

The Forest School Leader holds a Level 3 Forest School qualification and an appropriate Outdoor First Aid qualification. Before each session, the Leader conducts a site check and considers the needs of the specific group attending. Staff are briefed on medical needs, behavioural considerations, and any required adaptations. The class medical box, inhalers, and other essential medication are taken to the woodland each session.

## **Health and Safety**

Health and safety underpin all Forest School practice. Risk is recognised as a valuable part of learning; however, it is managed rigorously and responsibly—the school commissions regular Forest Tree reports to ensure that the forest area is safe to use. The report indicates any trees which need to be pruned or felled.

A comprehensive risk assessment is undertaken for the overall site, individual tools, particular activities, and the session environment. Daily site checks ensure that hazards are identified and addressed before children enter the area. Weather conditions are monitored regularly, and the site will be evacuated immediately if conditions become unsafe.

Staffing ratios remain high to ensure constant supervision and safe play. A qualified Forest School Leader is present at all times, supported by additional staff members. Ratios generally reflect the level of risk associated with planned activities, pupil age, and group complexity.

A clear emergency procedure is in place and communicated to all adults participating in a session. This includes the use of a designated recall signal, protocols for a missing child, access to communication devices (such as mobile phones or walkie-talkies), and a fully stocked first-aid kit. All staff must be familiar with children's medical conditions and ensure that relevant medication is taken to the site.

Hygiene practices form part of everyday routines, with children required to wash their hands after sessions. No child is permitted to eat or taste anything found within the forest environment.

## **Access and Inclusivity.**

SS. John and Monica have 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 that runs through all 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 an understanding of the properties and suitability of the materials used to make clothing.

Forest School activities are designed to be accessible to all children, with differentiated support for children with SEND or English as an additional language.

We do not make adaptations to the forest other than those required by the Health and Safety Risk Assessment to preserve its natural state.

### **First Aid.**

The Forest School Leader holds a Forest School Activity First Aid Certificate specifically for outdoor activities. All staff are aware of the children's medical conditions, and that medication such as inhalers and EPI pens are taken into the woodland.

### **Clothing and Personal Equipment**

Children must wear suitable outdoor clothing to participate safely and comfortably. Clothing should allow freedom of movement, protect against the weather, and minimise the risk of injury. Long sleeves and long trousers are required at all times to protect against scratches, bites, and sun exposure. Waterproof jackets and trousers, along with sturdy closed-toe footwear, should be worn during wet or muddy conditions. Seasonal items such as sun hats, gloves, warm layers, or sun cream should be worn depending on the time of year. 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 that fits and changing. We have a limited amount of kit available in case appropriate clothing isn't brought.

Independence is encouraged by expecting children to manage their own clothing, particularly in the Early Years.

### **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 the rules, safety, and how to use them before they use them.

### **Use of Fires**

Fires are only lit under the direct supervision of the Forest School Leader and in suitable weather conditions. A water bucket, fire blanket, and protective gloves must be available at all times. Children are taught a straightforward method for entering and exiting the fire circle safely and are reminded of fire rules during every session. Fires must never be left unattended, and the area must be fully extinguished before leaving the site.

Children will be reminded of the fire pit procedures at 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, the correct seating position is to be adhered to at all times.

### **Environment.**

Environmental stewardship is integral to our Forest School and aligns with the Catholic mission of caring for God's creation. Children learn to respect and protect the woodland and its inhabitants. These include the following measures:

- Sustainable practices are promoted through the use of environmentally friendly products, recycling, and responsible resource use.
- The woodland is carefully managed, and areas are left at times to maintain its ecological health, with consideration for seasonal wildlife behaviours such as hibernation.
- Litter is removed regularly, and only the minimum necessary vegetation is cleared to maintain safe access.
- The amount of smoke and noise we produce will be minimised in the interests of local neighbours
- 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 along the main pathways will be removed to prevent injuries to people entering the woodland.
- Dead and fallen branches will also be removed, cut down, stored in the log store, and used as firewood.
- During the winter months, large stones and logs will be left alone to avoid disturbing hibernating creatures.

- Areas will be created where wood is allowed to rot to encourage insects to thrive, and flowers will be allowed to grow, with the children encouraged to enjoy them growing rather than picking them.

### **Code of Conduct**

A clear code of conduct supports safe, respectful behaviour and is regularly shared with children. Pupils are expected to remain within the designated boundaries and demonstrate care for themselves, others, and the environment. Staff use positive reinforcement and supportive language to guide children's behaviour. Should behaviour compromise safety, the child may be temporarily withdrawn from an activity or, where necessary, the session. They are reminded not to put fingers or natural items in their mouths and to treat all wildlife with respect, avoiding the picking of living plants or flowers unless explicitly permitted for an activity.

Tool use and fire activities require strict adherence to safety guidance. All children must follow instructions at all times and demonstrate readiness before engaging in higher-risk tasks. A "leave no trace" approach is embedded, with all litter and equipment removed at the end of each session.

### **Roles and Responsibilities.**

The Forest School Leader holds 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 (RA signed off by Head Teacher).
- Planning for sessions, differentiation for individual children's needs.
- Ensuring the necessary equipment is taken into the woodland.
- Administration of first aid and first aid kit.
- Supervision of the use of tools, cleaning and storing.
- Adhering to 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 at Forest School are often linked to work the children are covering in their wider curriculum subjects, with a focus on holistic and accelerated learning.

Forest school activities are planned by the Forest School leader, in consultation with the class teacher, to ensure links can be made between Forest School sessions and classroom learning (where relevant). After the session, the class teacher can use the children's outdoor experiences to stimulate their 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 - children must see Forest School as different from their usual class activities, but supporting their learning in an alternative way.

### **Timetabling of Forest School Sessions and After-School Club**

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 for two full days each week. SS John and Monica's also offers an After-School Forest School club twice weekly to embrace children's love of this further.

### **Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be reviewed biennially or before any incidents arise, or laws and policies change.

Dec 2025

Review: Dec 2027