

## S.S. John and Monica's Catholic Primary School

### Forest-School Curriculum Design and Overview

Forest-Schools sits in a unique place within the school timetable. Being a child led, responsive programme, it does not follow a structured, progressive system in the same way that a traditional curriculum subject would. Indeed, it would be counterproductive to impose such a traditional structure on it; it is an experience more akin to a therapeutic intervention than a traditional subject. The progress of a session, or series of sessions, will depend on the moods and enthusiasms of the children involved, chance events and encounters during the session, and the maturity and age of the children. In addition, children should not be expected or forced to participate in a given activity, or given a level of expectation of what they will achieve. In practical terms, this would mean that a child would not be told that they will be learning to climb trees, or told they have to climb to a given height. This imposes a definition of success, and subsequently the chance of failure. A child presented with the opportunity of tree climbing may choose to join in, or to pursue another interest. Anything they achieve will be their choice and their own achievement, and the more powerful and valuable experience for that. That said, the types of experiences made available for the children, the broad expectations of how they may engage and behave on sessions and the amount of independence and responsibility given to the children by staff will alter and develop as they progress through the school; a year one pupil will experience Forest-Schools sessions in a different way to a year six pupil, albeit sharing a similar fundamental experience. This overview seeks to establish a broad framework for the delivery of Forest Schools, and ensure that the children gain full benefit from the sessions. The following is taken from the Forest-Schools Association website and gives an overview of the aims of Forest School, and how it is implemented at SS John and Monica's.

*Forest School is an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence, self-regulation and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences involving managed risk-taking in a woodland.*

#### **What is Forest School?**

Forest School is a type of outdoor education which facilitates the holistic development of the learner through play, risk-taking and nature connection. Forest School is an ethos-driven process and is governed by six core principles. Like many ethos-based approaches, it is the interplay between the core principles that makes it work and it is only when the six principles are found together that we see the subtle and complex progression that Forest School is designed to deliver. Forest School works to support self-esteem, confidence, communication, attitudes to learning and emotional development.

## **The Six Core Principles**

1. Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.
2. Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a lifelong relationship between the learner and the natural world.
3. Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
4. Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
5. Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
6. Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners, who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice

### **Trust**

At the heart of Forest-Schools sessions is the development and maintenance of trust. It is down to the individual to leader to decide how they interpret and apply the above; all new series of sessions should begin with low risk, simple activities and build up to more risky or advanced sessions as the trust between the staff and children is established. This may mean that some groups will not experience the same activities as other groups of the same age, dependent on their maturity, engagement and interests, which is in line with the personalised nature of Forest-Schools. Trust should be explicitly and regularly discussed with the children as part of all sessions.

**Forest School at SS John and Monica's: Overarching principles in line with the Forest School Association**

**Development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world**

- aims to foster a relationship with nature through regular personal experiences in order to develop long-term, environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices in staff, learners and the wider community.

- Forest School uses natural resources for inspiration, to enable ideas and to encourage intrinsic motivation.

**Learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning**

Play and choice are an integral part of the Forest School learning process, and play is recognised as vital to learning and development at Forest School.

- Forest School provides a stimulus for all learning preferences and dispositions.
- Reflective practice is a feature of each session to ensure learners and practitioners can understand their achievements, develop emotional intelligence and plan for the future.

**Promotion of the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners**

- aim to link experiences at Forest School to home, work and /or school education

- Forest School programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of the learner.

**Opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.**

- opportunities are designed to build on an individual's innate motivation, positive attitudes and/or interests.

- Forest School uses tools and fires only where deemed appropriate to the learners, and dependent on completion of a baseline risk assessment.
- Any Forest School experience follows a Risk-Benefit process managed jointly by the practitioner and learner that is tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Independence and boundaries</b>	<b>Interaction with Nature</b>	<b>Group Work and interaction</b>	<b>Adult Support</b>
<b>Year 1+2</b>	Children in these year groups would be expected to work within shortened boundaries, typically staying within adult sight, or even closer, perhaps holding hands if less confident.	Children would typically be curious about the world around them, but require adult mediation to explore and understand, or adult questioning or planning to ensure they get the best outcomes.	Children would be expected to work together, but groups may be smaller (pairs or threes) and often include adults, or very close adult support.	Adults would be expected to lead sessions (albeit responding to suggestions from the children) and provide very direct support and reassurance.
<b>Year 3+4</b>	Children should be becoming more independent, choosing the appropriate distances to be from adults, although adults should still monitor and discuss to ensure boundaries are appropriate.	Children should be developing some knowledge of the animals and plants around them, identifying the more common ones by sight and making comments and predictions about where they may be and why.	Children should be able to work together and discuss and negotiate together to achieve tasks; they may be more independent in doing so, but require adult support and intervention to achieve positive outcomes.	Adult support should be more low key, with activities being more child led, and adults using questioning, or advice to support the children and guide their ideas
<b>Year 5+6</b>	Children should be confident and able to make choices and plan activities for themselves – they should effectively choose their own boundaries, choosing the appropriate distances to be from	Children should be confidently able to identify common woodland species and talk about the relationships between them and their habitats.	Children should be able to collaborate and work together, negotiating with each other and responding positively to others ideas. Groups should be	Activities should, ideally, be entirely child led, with adults providing low key, minimal support as needed. Children should be confident in seeking advice and support when needed.

	<p>the adults dependent on terrain and activities. Children would also be expected to have more control and choice over clothing – e.g. choosing trainers over wellies if wanting to climb*</p>		<p>more fluid and alter according to the activities undertaken.</p>	
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Age Group	Possible Activities Onsite	Possible Activities Offsite
Year 1+2+3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult led and supported campfire</li> <li>• Use of simple tools, such as potato peelers to create toasting sticks</li> <li>• Cooking of simple foods</li> <li>• Making of “Tree Cookie” medals</li> <li>• Assisting adults with splitting and cutting of firewood</li> <li>• Lighting small fires, using flint and steel, to help start a communal fire</li> <li>• Basic knot tying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration of woodlands</li> <li>• Viewing and feeding of animals</li> <li>• Tracking and searching for wildlife</li> <li>• Scavenger hunts</li> <li>• Assisting adults in building rope swings</li> <li>• Building simple dens</li> <li>• Tree climbing</li> <li>• Paddling (both in lake and in mud!)</li> <li>• Assisting leader to make hot chocolate with Kelly Kettle</li> <li>• Gathering natural materials (e.g. firewood, resources for art)</li> <li>• Map reading/orienteering type activities (including treasure hunts)</li> <li>• Pond dipping</li> </ul>
Year 4+5+6	<p><i>Older pupils would typically do all of the above activities, but with changes in the level of independence and responsibility – e.g. lighting the Kelly Kettle for hot chocolate without help, rather than assisting or making a rope swing with the adult supervising to ensure it is safe, rather than leading the building. In addition, some more technical activities, listed below, will be reserved for older children.</i></p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building more complex objects – e.g. making wooden mallets or animals</li> <li>• Shelter building with tarpaulins on site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More specialised work with wildlife – e.g. twig traps to track animals, or photography</li> <li>• Creation of more complex and advanced shelters, or group shelters</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building different forms or fire, or building and controlling individual fires</li> <li>• Cooking more complex items, or using a cooking stove</li> <li>• Use of more complex tools, independent/ chosen tool use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of activities for younger children – eg making a treasure hunt trail</li> <li>• Fishing trip</li> <li>• Visiting more remote locations – eg Paccar Camp – for longer periods of time</li> <li>• Using tools on offsite sessions</li> </ul>
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