



St. Mary's Catholic Primary School
Ysgol Gynradd Gatholig Y Santes Fair
Milford Road, Newtown, Powys,
SY16 2EH
Headteacher: S Ruggeri



Forest School Policy

Version 2

Reviewed and approved by the Governing Body:	22 nd October 2024
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Signed by Governor representative	<i>M.A. Bacigalupo</i>

Introduction

Forest Schools is an area of our curriculum provision aimed at developing learners' awareness of both themselves and their environment, at promoting positive self-esteem, encouraging the growth of both independent practical skills and confidence in working as part of an effective team, alongside supporting the development of fine and gross motor skills. The Forest School Area will continue to be developed alongside our learners, for example, through planting new trees and creating fencing.

1. Forest School Leaders

The Forest School Leaders, Lynne Austin and Paulina Jurkiewicz-Davies are fully qualified to plan, deliver and review Forest School sessions. All sessions are carried out with an adult to learner ratio of 2:12. If additional support is required for learners with ALN, then an additional member of staff is required to support that learner / learners under the direction of the Forest School Leaders. When using tools, the ratio will increase – see tools procedure below.

2. Ethos of Play

The Welsh Assembly is committed to ensuring that all learners have access to rich, stimulating play experiences, with safeguards from inappropriate risk, but full of challenge, offering them opportunity to explore, through freely chosen play. Through play, learners explore and develop the learning experiences that help them make sense of the world. They practice and build up their own ideas, learn how to control themselves and begin to understand the need for rules. Learners should enjoy energetic activity both indoor and out and the feeling of wellbeing it brings.

Forest School sessions provide a multi-sensory environment which responds to individual learning styles. It compliments and enhances all aspects of development and learning through its physical, open-ended nature. Learners can think creatively, both alongside others and alone. They can express fears or re-live anxious experiences, in controlled and safe situations.

During the sessions the Forest School Leaders will have a group of twelve learners. These will be split into three groups of four, with two groups working with a Forest School Leader and the third group experiencing a choice of independent activities.

3. Planning and preparation

Preparation and planning time for the Forest School Leaders is provided in the first week of each term, thus no learner sessions will take place during these planning times.

4. Environmental Impact

The aim of Forest School is to enable our learners to appreciate our environment and the need for them to fulfil their stewardship role in caring for it. This can be achieved through creating habitats for different wildlife, raising awareness of our ecological impact and ensuring the safe use of natural items for craft activities.

5. Inclusivity

The ethos of this school is that all learners and staff are equally included in all aspects of the school day. We follow the Equality Act 2010, UN Convention on the rights of the child, the

UN convention of the rights of people with disabilities and the Human Rights Act 1998, throughout the whole school – this includes in Forest School.

Activities and resources are organised to be appropriate for the learners to access at their own level of challenge. There is a great degree of flexibility, with the focus upon being learner-led. Throughout the sessions, there is often opportunities to develop emotional literacy, with encouragement given to increasing self-awareness, that of peers and the environment.

6. Safeguarding

Safeguarding the learners at this school is everyone's responsibility – the Safeguarding Policy should be followed at all times.

7. Health and Safety

The health and safety of our learners, staff and visitors is of paramount importance. Health and safety is always considered when planning sessions and taken into account when drawing up risk assessments.

The Forest School area is located within the school grounds; the site is being developed alongside the learners. The site is covered under the school's liability insurance, the policy number is - Y082744QBE0119A.

The Forest School Leaders have the responsibility to make the sessions run safely and have a duty of care for the learners and other helpers. Any additional staff members or volunteers that are involved in sessions, also have a duty of care to the learners they are supporting.

Annual Site Risk Assessment

A Site Risk Assessment is carried out on an annual basis by the Forest School Leaders. This will be updated as and when required because of seasonal changes or other permanent changes. The school ensures that there is a Tree Survey completed every three years, with works undertaken immediately should any be deemed necessary by tree specialists.

Weekly Site Risk Assessment

As Forest School sessions run weekly, a weekly site risk assessment will be carried out prior to each session. In the event of high winds or other extreme weather conditions, (ice, heavy rain, etc) the sessions may be cancelled or moved to another area. After each risk assessment the leaders will remove any hazards, if possible, or secure the area and ensure all issues are resolved where possible. If it is not possible to eliminate the hazard, the activity will be postponed or rearranged in another area, where it is not possible for the hazard to pose a risk.

Activity Risk Assessments

Risk assessments are undertaken for each planned activity. These are stored in the Forest School folder on Teams. Any additional staff or volunteers involved in sessions are provided with a session plan and risk assessment form prior to the session starting.

8. Fire Safety

Safe fire practice is always followed, with learners being taught to understand these rules.

The fire circle will always be supervised when lit. Nearby there is kept a bucket of water, a damp cloth and fire safety gloves. All staff and pupils are required to have any long hair tied back during sessions. Seating is 1.5m away from the fire pit and any shelter is higher than 8ft above the fire pit.

Learners are taught the rules of the fire circle and this is reinforced every session:

- Stand behind the log.
- Step in front of log and sit on the log.
- Stand up, step to the side and around the back of the log.

Learners are not to walk across the circle or step inside the circle, unless under the instruction of the Forest School Leaders.

When starting a fire, learners will be taught this in stages, they will not build and light during the same lesson. They must understand all guidelines before the Forest School Leaders will consider individual learners lighting fires:

- Check the direction of the wind before starting anything.
- Ensure the area is suitable, the ground layer is not peat and that there are no overhanging branches.
- All hair must be tied up and loose jewellery must be removed.
- When a large fire is being lit the learners will be asked to sit on the fire circle, which is 1.5m away from the fire with spaces between the benches so learners can leave the circle safely.
- The area must be checked to make sure there are no trip hazards or rubbish that could blow onto fire.
- All fire steels/flints/matches and fire fighters will be stored in a box and stored in a safe place.
- The fire will never be left unattended.
- When extinguishing the fire, water will be gently poured on to the fire from the outside inwards.
- Using the back of your hand check that it has cooled sufficiently, if not add more water.
- Spread out the ashes of the fire.

9. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)

For any activity involving the use of tools, all learners must wear the correct PPE. These are strong protective gloves if using knives, saws, axes, secateurs or loppers.

10. Use of Tools

- All tools to be kept in the Forest Schools shed. This is a safe and secure place, which is always kept locked when not in use.
- All tools are counted out and in again at the end of sessions.
- When using tools, learners work 1:1 with a supervising adult. This may increase as the learners become more proficient in using the equipment.
- Learners are shown how to use each tool safely.
- All learners will learn the importance of the Blood Bubble (this is a procedure where nobody enters the immediate space being used by a learner using a tool).

- Any broken tools and equipment are to be immediately reported to the Forest School Leaders.
- All tools are cleaned at end of the session. Children will be shown and supervised how to use each tool safely.

Individual Tools:

Bow Saw - These are used for sawing wood, which can be used for many different purposes, eg. to fell a small tree, den building, making tree cookies.

PPE required: Gloves on non-working hand

Safety precautions: Ensure the use of a safe working bubble; ensure the ground beneath your feet is clear from hazards; if a second person is holding the wood ensure they are a safe distance from the blade and wearing gloves.

Equipment checks: Ensure the blade is not damaged / blunt and securely fastened to the frame.

Loppers – These are used to cut wood, which is thumb size in diameter. Due to the longer handles, these can be used to reach higher branches.

PPE required: Gloves on non-working hand.

Safety precautions: When carrying make sure the blade is facing down to the ground and carry under arm; make sure body is not placed between the handles, as when they close body part will become trapped; make sure to have a safe working bubble.

Equipment checks- check the blades by placing one handle over your shoulder and holding the other blade firmly in your hand with your free hand check the blade is not loose and does not have any chips.

Secateurs – These are used for cutting smaller branches/twigs

PPE required: Gloves to be worn on both hands

Safety precautions: When not using make sure they are locked and facing down, when passing to another person make sure you pass them the blade and they are wearing gloves.

Equipment checks: Check blade is secure and not damaged, store in a dry place and make sure cleaned after use.

Mallet – These are used for hammering and as an additional tool to use with other tools.

PPE required: Glove on non-tool hand

Safety precautions: When using keep in working bubble, keep safe distance from others, do not swing mallet around.

Equipment checks – clean and store in dry place.

Fixed knife blade – These are used for cutting and carving,

PPE required: No glove to be on tool hand and a well fitted glove on non-knife hand

Safety precautions: When using keep a safe distance, make the group aware of the tool, keep blade facing away from you, keep in protective cover when not in use.

Equipment checks: Clean after session, check blade not damaged and store in secure place.

For new tools introduced to sessions, this policy will be updated accordingly.

11. First Aid

The Forest School Leaders will be informed prior to sessions if any learners have any medical needs, allergies and any care plans. As the Forest School is being held on site there is no requirement for an emergency plan for returning to the school.

The Forest School Leaders are qualified in providing first aid.

The first aid kit is stored with the Forest School equipment. When Forest School is in session, the first aid kit is kept in the designated first aid area, where minor injuries may be treated. Forest School Leaders and supporting adults will have access to this first aid kit. No volunteers, visitors or learners are to access the first aid kit. The contents of the first aid kit are regularly checked and restocked according to this list - antiseptic wipes, eye wash, various sizes of plasters, bandages and slings, various sizes of adhesive wound dressings, disposable gloves, micro-pore tape, CPR face shield, blanket, instant ice packs, burn gel/spray.

If a minor injury happens during the forest school session, then the forest school leaders will deal with the injury accordingly using the first aid kit and completing the accident record book. If it is a more serious injury the session will be stopped, a head count taken and the learners taken back into the school building by one of the Forest School Leaders. The other Forest School Leader will call for assistance from the first aiders within the school and the situation assessed for further treatment according to the school's first aid procedures.

The Forest School Leaders will always have a mobile phone and the school walkie talkie on them in order to contact the school or emergency services immediately.

Emergency Procedures:

- Forest School Leader 1, call the office, explain situation, and ask for extra help. The Forest School Leader will make the decision if the office needs to call the parents to collect the learner or if emergency service is required (call 999)
- Forest School Leader 2 to call, "1,2,3, Come to me".
- Gather learners and do head count.
- Learners return to school building with Forest School Leader 2 or additional adult from school site
- Forest School Leader 1 will comfort the learner in distress and administer first aid if needed.
- Forest School Leader 1 to complete the accident record and copy to be sent for parents / carers.

The Forest School Leaders will also have other items in a separate bag in case they are needed: fire blanket, bucket of cold water (only if fire is planned); tissues and paper towels; hand wash gel; wipes.

12. Food and Hygiene Procedures

There will be a no eating procedure in place during Forest School session, unless it is a planned cooking session. There will be no use of the wild food grown in the grounds in order to prevent any confusion as to what is safe / unsafe to eat.

Prior to preparing any food, hands must be washed thoroughly in the washrooms within the school building. Any cuts must be covered by a blue food grade plaster or gloves worn.

Water used for cooking is stored in sealed containers specifically for cooking use. Any foods that are to be used for cooking are carried in sealed bags and containers to ensure they do not become contaminated while being transported.

Any cooking will be fully supervised and the cooked food checked by an adult before being eaten.

When clearing away, any uneaten food must be put into the green food waste bags and placed in the food waste bin. Any other rubbish must be placed in black bin bags and put into the rubbish bins.

The area must be fully checked to make sure no food or other rubbish is left to help prevent attracting vermin.

Any pots, pans, utensils used will be washed by the learners in a designated washing up bowl. To ensure correct standards of hygiene are upheld, these will then be rewashed by an adult inside the school building.

13. Clothing Requirements

All learners and adults taking part in the Forest School sessions must wear appropriate clothing for outdoor learning throughout the year. If learners or adults are not wearing suitable clothing then they will be unable to take part in the session.

Summer clothing: long sleeved tops/T-shirts, light weight trousers, socks, sturdy footwear (sandals and flip flops will not be allowed), sun Hat

If insect repellent is required, parents/carers will need to complete the school's medical forms in order for it to be applied.

Winter clothing: vest/T-shirts, long sleeved tops, thick jumper/fleece/hoodie, waterproof coat, thick/thermal socks, sturdy footwear, hat, gloves.

14. Toilet Procedure

All learners will be encouraged to use the toilet before the session begins to reduce the need to go back into the school building and remove layers of clothing during a session. However, if the toilet is required during a session, the learner will need to return through the outside door off the corridor. The learner must inform the Forest School Leader prior to leaving the area. If tools are being used and the Forest School Leader needs to accompany the learner, due to age or needs, then all tools will be put down until they return.

15. Roles and Responsibilities of Forest School Leaders:

- Responsible for planning the activities and sourcing the materials needed sustainably

- Ensuring that all risk assessments are carried out correctly
- Abide by the 2:6 adult:child ratio in all sessions
- Responsible for the discipline of learners during sessions, in keeping with the school's behaviour policy. Guidance will be sought from the Headteacher when required.
- Ensure that all learners and supporting adults and children have suitable clothing before they enter the Forest School Area. If the clothing is inadequate the Forest School Leaders will stop the learners or supporting adults or children from taking part in the sessions.
- Observe the participation of all learners, ensuring that sessions are continually adapted to suit the needs of all learners throughout the term.
- Ensure that any supporting adults understand their individual roles, ensuring that all learners are included to promote self-esteem, positive wellbeing and independence.
- Ensure first aid qualifications are up-to-date.
- Ensure the first aid kit is fully stocked, according to the 'First Aid Supply List' and that any medicines required by learners or adults are safely stored during sessions and that any relevant paperwork is completed in accordance with the school's medication policy.
- Ensure that the Forest School policy is reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

16. Roles and Responsibilities of Supporting Adults

All supporting adults will be expected to take part and actively join in with the learners, encouraging full participation in activities in order to help boost their confidence and self-esteem.

- All adults must follow the rules of the Forest School and lead by example.
- All adults must read and sign this policy and procedures handbook.
- All adults will be shown the planned activities before sessions begin.
- All adults will be shown the risk assessments for that day.
- Tools are only to be used upon the approval of the Forest School Leaders.
- All adults are to be aware of where the first aid kit is kept and of the first aid policy followed by the school.
- If first aid is required, the supporting adult must notify the Forest School Leaders of incident details and first aid delivered. The accident book must be completed and parent/carer notified by letter.
- After each session, the supporting adult should allow time for helping the learners and Forest School Leaders to ensure that all equipment and tools are put away and that the Forest School Area is clean and tidy.

17. Daily Procedures

Before Sessions:

- Activity risk assessment to be completed and made available for additional staff, visitors or volunteers.
- Activity plans shared with additional staff, visitors or volunteers.

- Undertake a risk check of the Forest School Area.
- Create a check list of resources and tools needed for sessions.
- Gather tools.
- Check contents of First Aid kit and ensure it is readily available in designated First Aid Area

At the start of sessions:

- Complete a register of attendees.
- Ensure correct adult to learner ratio is in place – 2:12
- Check appropriate clothing for learners and additional adults.
- Remind the learners of the rules and expectations.

At the end of each session

- Forest School Leaders will call, “1,2,3, come to me”.
- Learners and adults will collect resources and place in the designated safe area.
- Learners will gather at the fire circle benches.
- A register / head count will be taken.
- Forest School Leader to lead a reflection session or game.
- Learners will return to their classroom, changing clothes and shoes if required.
- Forest School Leaders to return tools to lockable storage area.
- Forest School Leaders will return to the Forest School area to double check nothing has been left out and the fire has been extinguished correctly if it has been.

Evaluation for next session

- Forest School Leaders will discuss the session and decide on any changes that may be needed for future sessions.

18. Forest School Rules

There are a clear set of rules for learners to abide by during their sessions. The following rules are recapped at the beginning of each session by the Forest School Leaders:

- Appropriate clothes and footwear must be worn.
- Stay within the boundary of the Forest School.
- Walk while in Forest School.
- Do not put anything in your mouth.
- Do not throw anything.
- Drag large, long sticks behind you.
- Carry small sticks facing downwards.
- Check with an adult before using any tools.
- Follow the tool rules.
- Care for the environment.
- Make sure hands are washed after each session.
- Have fun and enjoy yourself!

It is the responsibility of all staff in school to support the Forest School Leaders in ensuring that all learners understand why these rules are so important. If these rules are not followed then the Forest School Area may become dangerous to themselves and others around them. If the Forest School Leaders feel that the rules are not being followed correctly, then the sessions come to an immediate end. If a particular learner does not follow the rules, they will not be allowed to attend the sessions until the Headteacher and Forest School Leaders believe that their behaviour has improved in order for them to safely rejoin the group

19. Cancellation procedure

A session may need to be cancelled in certain situations:

- If either of the Forest School Leaders were unable to attend the session
- If additional adults that were required to support learners with ALN were unable to attend the session
- Inclement weather which makes the site or activity dangerous, eg. if the wind speed is more than 25mph or if the temperatures are below freezing

In some situations, the Forest School sessions may be altered, eg. timings reduced if it is cold or very wet.

20. Procedure for Missing Learner

If it is thought that a learner is missing, the Forest School Leaders will call, "1,2,3 come to me", so that the learners will assemble and then a full head count/register will be taken. If a learner is missing, one of the Forest School Leaders will take the remaining learners back into the school building and the other Forest School Leader will make contact with the staff within the school building using the walkie talkies. As the Forest School site is within the school setting, staff will check within the school grounds and school building for the missing learner. If the learner cannot be found, then police and parents / carers will be informed immediately and a full search will be undertaken.

21. Procedure for loose animals or intruder

In the case of a loose animal or intruder entering the school grounds during a Forest School session, all attendees in the Forest School Area will follow the school's Lockdown Policy.

22. Parental consent and confidentiality

All learners are required to have parent / carer consent to take part in certain activities within Forest School sessions. These are – cooking, eating their produce and drinking hot chocolate / squash. Without this consent, certain learners will not be able to take part in these activities.

The Forest School Leaders hold up-to-date GDPR and Cyber-security training and are aware of the procedures in place in this school to maintain the confidentiality of learners at all times.