

St Paul's Forest School Handbook



Introduction & Background

St Pauls Primary Forest School handbook contains information, policies and procedures relating to the running of Forest School sessions in a safe and enjoyable way.

It is to be read by all staff, volunteers and parents working with Forest School sessions at St Pauls Primary prior to participation. The Handbook is subject to annual review and to immediate review if an incident indicates the need for this.

What is Forest School?

Forest School is an inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.

Forest School is a specialised learning approach that sits within and compliments the wider context of outdoor and woodland education.

Definition taken from FSA (Forest School Association)

This links well with our school motto

‘Great oaks from little acorns grow’



Aims Of Forest school sessions

- To encourage and inspire individuals of any age through positive outdoor experiences
- To abide by rules and set standards of behaviour
- To work cooperatively in groups and to respect each other.
- To develop personal, social, health and emotional skills
- To build on the child's innate motivation and positive attitude to learning
- To help children access the natural environment on a regular basis.(throughout all seasons)
- To help children understand, appreciate and care for their natural environment
- A chance to discover their abilities with new opportunities to succeed
- Learning linked to the national curriculum

Benefits of Forest school sessions

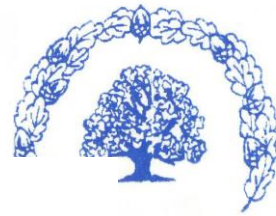
- Build self confidence and self esteem
- Combines freedom with responsibility
- Taking risks in a structured and safe environment
- Promotes resilience
- Understand how and why to care for their natural environment
- Having FUN and ENJOYMENT whilst outdoors.

Examples of Forest School Activities include

- Woodland management and nature exploration
- Building dens and other structures
- Fire making and cooking
- Environmental Games and invitations for imaginative play
- Natural crafts
- Using tools, such as knives and saws
- Storytelling
- Scavenger hunts and adventure
- Seasonal celebrations



POLICIES Section



Environmental Considerations and Conservation

We aim for all participants (children and staff) to aim for a high level of respect for the natural world and encourage all to be involved in decisions about their environment and safety.

One of the main principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. The children and adults involved are taught about respect and responsibility for the world around them. Both the children and adults are encouraged to respect their environment and to be aware of conservation issues of the wild area around them.

The aim is to promote respect for wildlife, which will be achieved through detailed session plans and evaluation. If appropriate, reclaimed, recycled and sustainable resources will be used to develop and maintain our forest school site.

Encouraging children to care for the school environment is an essential part of Forest School Sessions. In order to encourage the children to look after the site we will always leave it tidy and never damage anything growing in it. We will only collect things that are on the ground and leave the area as we found it. The Forest School Session Leader (Sian Evans) will monitor the site so that it does not become overused and an alternative area will be found and risk assessed as and when if necessary.

On site activities such as fires will follow practices that minimise impact on wildlife through being mindful of what is burnt and how any residues are disposed of. Before leaving our site we will ensure that any litter is collected and disposed of carefully.

Also all children involved in Forests school sessions will be encouraged to help and educate the school population in following these aims when not in a forest school session.



Minimising the Environmental impact on the school site

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Impact</u>	<u>Reducing the impact</u>
Collecting Wood	Dead wood is important to any woodland ecology as it has a number of uses from homes for mini beasts to beds for fungi so a lack of it is bad for any woodland habitat	Limit the frequency of fires and evaluate the amount of dry, dead wood before having a fire. Collect only the minimum amount required. Reserve specific areas for dead wood conservation.
Fire	Changes in soil can be harmful to some plants, whilst other essential nutrients may be depleted. Fire can travel underground to roots even after appearing to be extinguished	Designate fixed locations for fires on parts of the site that aren't particularly ecologically interesting or unique. Dispose of ash into patches of nettles. Ensure that all fires are extinguished fully before leaving the site. Could use a fire wok.
Tree Climbing and Den Building	Damage to trees	Restrict these activities to suitable trees that will tolerate the activities.
Collecting Fauna	Damage to plants	Inform groups as to which types of plants are best to pick. Ensure leaves or flowers are taken from the ground where possible. Limit the frequency of this type of activity.



Health And Safety

Forest school sessions may include activities that could be at a higher risk than usual for some children that would be encountered in a school environment. Whilst engaging in Forest school sessions some activities, such as fire lighting and tool use, is considered and risk assessed carefully to minimise any potential hazards.

At St Pauls Forest School the Legislation of importance to Forest School includes the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The purpose of this act makes it statutory that an employer has a duty to ensure the Health, Safety and Welfare at work of their employees (in the case of schools adults and children) and any equipment used by them. Employees are responsible for the Health and Safety of themselves and others they may be affected by their acts. It protects not only all people (staff and children) at work, but also the health and safety of the general public (Volunteers and parents) who may be affected by the work activities.

Recognising the benefits of play Key message:

'Play is great for children's well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool'.

**Taken from the Health and Safety Executive - Key Findings from the paper
CHILDREN'S PLAY AND LEISURE – PROMOTING A BALANCED APPROACH**

Sept 2012

A site risk assessment has been carried out and a copy is held in the back of this handbook.

Insurance

St Pauls School staff are covered by Zurich Municipal overseen by Wiltshire County Council for £50,000,000 public liability.

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Staff & Training

All staff and support staff are professionals with relevant qualifications and experience and have all undertaken current DBS (CRB) checks. Any parent helpers/volunteers for forest school sessions will also be DBS (CRB) checked.

The Forest School Leader (Sian Evans) has an up-to-date certificate in ITC Outdoor First Aid and is in charge of first aid arrangements during any forest school sessions. Also a support staff member will have advanced paediatric first Aid qualification, both work full time and are on site every day. All support staff (Teaching assistants and Lunchtime Play leaders) have first aid training. A first aid kit is taken on all sessions. In the case of an accident requiring further assistance, an emergency contact form is kept in the school office and a mobile phone is always carried by at least 2 members of staff. The school admin team will contact the parents when on site.

Safeguarding

At St Pauls School all forest school sessions are led by a Level 3 trained Forest School Leader (Sian Evans) and supported by members of staff and parent volunteers.

Everyone involved in Forest school sessions at St Pauls are fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of site and activities(verbally/written). Staff and volunteers are made aware of the relevant school policies and procedures and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them.

All St Paul's staff and regular volunteers have current CRB checks.

All St Pauls School staff are qualified and have been updated on new safeguarding policies. Any concerns about a child's physical or mental well-being will be shared with our named Safeguarding Officers (SU/LW) through CPOMS will be filled in as soon as possible, so that our school's Safeguarding Policy can then be followed. Confidentiality should be maintained at all times. Any concerns should only be shared with those who need to know and the correct channels are then informed.

Safeguarding and Child Protection



Ratios

The following minimum adult ratios will ensure appropriate support and supervision:

For children

Foundation Stage: 1 adult: 4 children

Key Stage 1: 1 adult: 6 children

Key Stage 2: 1 adult: 10 children

These ratios are for guidance only for groups of children and suitable levels of support should be determined in advance depending on the types of activity and needs of the group. For example any 1:1 TA.

Photos & Video

As a school we hold permission for consent for all children within the school for staff to take photographs of participants for monitoring and evaluation purposes and suitable use for reports/materials/website. Where permission is refused, we will avoid photographing and videoing that child and blur out faces wherever they do appear in recorded material.

Equality and Inclusion

St. Paul's Primary school is committed to providing a safe and nurturing learning environment for its diverse population of pupils. During all forest school sessions all children will be included in all activities and all children's contributions are valued.

[Equality and Inclusion Policy](#)

Behaviour

During all forest school sessions at St Pauls we operate in line with current schools behaviour policy. We seek to create an environment in the school and in the outside environment which encourages and reinforces good behaviour.

[Behaviour Policy](#)



Emergency Procedure (Onsite Forest School)

This Emergency procedure is always kept at the top of the forest school kit bag and carried at all times by the leader (Sian Evans).

All staff/parents/volunteers are made aware and asked to read this procedure before every session.

- In an event of an emergency secure the safety of whole group from further danger (if any is perceived). Stop all work/activities if safe. Call in and locate group promptly as agreed with group in advance.
- In the event of an emergency and a child needs to be taken to hospital a member of staff would contact and direct the emergency services to the casualty, Sian Evans, as ITC First Aider, would attend to the casualty until the Emergency Services arrive. The casualty would be accompanied to hospital by a member of school staff. Sian Evans as Forest school leader would stay with the group and the class teacher or Forest School Assistant would help oversee the rest of the group are counted and prepared to return to the school building.
- The school office would be informed after dialling the Emergency Services and contact the parents/carers. The adult accompanying the casualty would return to school once the child was in the care of their parents/carers.
- In the event of an adult needing emergency attention it must be judged whether they need to be accompanied or support may be required. Decisions taken must ensure the safety of the children within the group and accompanying adults.
- In the event of the Forest School Leader needing emergency assistance it would be expected for the Class teacher to return the children to school and another adult would stay with the casualty.

Accident and incident forms would be completed as soon as possible back at school.

Minor injuries would be treated as they would within school and recorded and reported to parents and carers in line with school policy.

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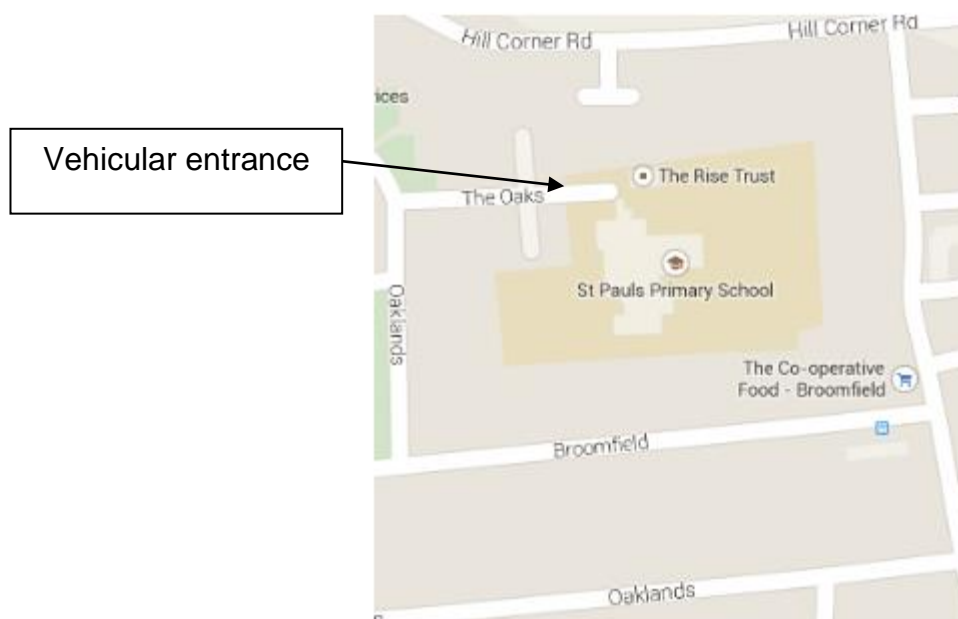
Emergency Contacts

Emergency Services	999
School Office	01249 653041
Sian Evans	07896135405
Sheridan Upton (head)	07709639304
Chippenham hospital	01249 447100
Bath RUH	01225 428331

Location of Forest School Sessions

Address: The Oaks, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 1DU **Phone:** 01249 653041
OS Reference: 391696, 174742 **OS Grid Reference:** ST917747

Vehicular entrance from The Oaks



Pre Site Visit

The Forest School Leader (Sian Evans) will always do a pre visit sweep of the area before any session to check for any new hazards or risks. Procedures are put into place to minimise or eliminate the risk to the group, e.g. removal of hazard/object or warning/advising the group on the potential hazard/risk.



Fire Building and Management Safety procedure

Site Location

- Permission is obtained and appropriate location for fire is identified during initial site visit.
- Site checked to assess soil type. Fire site needs to be clear of dry leaves, overhanging branches/vegetation and any material likely to combust.
- Site checked for adequate ventilation.
- Emergency Vehicle access assessed (See map).
- Fire is cancelled or held in a fire wok above ground if there are any safety concerns.

Organisation and Management

- Clear safety boundary is marked around the fire beyond which access is by permission only. A boundary may be a stable log seating or stone circles at least 1.5m from the fire.
- Participants must walk around the outside of the boundary and not across the circle.
- Participants only approach the fire when invited by the FS leader (Sian Evans).
- Water available by the fire in case of emergency. First Aid kit and mobile phone always available.
- Fire Safety sessions and talk given prior to lighting fire. FS leader (SE) to check that this has been thoroughly understood prior to proceeding.
- FS leader (SE) only to supervise and handle tools relating to fire management.
- Untreated wood to be used and stored safely away from fire.
- Once lit, the FS leader (SE) will manage and supervise fire at all times.
- Care will be taken to ensure that participants do not eat/drink scalding food/drinks, tepid warm only.
- Participants will hand wash before any food preparation.

Leaving the Fire Site

- The fire must be thoroughly extinguished prior to leaving the site.



Tool management Policy and Safety guidelines

Using small hand tools is an important part of Forest School as it enables children to develop new practical skills that help them develop self confidence. Hand tools are to be maintained in good working order by the FS leader (SE) and inspected before each use. All participants (children and adult helpers) will be taught how to use and respect tools. The adult:child ratio is increased while using hand tools.

Organisation and Management

- Adult – child ratio 1:1, with close supervision and support.
- All adults (staff and volunteers) will be given basic training on the use of individual hand tools before being allowed to use them with children.
- The first aid kit will always be available along with at least 2 first aid trained adults (FS Leader and 1 other).
- Tools will be introduced to children based on their development as and when the FS leader decides.
- Tools will be stored in the Forest School tool box. (In locked FS cupboard – out of bounds for children). Tools will only be removed by FS Leader or responsible adult.
- All tools counted out and counted in at the beginning and end of sessions.
- This policy will be reviewed when new tools are added.

Use of Tools

- FS Leader will give clear verbal explanation and demonstration of tool prior to child using it.
- No running or pointing with tools.
- The bow saw must have a blade guard on it when not in use. Blade guards to be used by FS leader only.
- Protective gloves (adults and children) to be worn when engaged in sawing. Hands to be kept away from the blade.
- Woods being sawn will be supported on stable logs and anchored by another participant.
- When potato peelers or pen knives are used for whittling, this must be done sitting down and downwards away from the body.

All tool risk assessments are in place and will be reviewed regularly.



Equipment

In addition to tools suited to the planned activities the Forest School leader will always take out an emergency bag. The contents of the emergency bag will vary depending on the site location being used, the group leading and the time of year and weather conditions. Contents of the bag may also vary as a result of risk assessments. However, there are some essential items that should be carried on every session.

Safety Bag Equipment List

- Emergency procedure sheet
- First aid kit (see below for what contents)
- Charged Mobile Phone
- Copy of Contact and Medical information sheets
- Emergency numbers
- Emergency shelter/Ground sheet
- Plastic bags
- Spare hats/gloves/socks
- Towel
- Newspaper
- Matches
- Protective gloves
- Whistle
- Throwline
- Any inhalers named(in side pocket of bag for quick access
- Camping roll mat
- Thermos flask with warm water for emergency use in winter
- Sweets/biscuits/chocolate
- Hand warmers
- Gaffer tape



First Aid Kit List

The kit needs to be regularly checked and re-stocked. The kit should contain the following items

- Gloves (in sealable bags, which can then be used for safe disposal of soiled items)
- Swabs
- Bandages (cotton, in various sizes)
- Plasters
- Micro pore tape
- Burn dressings
- Accident book
- Sterile water (for washing out wounds or eyes)
- Designated first aid water for different purposes, 0.5 litre of fresh tap water
- Scissors
- Cling film
- Emergency procedures, containing emergency and missing person scripts.
- Medical information and emergency contact details for all in group, including adult helpers and leader of sessions
- Mobile phone – adult helpers should all carry a mobile phone and numbers have to be exchanged amongst adults prior to session

Toileting

All participants will toilet before leaving for the session but as the site is on school grounds toilets are accessible for all. Use KS2 Toilets.



Inclement Weather and Shelter Facilities

We will not go to Forest School if the conditions are deemed dangerous such as in high winds, during thunder storms, or during periods of extreme cold. We will use the BBC weather online forecast to make judgments about the expected conditions. A pre site visit will also be made after any high winds to risk assess the trees and surrounding area. When it is wet a shelter will be built immediately by the leader (S Evans) so that there is a sheltered area that is available from the start that can be used. This will be in the form of a raised tarp between two trees. When on site at St Pauls a wooden permanent gazebo will be used.

Adverse Weather

Transport

Vehicle Procedure

A reputable mini bus/coach company is employed for the safe transport of all staff and children. Children will be counted onto and off the bus. The leader (S Evans) assures that all passengers are safely seat belted and that all equipment bags are safely stored. On leaving the coach one member of staff will be last to leave to check all children and resources have been accounted for.

Walking Procedure to site

All staff, adults and children are aware of how we stop the group if needed, it will be passed down the line so that the group is aware of any instructions/emergency. Children are familiar with safe walking procedures. Staff will give instructions, such as single file walking, paired walking where applicable. An adult will be placed at the front and back of the group with other adults spaced in between. When crossing a road two adults will stand in the road whilst children walk across. During progressive sessions children are gaining skills in performing risk assessments and will become more aware of dangers of moving about on site.



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS





What is Forest School?

- It is about learning and having fun outside, using natural materials like sticks, mud and water.
- Adults lead some activities but allow time for child led activities. The emphasis is on partnership and learning.
- Through small achievable tasks, every child is able to succeed and this helps build self confidence and self esteem for ALL learning.
- Adults support the children in activities that are designed to encourage them to solve real life problems.
- Children are taught about assessing risk, the safe use of tools and safe fire lighting techniques.
- Being outside connects children with the environment and promotes a feeling of well being.
- Many children learn better outdoors and can bring those skills into the classroom to develop.



When will forest school happen?

Every Wednesday on the school site..

You will be informed of the dates of each forest school session at the start of each term.

What will my child be doing?

Preparation

Mrs Evans (Forest School Level 3 practitioner) will visit the site and check for any hazards or risks and remove or make the group aware of them.

To keep all children safe and assess the risks, Mrs Evans will check the FS Kit Bag and that it contains all essential items. The Emergency Action Plan is kept in the top of the kit bag and all adults are aware of this. First Aid kit, inhalers, wipes and spare hats and gloves (children's and adults) are kept in the kit bag. The tool bag, water containers and other equipment will be taken as appropriate. Mrs Evans will carry the rucksack to the site.

Prior to the session

All children will be toileted and put on their waterproofs. Any child without correct clothes will be given some. (see below for what clothes are needed) Forest school safety rules will be shared with the group in the classroom. Children will put wellies on outside the classroom door and walk in pairs to the site.

During the session

All children participate in a variety of activities which are totally inclusive; this caters for all ability levels. Children are taught a variety of woodland skills through practical hands on activities. They also learn how to light fires safely. The children learn the care and safe use of a wide range of tools. This is a tightly supervised activity on a 1:1 ratio of adult to children. It is introduced gradually in small steps that make all abilities achieve which boosts their self esteem. Children are encouraged to listen attentively to instructions and to take responsibility for their actions. This is achieved by games that also encourage respect for the environment. Children are made aware of any new hazards and risk assess it. They will form an opening circle at our base camp and then describe or walk the boundaries for the session. All children are engaged in the development of rules and guidelines for each session. The FS Leader will then describe the activities for the session.

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It is the job of the FS Leader to

- Visually check all equipment is safe to use before children use them.
- Check the needs of the group so everyone is involved.
- Conduct head counts when needed
- Ensure that all participants (children and adults) are wearing protective clothing.
- Ensure all participants are warm enough so it does not become a negative experience!

Closing the session

All fires will be extinguished properly (as per Fire Procedure), all tools, if used, will be counted back into their bag and any structures will be removed. All participants will check for any litter and return all equipment to correct bags/boxes. We will then form a closing circle at base camp for reflection and evaluation on the session. We will then walk back to the classroom.

After the session

The FS Leader will check and count the equipment and store away as appropriate. Any containers with water in will be emptied and washed out and then stored. All tools will be put away and the contents of the kit bag will be checked and any items used will be replaced. The FS Leader will then complete any evaluation/medical forms if needed.

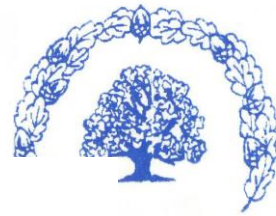
Will Forest School ever be cancelled?

Forest School sessions will only be cancelled

- in extreme weather e.g. high winds, lightning or blizzards.
- if there are not enough adults to accompany us
- If Mrs Evans (FS Leader) is unable to attend. Campfires and tool use cannot take place without a Qualified Forest School Leader – Sian Evans (Level 3 Forest School Practitioner)

What happens if there is an emergency?

All activities are risk assessed and the FS Leader will always undertake a pre site visit before every session. Should a serious emergency arise (medical) , the Forest School Emergency Procedure contains vital information for the emergency services, such as location and access to the school. Accident forms will be filled in and parents/carers will be notified as soon as possible.



Will my child be cooking and eating anything?

All participants will be briefed every session that nothing is to be picked and eaten whilst working outside. If hot drinks are planned for a session, they will be tepid to prevent scalding. Marshmallows and other food cooked over a fire will be supervised closely to ensure children do not scald themselves. Hands will be washed before eating (with water and wipes). Please see consent forms to add any food allergies.

What clothes will my child need?

"There is no such thing as bad weather, just unsuitable clothing."

We aim to go out in all seasons, so for each we need participants to dress appropriately. Each FS session is relatively active, but in winter spending hours outside can mean getting very cold if a participant isn't wearing several layers.

Here is some clothing that will make your child get the most from our sessions.

- Layered clothing – vest, long sleeved t shirt, sweatshirt, fleece, coat
- Trousers – normal trousers/leggings and waterproofs on top (especially when wet!)
- Socks- ideally 2 pairs, one thin and 1 thick pair. Feet get cold quickly!
- Warm hat and gloves in winter, sun hat in summer.
- Wellington boots/hiking boots all year.
- Warm, waterproof coat
- Spare socks – in case they get wet feet!



I liked it when I picked up bugs for the first time! - Kariym





APPENDIX