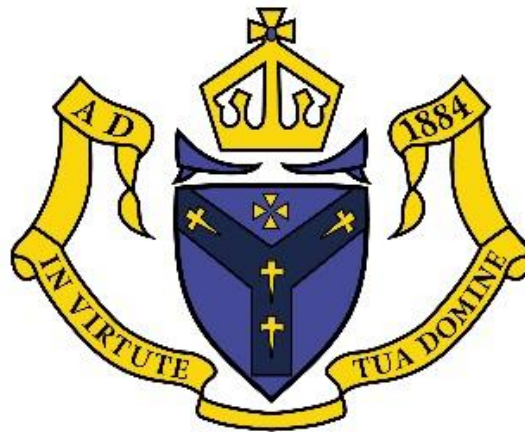




Sissinghurst VA Church of England Primary School
Enjoy, Achieve and Celebrate Together in Faith



The Governors and Staff of Sissinghurst (VA) Church of England Primary School believe the policies and procedures we write help us to continuously improve the school and develop our pupils to become life-long learners and valuable citizens of the future. We are dedicated to providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. Our Christian values of:

Endurance · Koinonia · Friendship · Wisdom
underpin all our policies. We actively reject any form of discrimination.

Forest School Handbook

2021 - 2022

Handbook Title:	Forest School Handbook
Date:	September 2021
Review Date:	September 2022
Reviewed by:	Mrs S Hutchings
Approved by:	Mrs J Langton

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Introduction and Background

What is Forest School All About?

Forest School originated in Scandinavia in the 1950s and was intended as a way to teach children about the natural world and environmental issues. During Sissinghurst Forest School sessions children spend time regularly in our wild area learning through fun and exciting outdoor activities. They learn how to co-operate and work with others to solve problems, use their own initiative and manage risks.

Forest School has been developed into an educational programme which is child-led and incorporates risky activity. It is inclusive, very flexible and can be used with a wide range of ages and abilities. Forest School focuses on helping to develop personal, social and emotional skills such as self-discovery, confidence and independence. It also helps improve communication skills and raises self-esteem.

Forest School Ethos

Building self-esteem is at the core of the Forest Schools ethos, along with raising emotional awareness, confidence building and encouraging independence by providing opportunities for active outdoor play and discovery. Forest School offers inspirational and challenging outdoor learning opportunities where pupils learn through self-directed play and exploration. They will have the opportunity to develop their curiosity, confidence, self-esteem, creativity, communication skills, knowledge of the environment and ability to assess risk. These activities are deep level learning experiences which are easily remembered by all participants. Experiences may be transferred in a meaningful way to life in and out of school.

The 6 principles of Forest School:

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

Sissinghurst Key Stage 2 Forest School is run by a qualified Forest School practitioner. Key Stage 1 and Reception classes participate in woodland activities.

What Activities are Offered?

Activities will depend on the ability and experience of participants.

Children will be shown how to safely use tools such as bow saws, loppers, wood shavers and drills. These may then be used to make items out of wood. They will be shown how to build fires and how to cook safely on a campfire. Shelters may be constructed using natural materials or tarps. Once shown how to do these things safely, pupils are permitted some choice in their activities with an emphasis on taking care of themselves, others and their environment. Appropriate risks will be taken but inappropriate use of tools and equipment will not be permitted. Dirt, minor cuts, bruises and scrapes are not completely avoidable in this environment.

Other age-appropriate activities will be available at each session. These may include playing in mud, climbing trees, identification of natural species, crafts from natural objects, seasonal celebrations, and games and singing for the whole group.

All activities will be risk-assessed and groups will be small with a high adult to child ratio (1:5).

Environmental Policy and Environmental Impact Assessment

Sissinghurst School Forest School activities aim to encourage staff and pupils to have respect for their environment and for the natural world. Whilst offering a variety of activities and opportunities, sessions will always try to minimise the impact on the flora/fauna of the wild area.

Leave nothing but footprints. Take nothing but photographs.

Activity	Impact	Mitigation
Collecting wood	Dead wood is important to the area's ecology, providing habitats for mini beasts and encouraging fungi.	The area does not have much deadwood. Established heavy wood should be left in situ and minimum amounts of wood removed for fires and activities.
Fires	Fires will destroy flora and habitats and deplete nutrients in soil.	Designate a permanent location for main campfire circle and another for individual fires. Dispose of ashes by spreading over a wide area. Ensure that all fires are extinguished fully before leaving the site.
Cooking and other waste	Food waste may attract unwanted animals to the site. Litter is unsightly and potentially hazardous.	Remove all food waste and litter.
Tree Climbing, Shelter Building	Trees/shrubs may be damaged	Ensure participants use only specified trees and do not remove live branches.
Collecting natural materials for crafts/activities	Damage to plants and habitats.	Collect only the minimum and ensure participants remove only limited amounts from abundant vegetation.

Health and Safety

Aims and Guidance

Forest School sessions offer learning opportunities for children and young people. Part of their purpose is to encourage participants to face new challenges and learn to take reasonable risks. In order to do that safely, the adults involved must know their role and ensure that the necessary risk assessments are carried out regularly and thoroughly. The following guidance for adults and children must be clearly understood by all concerned.

1. However many leaders accompany Forest School sessions the person in charge is always the trained Forest School Leader.
2. The Forest School Leader has overall duty of care for the participants in his/her charge, but all leaders are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure participants are safe.
3. All leader helpers must sign and date a form to show they have read this handbook and appropriate risk assessments and understand and agree to comply with the general operating procedures for Forest School.
4. In the event of an emergency, the Forest School Leader will ensure that the School contacts the emergency services.
5. The risk assessment has been completed and appropriate safety measures are in place.
6. The Forest School Leader will review the risk assessments before every session.
7. The adult: child ratio is appropriate for the activity.
8. Parents are informed about Forest School dates for their child's participation and agree to send their child appropriately dressed.
9. There is adequate and relevant insurance cover.

First Aid and Emergency Incidents (including fire and missing child)

Reference should be made to Sissinghurst School first aid and emergency procedures.

In addition, due to the slightly more remote position of the site, staff should ensure that a mobile phone is carried. A first aider will be appointed for each session and a first aid kit carried.

Sissinghurst School Wild Area		
Location:	TQ789378	Common Road, Sissinghurst TN17 2BH
Emergency vehicle Access 1	TQ791379 Common Road	Via school field, field gate to wild area and on foot
Emergency Vehicle Access 2	TQ788377 Mill Lane	On foot through field and gate to wild area
Emergency Vehicle Access 3	Helicopter TQ789379 School Field	Field gate to wild area and on foot
School Tel. No.	01580 713895	

Fire Emergency

Reference should be made to the School's Emergency Procedures Policy. In addition, the following action will be taken:

In the event of a fire getting out of control the group will be gathered together using a whistle call. A register will be taken and the group removed by the closest unobstructed exit. The school office will be advised and emergency services called via the office.

Children off site during lockdown

If children are off site during lockdown a message will be sent to them as soon as is practicably possible to tell them not to return to the school building. For example if they are in the wildlife area it may be safer to stay there or to go to the church until further notice, it is up to the Forest School Leader to decide the course of action.

Lost Child Policy

Reference should be made to the School's Lost Child Policy. In addition immediate action should be:

1. Gather all participants in Willow Dome/fire circle
2. Ascertain where and when child was last seen.
3. 1 adult hold group.
4. 1 adult contact school office to instigate school action – then join search.
5. 1 adult commence immediate search, checking Mill Lane gate first.

First Aid Incident

A named and qualified First Aider will attend each session. Kit will include First Aid equipment.

Reference should be made to the School's First Aid Policy. In addition, for a serious accident immediate action should be:

1. First Aider to provide first aid.
2. 1 adult to remove group to safety (to school building via school field)
3. 1 adult to contact school office for 999/112 or 999/112 direct if no immediate response.

Campfire policy

Aim - To use fire safely as part of the Forest School experience.

Fires must only be lit after a risk assessment has been carried out and they must only be within the fire circle area. There must always be a trained leader present within the fire circle when a fire is lit or hot embers remain. The fire must not be left unattended.

There must be an adequate supply of fire water close to the fire basket to ensure there is enough water available to extinguish the fire. A fire blanket must be brought into the woodland to wrap round someone if their clothes become alight. Fire proof gauntlets should be kept at the fire area to allow leaders to pick up hot items. There should be two exits from the fire circle.

Participants should be briefed about fire safety. When at the fire circle the rules should be demonstrated for the participant to see. The best position for cooking is on one knee so you can move backwards easily and remain stable. Long hair should be tied back and scarves removed.

Tool Safety Policy

Using and Storing Tools

Using a range of tools is necessary in many forest school activities. It is an important part of our work as it enables participants to gain practical skills that help develop self-confidence. The use of tools can build gross and fine motor skills and develops hand eye coordination. The forest school facilitator will ensure that all people participating in sessions with tools do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. Tools that may be used include bow saws, pruning saws, loppers, drills, secateurs, mallets, palm drills and potato peelers. The following guidelines are to be followed when using tools:

General rules for tool use:

- All tools must have an individual risk assessment in the Health and Safety folder
- Ensure safe storage at school with nominated Forest School Leader access and responsibility
- Ensure safe storage at the Forest School Site
- Never walk around with tools.
- Always make sure they are well maintained, clean and sharp before using them.
- When using tools with participants it should only be with the Forest School Leader.
- When using tools there is a designated tool area where the Forest School Leader and participant will sit when using the tool.
- First aiders and first aid kit close by.

Bow Saw:

- Ensure guard is in place when not in use
- Must only be used with a Forest School Leader
- Always use in the designated tool area
- Use the bow saw with a saw horse
- Talk with the participant about the way you hold the bow saw – hand over blade
- Ensure safe storage and safe handling in Forest School

Mallet :

- Remind others in vicinity to stay clear of tools.

Potato Peeler:

- Must be with Forest School Leader or trained adult.
- No glove needed on hand using tool.
- 3-1 ratio supervision for early years' participants.
- Use in designated area for tools.
- Keep in cover when not in use and store in tool box.
- Remind others in vicinity to stay clear of tools.

Child Protection and Safeguarding

Reference to be made to:

Sissinghurst School Child Protection Policy.

Sissinghurst School Keeping Children Safe in Education Policy

Equal Opportunities

Reference to be made to:
Sissinghurst School Equal Opportunities Policy

Who will attend Forest School

Forest School should be available to all pupils, although due to the nature of the activities offered, there will be some pupils who will need appropriate support in order to attend. All participants must be confident enough and have sufficient endurance to be able to complete the session. All participants must be able and willing to follow instructions in order to keep themselves and others safe. Forest School involves many high risk activities that are rendered safe if simple instructions are followed.

Behaviour

Reference should be made to:
Sissinghurst School Behaviour for Learning Policy
In addition the following should be noted:

Use of Tools, Equipment and Woodland Materials

Whilst the School's behaviour policy will be followed, serious inappropriate use of tools, equipment and woodland materials will result in immediate cessation of the activity for the child/children concerned and for the whole group if necessary. Continued inappropriate behaviour will result in the child/children being removed from the site.

Weather Policy

Weather is part of Forest School and a great way for children to regulate themselves and assess their own needs. The session will continue regardless of the weather unless conditions are extreme. A shelter may be erected on very wet or snowy days and some planned activities may have to be altered.

The weather forecast will be checked prior to the session and activities considered accordingly.

RAIN - Continuous torrential rain may result in cancellation/curtailment of the session, particularly if some members of the group are inappropriately clad.

SNOW – Cancellation/curtailment will occur if participants are inappropriately clad. Hot drinks will be provided and participants kept active to maintain body heat.

LIGHTNING STORM – the session will be cancelled or curtailed if the storm is within ten miles of the site.

WIND – in winds in excess of Force 6 (strong breeze – 25-31 mph) the session will be re-located to the open field and activities adjusted accordingly.

EXTREME HEAT – participants will be required to wear sun hats and to have had sunscreen applied. They will be encouraged to seek shelter from the sun. Water must be available to all participants. The situation will be monitored by staff and curtailed if necessary.

Participants' Clothing and Equipment

“There is no such thing as bad weather – only the wrong clothes.” – ancient Scandinavian saying.

Forest School Leaders will ensure that appropriate clothing is worn by participants. Pupils without the correct clothing will not be permitted to participate. Long trousers and long-sleeved tops will help prevent scratches and stings. Sturdy footwear must be worn.

Session Routines

Equipment

First Aid Kit - Risk-assessments - First Aid book - Incident log - Emergency Procedure - Mobile phone - Tools & fire lighting kit - Handwashing kit - Fresh water/water carrier - Personal protective equipment - Spare clothing - Fire blanket

Setting Up

1. Carry out a session risk assessment of site and advise/act accordingly
2. Collect necessary equipment and restock first aid where necessary
3. Meet and register group
4. Check phone signal

Session Opening

1. Meet in Willow Dome
2. Make the group aware of new hazards or medical considerations
3. Check that they are all wearing suitable clothing and footwear
4. Form an opening circle
5. Describe or walk the boundaries for the day
6. Engage children in the development of rules and guidelines for the day
7. Describe the day's activities

During the Session

- Visually check all equipment before use
- Check on pastoral needs of group
- Conduct a head count, as needed
- Ensure appropriate personal protective clothing is worn

Closing the Session

1. Extinguish any fires properly
2. Count any tools used into their bag
3. Remove structures
4. Check for litter etc.
5. Collect the equipment
6. Form a closing circle
7. Conduct evaluation with the group (questions, talking stick or drawing)
8. After group has left site, check equipment and evaluation forms

Learning and Development

Sissinghurst Forest School programme fosters self-esteem, independence, resilience, co-operation, personal responsibility, autonomy and motivation, as well as a deeply personal knowledge, respect and care for our environment. The approach of Sissinghurst Forest School activities is learner-led, play-centred, holistic and experiential. When taking part in the forest school programme a participant is engaging with nature in wild spaces in an exploratory, sensory and physical way.

It is important to create, where possible, a long-term relationship between a location and a group of participants - giving all participants a chance to get a feel for how an environment changes over time.

Participants will be encouraged to take constructive risks in order to develop skills, good judgment and to learn and develop through managing their own and others' risks. In planning activities we consider not only the risks but also the potential benefits for the learner.

Roles & Responsibilities

All staff members involved in the Forest School programmes should be aware that it is an exploratory experience for the group. They allow the group to play and learn as independently as possible, often without demonstrating or suggesting. If invited to provide support then they do, but otherwise merely observe, allowing the experience to be learner-directed.

It is the role of the Forest School leader(s) to take a lead in planning, delivering and evaluating the forest school programme. They also take primary responsibility in ensuring that policies and procedures, rules and guidelines are adhered to. Volunteers and other adults may help with these responsibilities where they wish to and are able and/or qualified to.

Evaluation

Evaluations should take place after each session and these should be used to plan next sessions.