

New Swannington Primary School



Forest School Handbook

Contents

1. Welcome to Forest School
2. What to expect
3. What to wear
4. Safety is paramount
5. Where to find us
6. Forest School Code of Conduct
7. Equipment
8. Using Tools
9. Fire!
10. Risk assessments
11. First Aid and Emergency Procedures
12. Weather
13. Communication Strategy

Welcome to Forest School

Forest School means many things to many people. The Forest School Association defines it as “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 Association 2020).

It is a specialised learning approach that has the learner at the centre, whatever their age.

At Forest School the learners are all seen as equal, unique and valuable, which here at New Swannington Primary School is central to our ethos too.

Forest School promotes child-initiated learning at its best. It creates a world where children are believed to be competent to choose and drive their own learning and development at a pace which is appropriate and meaningful to them. They are freely able to explore and discover whilst learning how to manage appropriate risk and challenge which is vital in their decision-making. The adults are there to support the children, guide if asked, look out for dangers and most importantly celebrate the learning taking place.

It creates a positive atmosphere of support where the children learn to become independent in their physical skills and mental thought processes. They learn to trust their own ideas, believe in their capabilities and recognise their own needs. They understand that support comes from trusted adults and friends alike as they are nurtured to develop positive relationships with themselves and other people. Everyone is equal. It is a safe place where they can be themselves or lose themselves and leave day to day stresses behind.

Central to all of this is the environment. Children experience the seasons, the wonders of nature, the highs, the lows, life and death. This enables them to build a strong, positive relationship with their natural world helping them to make sense of the wider world.

What to expect

At New Swannington we offer a broad and balanced curriculum to develop the whole child. Forest School will offer the same broad range of experiences designed to develop the whole child; physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and morally.

We aim to challenge and support the children to become independent resilient learners who enjoy trying out their ideas, working together with their peers to solve problems and conquer challenges.

Some of the challenges might include:

Activity	Benefit
Shelter building	Problem solving, teamwork, creativity, confidence, independence.
Fire lighting	Following instructions, resilience, confidence, independence
Using a Kelly Kettle	Following instructions, confidence
Carving and whittling	Resilience, creativity, confidence, independence
Looking after wildlife	Connecting with and better understanding the natural environment

Group games	Teamwork, social skills
Looking closely at wildlife	Connecting with and better understanding the natural environment
Telling and listening to stories	Listening skills, social skills, concentration.
Physical challenges	Resilience, teamwork, confidence, independence.
Rope and string work	Listening skills and following instructions, resilience, confidence, independence, concentration.
Traditional woodland craft	Following instructions, creativity, confidence, independence, concentration, stress relief.
Using tools	Listening and following instructions, confidence, independence, concentration, motivation, teamwork.
Forest art	Creativity, confidence, independence, concentration, stress relief.
Planting and harvesting	Listening and following instructions, confidence and independence, connecting with and better understanding the natural environment, new perspective, stress relief.
Sculpture with natural materials	Creativity, independence, new perspective, stress relief.
Building bird boxes	Listening and following instructions, problem solving, creativity.
Free play	Teamwork, social skills.
Cooking on an open fire	Listening and following instructions, confidence, independence.
Learning knots	Listening and following instructions, resilience, confidence, independence.
Building bug homes	Listening and following instructions, problem solving, creativity, stress relief.
Bug hunting	Connecting with and better understanding the natural environment.
Team games	Teamwork, social skills
Tree Climbing	Overcoming challenges, problem solving, confidence, resilience, independence, motivation.

What to wear at Forest School

- Long-sleeved t-shirt, to prevent scratches or stings.
- Comfortable long trousers, to prevent scratches or stings.
- Wellies or outdoor boots, waterproof and comfortable is essential.
- In cold or wet weather, wear waterproofs, warm jogging bottoms a hat, gloves, and a warm coat. Don't forget to layer up! You can always remove items if needed.
- In warm or sunny weather, keep shoulders covered, wear a sunhat, suncream.
- Make sure the clothes are old and can get dirty!

Safety is paramount

At Forest School children can learn a great deal from their mistakes (even painful ones) and enjoy risky play activities and challenges. Learning to respect risk and danger through play will help them to cope with risks and hazards later in life. They will learn how far they can go before they feel unsafe, they will learn to understand their limits, they will gain the confidence to be able to say “No thank you, that’s enough for me,” without feeling pressurised by their peers.

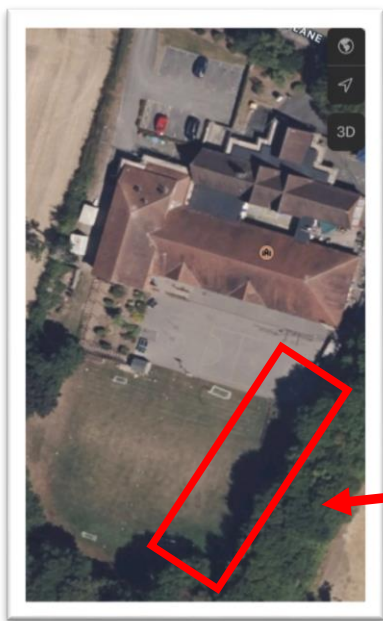
The safety of all participants is very important to us. All of the activities have been fully risk assessed to minimise the dangers. All adults participating in Forest School are required to read the risk assessments and protocols. We regularly review and update the risk assessments as required.

A site risk assessment is carried out before each session to look for natural or foreign hazards in the environment.

Individual risk assessments will be made for children whose medical condition or whose behaviour requires it.

Where to find us

Our Forest School activities will be held within the school grounds in our Forest School/ woodland area.



Our Forest School area.

Our Forest School Code of Conduct

Our code of conduct is relevant to all participants, adults and children and helps to create a safe and nurturing learning environment.

Boundaries During their first Forest School session children will learn where the physical boundaries for activities are and any no-go zones. Each group will work together to generate some rules for safe and happy learning and children will understand that they are expected to follow them. This will include an agreed call back sign to enable speedy return if needed or wanted by the Forest School Leaders.

Being in the Forest School At Forest School we learn to respect the world around us. When we enter the site we will be aware that we share the space with plants, birds and animals and we need to work in a way that will not damage or harm anything.

Toileting Children will be encouraged to use the toilets before a session starts. They may go to the toilets by using the KS2 toilets. We do not allow wild toileting on our site.

The Fire Circle For everyone's safety, no one is allowed to walk or run inside the fire circle even if there is no fire lit. We use log stools to mark out our circle and to sit on. If anyone wants to move around the circle or change places, they must step out of the circle and walk around the outside. The fire is kept within a wooden square in the centre of the circle. Children may be invited to approach the square for cooking or fire lighting but only under adult supervision.

Fire Lighting A fire can only be lit if our fire safety equipment is present and correct. The Forest School Leaders will always take the lead during fire lighting. All helpers will be briefed prior to a fire lighting session to set out protocols. A lit fire will never be left unattended. Open fires will only be lit in the fire square or in the raised fire pits.

Collecting natural materials Natural materials are collected for art, sculpture and woodland craft. Children are encouraged to look for the materials themselves but leaders will supervise to check that nothing harmful is gathered.

Carrying larger materials Children will be taught how to lift, roll drag or pull heavier materials safely using hands or ropes, keeping a straight back and bending the knees. Team work is encouraged.

Digging When investigating the environment, children may carefully move logs or stones to look for insects, taking care not to harm the creatures or destroy their habitat. They can dig under the soil using their fingers or small sticks but will not use tools to dig deep holes. Deeper digging opportunities will be included in the planting activities.

Using tools Children will be taught the correct way to use tools at Forest school. This will include the use of safety equipment, posture and awareness of others around them. Some tools will have a marked zone for their use. All tool use will be under strict adult supervision.

Tree climbing Climbing trees is a good opportunity for children to learn to manage their own risks. They will be shown how to climb safely, checking the ground below for sharp objects, looking for a safe path of ascent and descent, numbers in the same tree and which trees are suitable for climbing. Children are permitted to reach their own limits to a maximum of 2 metres. Adults will supervise tree climbing activities and ensure that children are wearing appropriate clothes and shoes. The Forest School Leaders will assess the trees to check for rotten or broken branches.

Sticks and stones Throwing sticks and stones is not permitted at Forest School. Children may pick up sticks shorter than their arm to carry pointed down to activities. Longer sticks must be dragged behind them. Stones can be dropped but children must check what is underneath before dropping them.

String, ropes and knots Children may learn a useful selection of knots for different uses. Adults will supervise activities where ropes are tied to trees for tarps or shelters.

Eating and Drinking Children will be encouraged to bring their water bottles with them. Anti-bacterial hand wash, wipes or sanitiser gel will be provided for hand washing before eating or drinking any snacks during Forest School. This will include food the children have cooked on the fire. Food allergies will be noted as part of the risk assessment for the cooking activity.

Leaving the Forest School area At the end of each session there will be a short time of reflection before the participants leave the site. All personal belongings must be taken away, any craft created can be taken home, and the site must be left clean and tidy ready for the next group.

Equipment

The Forest School Leaders will have a First Aid bag for every session. The contents for each bag may vary depending on the group, activity, time of year and weather conditions. Essential items that should be included in the First Aid Bag are:

- First Aid Kit (regularly checked and restocked as necessary)
- Burns kit
- Emergency procedures list
- Mobile Phone
- Medication for individuals (if not appropriate for individual to carry it themselves) clearly labelled with parental consent
- Drinking water

The Forest School Leaders will organise the equipment and tools needed for each session including tools, ropes, tarps, food, kitchen implements and fire lighting kit.

Using Tools

Using a range of tools in Forest School helps children to develop physical skills and how to manage risks safely. Tools may not be used at every session and they will only be used for particular purposes appropriate to the age and level of skill of the child.

- Sheath Knife
- Loppers
- Bow saw
- Bill Hook

The Forest School Leaders will ensure that tools are stored, maintained and transported safely. Tools will be kept packed away until needed.

Tool Policy and Procedure

The use of a range of different tools is an important part of Forest School activities as it helps the children to develop new skills, increase self-confidence and independence and develop their fine motor skills.

Tools that may be used include bow saws, loppers, knives and Bill Hooks.

In our Forest School sessions, we aim to ensure that the tools are used safely by ensuring that guidelines are follows:

- The Forest School Leaders will check the tools before each session to ensure they are in good condition, safe and suitable for use.
- Correct and safe use of sharp tools will be demonstrated by the Forest School Leaders to all members of the group. Leaving the activity with tools will not be permitted.
- Safe working ratios will be adhered to during the course of activities.
- Protective clothing and footwear will be worn by the group.
- Tools will be counted out and counted back in again.
- All children will be supervised closely whilst using the tools.
- Tools will be kept in a designated, secure area when they are not in use.
- Tools will not be left unattended.

Guidance on using a Sheath Knife

- Individuals working with Sheath Knife will work within a specific designated area.
- Knives will be carried with the sheath on.
- Forest School Leaders will demonstrate the safe passing around of sheaved knives as well as the safe use of Knives (including grip and body position) before each session.
- When not in use, Knives will be immediately sheaved.
- Leaders will count the Knives out and back in again.
- Sessions will always be supervised by an adult.
- When using Knives, each person will sit well out of reach of other individuals (blood bubble).

Guidance on using a Bow Saw

- Individuals working with Bow Saw will work within a specific designated area.
- Bow Saws will be carried with the guard on and a safety glove.
- Bow Saws should be used with a Saw Horse (or similar) where possible.
- Forest School Leaders will demonstrate the safe passing around of Bow Saws as well as the safe use of the equipment (including grip and body position) before each session.
- When not in use, Bow Saws will immediately have their blade protection replaced.
- Leaders will count the Bow Saws out and back in again.
- Sessions will always be supervised by an adult.
- When using Bow Saws, each person will sit well out of reach of other individuals not involved in the task at hand (blood bubble).

Guidance on using a Bill Hook

- Individuals working with a Bill Hook will work within a specific designated area.
- Bill Hooks will be carried with the guard on.
- Forest School Leaders will demonstrate the safe passing around of Bill Hooks as well as the safe use of the equipment (including grip and body position) before each session.
- Forest School Leaders will talk to the children about how to hit the Bill Hook.
- When not in use, Bill Hooks will immediately have their blade protection replaced.
- Leaders will count the Bill Hooks out and back in again.
- Sessions will always be supervised by an adult.
- When using Bill Hooks, each person will sit well out of reach of other individuals not involved in the task at hand (blood bubble).

Guidance on using Loppers

- Individuals working with Loppers will work within a specific designated area.
- Loppers will be carried carefully and under supervision.
- Forest School Leaders will demonstrate the safe passing around of Loppers as well as the safe use of the equipment (including grip and body position) before each session.
- When not in use, Loppers will immediately be stored safely.
- Leaders will count the Loppers out and back in again.
- Sessions will always be supervised by an adult.
- When using Loppers, each person will sit well out of reach of other individuals not involved in the task at hand (blood bubble).

Fire!

A campfire is an important part of the Forest School and is often, though not always, used in a session. It provides a central communal focus, particularly during times of sharing and reviewing; stimulates the senses (watching flames dance, listening to wood crackling, smelling fuel burning, feeling its warmth); and is essential for cooking and providing hot water. With appropriate instruction fires can be used safely with little risk to anyone's health.

All visitors to the site will be made aware from their first visit of the importance of walking around, not through, the fire circle unless invited to do so by a Forest School Leaders.

Participants will be taught important life skills: preparation of the area; building and managing the fire; fire respect and appropriate behaviour; and, the responsibility to self-assess risk.

Before

- The fire circle is made free of debris, trip hazards and overhanging objects
- Fires are not lit in extremely dry or extremely windy weather
- Safety equipment is present and visible (bucket of water, burns kit, first aid kit, fire blanket, fire gloves/gauntlets).

During

- Forest School Leaders maintains responsibility for lighting and maintaining the fire
- Participants receive safety talk and demonstration, including walking around the fire circle – not through it, the position of respect (one knee), entering the fire circle with invitation only, hair tied back, and jackets zipped, and safe use of fire steels.
- Fires are not left unattended
- Flames are kept to approximately knee height
- Seating in line of smoke when there is a clear wind direction is to be avoided. If the wind changes direction participants turn their head to one side and put their hand over their eyes and count to 10 or move back and around to another position.
- 'Tiny' fires (using a small piece of cotton wool) are allowed on the fire circle seats/logs when participants practice making fire with fire steels. Participants are shown how to extinguish these small fires by stamping them out.
- Participants are not permitted to throw anything onto the fire unless guided by a leader.

- No flammable liquids or plastics are to be used on the fire
- Participants may add fuel to the fire with 1:1 adult supervision. Hands must never go over the fire. Fuel must be added from the side.

After

- At the end of the session the fuels should preferably be burnt to ash. The fire must be fully extinguished and stirred with water until no embers, smoke or steam remain.

Fire knowledge

- Lighting techniques include using flint and steel.
- Cotton wool may be used to assist lighting fires.
- Tinder is often cotton wool / tumble dryer lint (fairy blankets/pillows), silver birch bark from dead wood.
- Dry kindling is collected and separated into sizes.
- A fire base is made from flat wood to keep the fire off the floor. Several thin sticks can allow air to circulate under the fire.
- Tinder is lit with a flint and steel.
- Kindling is slowly added from the side using a 'jenga' criss-cross pattern to allow air to circulate.

Kelly Kettle Policy and Procedure

- Kelly Kettles may be used with a 1:5 ratio (age appropriate).
- Always remove the cork before lighting the kettle.
- The cork is only to be used for transporting cold water.
- Never hold the handle above the chimney when the kettle is lit.
- Always keep other people away from the kettle when in use. See handbook for guidelines.

Risk Assessments

The Forest School Leaders is responsible for the health and safety of the individuals taking part in Forest School. Other adults must also ensure the children are safe and the children are encouraged to be risk aware to encourage them to be responsible for their own and others health and wellbeing.

The school has adequate insurance to cover the activities taking place and all staff are First Aid qualified.

Procedures for risk management and assessment:

Prior to the session:

- The lesson activities, relevant risk assessments and any medical/SEN needs of the children are shared with adults.
- The daily site risk assessment will be carried out by the Forest School Leader and any possible risks will be shared with other adults and the children, or managed to minimise risk where needed.
- The weather will be assessed to ensure high winds or thunder and lightning will not pose a risk.
- The children and adults will be checked that clothing and footwear comply with the Forest School Clothing policy.
- Tools or equipment that will be used in the session activities are checked they are safe to use.
- Any medication/inhalers needed by the children are checked.
- School walkie-talkie, Forest School Leaders's mobile phone and the Forest School first aid kit is checked and their whereabouts shared with the other adults.
- Fire safety kit is checked and on site if needed.

During the session:

- Any potential hazards, risks and tool safety talks happen before an activity starts. Children are involved in risk awareness and the need for safety of themselves and others at all times.
- Correct adult:child ratios for tool, equipment and fire use are adhered to at all times.
- Relevant risk assessments for specific tools, equipment and fire use are followed at all times.
- If an activity is adapted during the session, the Forest School Leaders will risk assess appropriately.
- All general Forest School policies and procedures are followed and managed by the Forest School Leaders at all times.
- Regular head counts of the children take place.

End of session:

- Any incidents/accidents have been logged in the incident book and the Headteacher and parents/carers informed where appropriate.
- Any feedback needed to be given to the child's usual class teacher (behaviour, first aid administered etc) will be given when returned to school.

Hazard	Harm	People at risk	Measures to be taken	Responsibility and timescale
Waste/litter	Glass, drug use, metal cans	All	Pre-visit check and continuous monitoring. Children not to pick up rubbish but inform adult if they see something hazardous. Remove and dispose of safely.	Leader prior to and during visit
Animal droppings	Contamination & disease	All	Pre-visit check and continuous monitoring. Sign to say No Dogs on school property. Remove and dispose of safely.	Leader prior to and during visit. SLT
Boundaries	Escaping children, Public entry	Children	Ensure the gates are closed when in FS area. Ensure safe supervision on way to and from site following guidelines on School Risk Assessment Policy. Inform children of boundaries, staff supervise boundaries when on site. Staff to be aware of members of the public walking along the footpath. Children to be reminded of Stranger Danger.	All on visit
Fences	Broken fences falling on person	All	Check fences are intact and safe especially after stormy weather – replace as necessary.	Leader prior to visit SLT
Trees	Falls	Children	Leaders to support children to manage their own risks and stop when they feel unsafe.	All on visit
Tree branches	Branches falling Children falling due to branch breaking	All	Pre-visit check and continuous risk check to look for dead wood hanging in trees, dead branches and damage to trees. Remove hanging dead wood Remind children of risks. Regular Tree Maintenance checks to be carried out.	Leader prior to visit and all staff on visits SLT
Tree Roots and stumps	Tripping and landing on them. Falling off stump.	All	All participants reminded to walk around with care under the trees. Show new participants the exposed roots and inform of danger. Remind children to take care on tree stump and look before leaping off.	All on visit
Tree sticks	Hitting Poking Scraping	Children	Establish safe stick rules. Sticks for playing = arm length maximum Sticks for den building to be dragged to site check around before lifting	All on visit

Tree Sawdust	Saw dust in eyes	All	First aid kit to include eye wash tubes. Leader to flush eyes immediately and follow school first aid policy.	All on visit SLT – first aid kit
Berries and other seeds on flora	Poisoning	Children	Inform children not to pick and eat any berries. Remind children not to put anything in mouths. Wash hands carefully before eating.	All on visit
Fungi	Poisoning	All	Remind all participants to “Look, don’t touch” at any fungi, toadstools or mushrooms.	All on visit
Nettles other weeds	Stinging, Allergic reaction	All	Make participants aware of nettles and other weeds. Keep central play area clear of nettles and weeds. All participants to wear long trousers.	Leader prior to visit and all on visit
Bees, Wasps Mosquitos	Stings, bites	All	Check area for nests – particularly the willow as wasps are attracted to it in June/July. Avoid contact with bees/wasps. Call 999 if anaphylactic reaction to sting. Children to wear long trousers.	Leader prior to visit and all on visit.
Fire	Burns Fire out of control	All	Leader with First Aid always present. School safety policy adhered to and safety procedures followed. Fire only in two allotted fire locations.	Leader prior to and on visit

Fire Lighting	Fingertip burns from matches Sparks in eyes	All	Leader with First Aid always present. Fire lighting on a one to one basis or in small group dependant on age and activity. Strict supervision by all staff Children taught safe and correct methods of lighting fires. First aid – eye wash.	
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Cooking	Burns to mouth. Burns to hand when handling pan, tinfoil, cooking stick	All	Leader with Outdoor First Aid always present. Cooking on a one to one basis or in small group dependant on age and activity. Strict supervision by all staff Children taught safe and correct handling of cooking implements. Gauntlets/gloves provided	All on visit
Inappropriate behaviour	Disruption to the activity. Physical harm to self. Causing accidents to others. Deliberate harm to others. Compromise of safety rules eg by fire or with tools.	All	Leaders to watch for sign of frustration or aggression. Practice de-escalation techniques. Staff to radio office or SLT to assist or remove participant. Staff to remove other participants to safety if required.	
Tools	Cuts Grazes Amputation Puncture wounds	All	Tools stored away from site. Tools taken to session kept in in locked storage until needed. Used on a one to one basis or in small group dependant on age and activity. Strict supervision by all staff Children taught safe and correct use of different tools.	All on visit
Ropes	Burns Whipping injuries	All	Remind children and adults to use gloves when using ropes to hoist or drag. Remind all to take care when ropes are thrown, eg. over branches when den building. Children reminded to take care if skipping or twirling with ropes to avoid injury to others.	All on visit.

First Aid and Emergency Procedure

The Forest School Leaders are First Aid trained and holds relevant qualifications. The Forest School Leaders carry a First Aid and Burns kit.

Our School is committed to encouraging and promoting good health and will deal efficiently and effectively with illnesses and emergencies that may arise while children are in our care. All participants will be briefed in what to do in case of emergency. Under duties set out in the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981, the School recognises its responsibilities in providing adequate and appropriate equipment, facilities and personnel to enable suitable first aid to be given.

The Forest School Leaders will assess the situation, the nature and extent of the injury/accident. They will ensure that the rest of the group are safe from danger and are adequately supervised. They will attend to the casualty, giving first aid where necessary.

After all such accidents or incidents will be recorded in detail and logged. Parents/carers will be notified as soon as is practicably possible.

The school will notify LCC Health and Safety and dependent on the extent/severity of the accident/injury this may be RIDDOR reportable through the H&S Executive.

The Forest School Leaders and other relevant members of staff should consider whether the accident or incident highlights any actual or potential weaknesses in the policies or procedures, and act accordingly, making suitable adjustments where necessary.

If anyone sustains an injury or illness which cannot be treated by First Aid on site and requires immediate medical assistance, a call to 999 should be made.

- The school will be responsible for notifying the parent.
- The group will be supervised away from the incident and if in danger, will be moved to safety.
- A member of the school staff will meet the ambulance at the site entrance and direct the crew to the incident site.
- If the injured child is taken to hospital, a member of staff will go with them and the child's parent will be updated about the situation by the staff remaining.
- In minor cases, the school will contact the parent of the injured child so they can be collected and taken to the hospital, doctor or home.

Weather

The Forest School Leaders will check the weather forecast before every session to ensure that the planned activity remains safe. Forest School will continue to go ahead in all weather conditions unless deemed dangerous or excessive.

Communication Strategy

Communication between everyone involved in Forest School is the basis for successful sessions. This would include:

- Class Teachers - the Forest School Leaders will evaluate each session and feed this information back to the class teacher where relevant. Any behavioural issues will be dealt with and fed back to the class teacher for their information.
- Site Manager - the Forest School Leaders will inform the Premises Officer of any hazards or concerns about the Forest School site. The Forest School Leaders will inform the Premises Office and other relevant staff when a fire is to be lit in Forest School. The Forest School Leaders will confirm Fire Safety arrangements with the Premises Officer and other relevant staff. The Premises Officer will communicate any hazards on the site or around the perimeter before a session commences. The Premises Officer will monitor and maintain the Forest School area.
- Headteacher - the Forest School Leaders will regularly update the Headteacher on the progress of the Forest School sessions and will ensure the safety and well-being of the children at all times.
- Parents/Carers - we will communicate to parents/carers about Forest School sessions by making the Forest School Handbook available to them.
- Wider school community – we will provide regular updates using school newsletters and social media.