

Forest School Policy and Procedures

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1. Introduction

This policy applies to all pupils participating in Forest School sessions who attend the Stephen Perse Foundation (the **Foundation**) including pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

2. Guiding principles

Forest School is holistic learning through play and exploration. pupils learn about the environment, how to manage risks and use their initiative to solve problems and to cooperate with others.

This policy ensures that all parents, staff, volunteers and governors at the Foundation have a shared understanding of the Forest School ethos and the implementation of Forest School at the Foundation.

The Foundation has adequate insurance to cover Forest School sessions and the use of tools, ropes and fire use.

Our aim is to provide a long term programme of Forest School sessions which will offer the opportunity to create resilient, life-long learners with transferable skills, in a pupil-led environment using open-ended play and learning. pupils will have opportunities to take and manage their own risks to help achieve emotional intelligence.

The Forest School ethos follows the 6 principles for good practice:

1. Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.
2. Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
3. Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
4. Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
5. Forest School is run by a qualified Forest School practitioner who continuously maintains and develops their professional practice.
6. Forest school uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

A Forest School Leader (**Leader**) is a member of staff who holds a fully recognised Level 3 Forest School Practitioners qualification and is present at all Forest School sessions.

3. Safeguarding

The Foundation's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, available on the Foundation's website, will be followed during Forest School sessions.

4. Health and Safety

We recognise that the health and safety of pupils and adults is of paramount importance. We make Forest School a healthy and safe place for pupils, parents, staff and volunteers by assessing and minimising the hazards and risks enabling the pupils to develop a responsibility to themselves, others and their environment.

The law does not require that all risk is eliminated but that “reasonable” precaution is taken. We put reasonable and sensible precautions in place to ensure the suitability and safety of our visits (as far as reasonably possible) and to reduce any risks to acceptably low levels. We recognise that it is important to balance the need for pupils to be able to take appropriate risks through physically challenging play and the benefit for pupils to be given the opportunity to work out what is safe and what they should do when faced with a risk.

5. Risk Management and Assessment

A full and comprehensive risk assessment of all sites used for Forest School is undertaken and reviewed regularly. Daily hazard checks are completed by the Leader before the session commences. Following the site hazard check, the Leader will carry out anything that is needed to make the site safe (e.g. remove any hazards, mark off any unsafe areas). At the same time the hazard check will consider specific circumstances which make it appropriate to cancel or limit a Forest School session. Any issue arising from this check is reported to the relevant person or department. Ongoing ‘on the spot’ risk assessment happens during the sessions, and any issues arising will be recorded on the relevant risk assessment. Risk assessments are shared with staff and helpers attending the session and any accident, incidents or near misses that arise will be recorded and reflected in the risk assessments.

Benefit risk assessments are carried out for activities and these are monitored and reviewed regularly. All staff and volunteers are made aware of the importance of allowing pupils to self-assess situations and to assist only if there is imminent peril to the pupil or another person. Particular activities the pupils may take part in are classified as ‘higher risk’ and these activities will not be available to the pupils until the Leader is confident that their behaviour is appropriate to ensure their safety. Individual Pupils may be identified as needing additional support at Forest School and may need an individual risk assessment to identify if they need any additional control measures.

6. First Aid, Accidents and Emergencies

At least one member of staff attending will hold a paediatric first aid certificate and the Leader holds an outdoor first aid certificate. At all times staff will follow the Foundation’s First Aid Policy.

The Leader always carries a kit bag that contains:

- A first aid kit which is compliant with Health and Safety (First Aid) regulations (1981)

- A burns kit when having a fire
- Emergency directions and contacts for relevant people at the school
- Laminated maps and directions of the site for emergency services
- Directions to the nearest emergency A&E departments
- A mobile phone
- PPE (gloves, aprons, masks, hand wipes, sanitizer, paper towels)
- An emergency whistle

Any pupil who attends the setting with a medical condition, which is managed through medication, has an individual health care plan (IHCP) in place. All staff will be made aware of this plan and the procedure to take should the pupil require administration of medication or first aid due to their medical condition. Any individual medications are kept with a member of Foundation staff during Forest School, this ensures they are available easily should they be required. Emergency medication such as auto adrenaline injectors (AAIs), piriton and inhalers are kept at the Latham Road and Dame Bradbury sites. The Leader will have Piriton in their first aid kit if not held at site. All individual and emergency medication is administered in accordance with the Foundation's Medicine Policy and Supporting pupils with Medical Conditions Policy.

Staff on the Forest School session have readily accessible telephone numbers for Foundation schools and the emergency services to use if required. If we call the emergency services, in the event of a serious incident, we will then call the school to let them know to alert the parents and a member of the Senior Leadership Team. A member of staff will accompany the pupil until the parents arrive and the rest of the group will remain at site, if safe to do so, or return to school. In the event of an incident on the walk to or from the site we would find a safe spot to wait with the group until we can return to school safely. The Driving School Vehicles Policy and Procedures is followed in the event of a minibus incident.

Any accidents, incidents or near misses are reported in accordance with the Foundation Accident, Incident and Near Miss Reporting Policy and Procedures and an Incident Report Form (IRF) completed accordingly. We also follow the legal guidelines for the Reporting Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences (RIDDOR).

There are designated emergency evacuation points and emergency procedures for each site. Evacuation of relevant sites is practised with the pupils termly and the Leader has an emergency whistle in case of external threats e.g. from public, wild animals or electrical storms.

7. Bites and Stings

Insect bites and stings are common, particularly in spring and summer. Most cause minor irritation but others may suffer serious allergic reactions that require medical attention. Piriton (Antihistamine) is carried by Leaders and kept on the Latham Road Pavilion and Dame Bradbury's Forest School sites. This will be administered according to the Foundation's Medicines and First Aid policies. Ticks are not known to be on the site. However, the Leaders are aware of how to recognise a tick bite and parents will be informed and asked to take their pupil to have it removed by their GP.

8. Welfare Requirements

8.1 Toileting

Pupils are encouraged to use the toilet prior to joining the Forest School session. Where toilets are accessible on school sites, during a Forest School session, they will be used. Permission is sought and a member of staff accompanies pupils. When they need to use these toilets, the staff member will let the Leader know which pupils they are taking and consider whether an appropriate ratio of adults to pupils will remain in their absence. The staff member will also check whether there are other pupils that need to go to the toilet to avoid multiple trips to the building during the session. There should not be any adult supervising a pupil alone; the member of staff and pupil should always be able to be seen by another adult.

If adult accompaniment cannot be given due to safety reasons or there is no toilet available, pupils will use an alternative toileting area where pupils will go for a “wild wee” or use the porter toilet. This alternative area will be outside of the main play area but close enough for the pupils to be supervised while they go to the toilet. At all times staff will adhere to the Foundation Intimate Care Policy.

Only an adult who is DBS checked and a member of Foundation staff, can accompany pupils with toileting.

8.2 Hand Washing

Where there is no running water, warm soapy water will be brought to the session for hand washing. The water will be brought in a container with a tap that allows washing using running water instead of sharing water. Paper towels, wipes and hand sanitiser are taken to sessions. These provisions and hand washing will be available throughout the session for washing dirty hands as needed. Pupils and staff will be encouraged to wash their hands before and after the session. Hands will be washed before and after toileting and before any food is consumed.

8.3 Food and Drink

The rule for Forest School is, “no picking, no licking.” Pupils will be reminded regularly not to eat anything found in the woods such as berries or fungi. Staff are to support pupils by reminding them not to put their fingers, hands or objects in their mouths or noses. A Food Hygiene Certificate level two is held by the Leader. We will also cook food on the fire to promote a community feel and for the pupils to experience open fire cooking. Please see Fire Safety at Forest School in the annex below.

Staff ensure that pupils are given food and drink consistent with their dietary needs and preferences. Any allergies or intolerances are identified before cooking and separate utensils used so as not to cross contaminate food. Good food hygiene practices are followed when any food is cooked on the

fire, a food temperature probe is taken when cooking any meat or fish. Any utensils, cooking pots will be thoroughly cleaned back at the school site.

Pupils are encouraged to bring their own full water bottles but drinking water is available at all times.

8.4 Disposal of Waste

During the hazard check (prior to the session) the Leader will check for any rubbish, waste or debris and remove it as needed. Any rubbish found during the session will be disposed of on site in waste bins or collected and taken away to be disposed of back at the school in a correct manner. No food waste is to be left on the floor; as much as reasonably possible needs to be cleared from the area after a session or composted if a bin is available. Food waste attracts wildlife and may leave flora/wildlife dependent upon unnatural food sources if left repeatedly. Waste from hand washing will be collected in an identified container and disposed of in the nearest drain.

8.5 Personal Protective Equipment

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be used when using tools. This is provided by the Leader who will ensure pupils and staff members participating in activities wear the appropriate clothing and equipment as required for the task they are completing. The Leader will ensure there are rigger gloves available for tool usage such as the hand drills and knives and fire gloves are provided for use of the fire. All staff members and pupils will be taught how to use the PPE and why it is needed.

Forest School is run outdoors throughout the year therefore pupils and adults must wear appropriate clothing and footwear to enable the pupils to achieve the best possible experience in a woodland environment in all seasons. We follow the Forest Schools' ethos of 'there is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing!'

Parents are asked to provide clothing for their pupils for all seasons for every Forest School session. The sessions will take place all year round and the pupils must have appropriate clothing and footwear, no open front or back shoes are to be worn.

- In the colder months (October – April), layers should be worn along with waterproof coats and trousers, thick socks and boots, hats and gloves (not mittens)
- In the warmer months (May – September) long sleeved T-shirts, long trousers, waterproofs, wellies or sturdy trainers and sun hats should be worn. Woodlands can still be quite cool and damp even in the warmer months.

A kit list is recommended to parents for all seasons, for the full kit list please refer to our Parent Handbooks.

9. Weather Conditions, Contingency and Cancellation

Forest School sessions are run throughout the year to enhance and develop the pupils' learning by being exposed to the woodland in all seasons and elements. Before each session the Leader will look at the most recent weather report, and their judgement will be used to see if the session can take place safely. We may shorten a session due to severe cold or weather conditions. Forest School may be cancelled in full due to high winds, with the possibility of trees/branches coming down, electrical

storms or if the site or conditions become unsafe for any reason. An alternative safe area may be used if appropriate, such as the school field. The Beaufort scale of wind force will be used to assess winds. Shade and shelter can be provided by the Leader if needed.

During the session if evacuation of the site due to weather is needed, the evacuation procedure will be followed and pupils taken to a safe place before returning to school as soon as safe to do so.

During colder weather, the group will stay more active to keep warm. Sun cream will be applied prior to sessions during the summer. Pupils will provide their own sun cream. If this is not available, a school sun cream will be used to protect pupils for extended periods outdoors. Sun cream will be applied every 3 – 4 hours or as appropriate. Throughout the summer months pupils will be encouraged to keep hydrated. Drinking water is available at all times.

The site's ground conditions may present a higher risk than normal during winter. This is assessed regularly and pupils are reminded of the risks of uneven ground or slippery surfaces. Paths may be constructed, repaired or rotated to reduce risk or to protect the site. A three year management plan of the sites, under our responsibility, is reviewed by the Foundation regularly. For the sites which we make use of for Forest School sessions, but do not own/lease, we have sight of a three year management plan and this is kept under review by the proprietor/tenant.

10. Fauna and Flora

The sites are checked for toxic plants, berries and fungus which will be monitored and identified. It may not be necessary to remove such flora or fauna as the pupils are taught the 'no picking, no licking' rules for potential hazards in the forest. The poisonous item may be shown to the pupils so they can identify what items are to be avoided.

Pupils are taught to care for the living trees and plants at their site: we do not hurt them unnecessarily and teach pupils how to care and thrive with the environment. We have a rule that we leave no trace of us being in the forest when we leave. Our three year management plan for the sites under our control may identify areas to be cut back each year on a rotation system or sites left to rejuvenate for some time.

11. Lost or Missing Persons

Pupils' safety is maintained as the highest priority at all times at Forest School. Every attempt is made through carrying out the entrance and exit procedures along with supervision and appropriate boundaries to ensure the security of pupils is maintained at all times. In the unlikely event of a pupil going missing the Foundation's Missing Child Policy is followed.

We encourage all participants to take an active interest in their surroundings so they can find their bearings. For everyone's safety we have a rule to stay together as a group and we have identified boundaries that are agreed with the pupils and reinforced at every session. Regular headcounts are undertaken by the staff and staff have good communication within the group, and if anyone leaves the group they let the Leader know.

The pupils are familiar with the emergency whistle in case of emergency evacuation and the chicken call used to get the group together at designated spots safely. Boundary fences or identified rope boundaries are used at our sites to teach pupils where it is safe to explore.

12. Unwanted Visitors

The Foundation will work with pupils, parents and the community to ensure the rights and safety of the pupils. We ensure our Forest School sites are safe and that if an unwanted visitor enters the site, the Leader will assess and deal with the situation.

- In Saffron Walden and our Cambridge schools, our Forest School is held on private land so an unwanted visitor is unlikely. If an unwanted visitor has been recognised and if it is safe to do so, the Leader will ask the unwanted visitor to leave the site. If the unwanted visitor does not leave the site, the Leader will advise a member of staff to ring the police and will advise staff to call pupils back to circle, conduct a head count and if safe to do so, take the pupils back to the carpark.
- In Madingley the 800 Wood woodland, local playground and Hall used are public places, and pupils are briefed about strangers and staff are vigilant in the presence of the public.

13. Behaviour Management

The Behaviour, Rewards and Sanctions Policy and the relevant School Rules and Code of Conduct apply during Forest School sessions but we take into account that behaviour considered inappropriate in the classroom setting may be considered appropriate at Forest School. For example, stick play, climbing or 'rough and tumble' interaction between the pupils.

We understand that Forest School may be the only environment providing the opportunity for pupils to express a wide range of emotions. We allow them to occur whilst managing behaviour in a way that keeps everyone safe. The Forest School ethos aims to promote holistic development and provide opportunities to take risks and the outcome of those risks operating a learner centred process.

We recognise and respond to factors that could affect and/or be a trigger for unsuitable behaviour at Forest School. The pupils are regularly reminded that we protect and care for nature and we leave the setting as we find it. Pupils are expected to play and explore in a respectful manner.

The Leader will create the emotional environment and expectations of the session for all participants pupils and adults by modelling behaviour. The physical, social and emotional boundaries are set and embedded at every session. Pupils can be encouraged to use a spot to sit to have some time to calm down and reflect on their emotions and have some quiet/silent time, if appropriate.

14. Supervision Ratios

For supervision the usual minimum ratio of adults to pupils is:

- EYFS ratios for Nursery pupils in school gardens
- 1:4 for EYFS age 3-5 in public areas off school site

- 1:6 for EYFS age 3-5 on school grounds
- 1:10 for KS1 on and in public areas off school site
- A minimum of three adults at all times during sessions off school site

However, consideration is given to an appropriate supervision ratio when risk assessments are carried out and in accordance with published guidance. Please see the Foundation's Trips and Visits Policy for further information.

The Leader will find out about all participants' individual needs and impart information to staff and volunteers, as appropriate, to assist with the provision of support.

15. Risky Play and Activities

Rope and strings are important tools for developing schemas of transporting and connecting. Pupils will be provided with a range of resources to use and encouraged to tie knots and explore uses for ropes. Pupils will be discouraged from tying each other up or themselves. Any activity will be supervised and ropes will only be used as part of an activity not as free play. No ropes are to be taken into certain areas such as the bushes area at Latham Road.

All activities that carry higher risks during Forest School have been risk assessed and are regularly reviewed. Pupils are taught safe lifting practices and the higher risk activities are always supervised on a lower ratio. Pupils take part in a safety reminder at the beginning of all sessions, where they go over their rules and boundaries of their site, this includes how to climb, swing and lift safely.

16. Related policies

- Accidents, Incidents and Near Miss Reporting Policy and Procedures
- Assessment and Reporting Policy
- Behaviour Rewards and Sanctions Policy
- Code of Conduct and School Rules - school specific
- Driving School Vehicles Policy and Procedures
- First Aid Policy
- Head Injury Procedures
- Health and Safety Policy
- Ill Health Procedures
- Intimate Care Policy
- Medicines Policy
- Missing Child Policy
- Physical Intervention (Positive Handling) Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- SEND Policy
- Supporting pupils with Medical Conditions Policy
- Supervision Policy
- Trips and Visits Policy

17. Annexes

Annex A - Forest school lighting of fires

Annex B - Forest school use of tools

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Version Control

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Annex A- Fire Safety at Forest School

The use of fires in our Forest School sessions greatly increases the pupils' experiences and makes for a group camp feeling creating excitement and imagination. Teaching pupils about the dangers of fire and how to use a fire safely to give you warmth and food and drink is an important skill for them to learn. All pupils that attend Forest School from an early age learn the fire safety rules, sitting around the campfire together, enjoying a hot drink and telling stories. The older pupils are taught basic primitive fire skills, using a striker to make sparks onto cotton wool or having a go at making a fire plough. Other such skills learnt are: making charcoal pencils, the fire triangle and feeding a fire safely.

A designated fire area is present at all our Forest School sites where fires are used. Time is taken to consider where the fire area should be, looking at the ground materials, overhanging branches and giving thought to wildlife. A form of seating is arranged around the inner fire area in a semicircle for the pupils to sit on during a controlled fire. The seats are positioned at least 1.5 metres from the fire and the pupils are taught the fire rules before any fires are lit. When accessing or moving around the campfire, pupils must walk around the outside of the log circle. Should they wish to sit near the fire, pupils must step over the logs and sit down. They must remain seated and leave using this method of stepping over the logs.

There is always a Leader present when a fire is planned and lit. Staff and pupils will be aware of fires before the session. Staff have read the fire procedure and the fire risk assessment which is regularly reviewed.

A hazard check of the fire area is undertaken before a fire is lit. This takes into consideration wind direction, trip hazards, debris etc. Fires will not be lit in strong winds. When a fire is alight the Leader will continually assess the wind direction, pupils will be advised and supported in moving away from the smoke. A higher ratio of staff to pupils may be needed for certain groups at fires, this is the Leader's decision. Before every fire the pupils are reminded about fire safety. No fire will be lit until the Leader is confident the pupils understand and can follow the fire rules. Pupils will be supervised whilst around the fire pit at all times and the fire will never be left unattended.

The Leader will use fire gloves when placing things into or taking things off the fire. Water/sand, fire blanket, fire gloves, burns kit and the first aid kit are always at hand during a fire.

When leaving the site, the Leader will check that the fire is extinguished 30 minutes before leaving and that all embers are out. Water or sand may be used to put the fire out and only natural fuel is used, no accelerants or plastics are to be put onto fires.

Kelly kettles may be used, but placed in the same place the usual fire is had, making sure the base is on a flat surface. The Kelly kettle bung is always to face away from the person lighting the fire and opposite the fire feeding hole.

Cooking or tending to the fire is always completed with an adult and pupil on a 1:1 ratio. Pupils are invited into the inner circle and adopt the "respect" kneeled position. Many different foods may be

cooked on the fire, using different cooking equipment from cast iron pans, dutch ovens and marshmallow toasting sticks.

Fire Procedure

Pupils will be taught the fire circle rules, as follows, and these will be reinforced during every session in the lead up to a fire being lit:

- There will always be a water/sand bucket, fire gloves and fire blanket next to the fire.
- There will be a 1.5 metre gap between the fire and the pupils' log seats or tarpaulin.
- There will be clear exits between the log seats to enter and exit the fire area.
- When the campfire is in use, pupils are not permitted to access the area immediately surrounding the fire without permission.
- There will be logs or a rope surrounding the fire area as a visual clue and for security with younger groups.
- Only natural fuel to be used on the fire, no accelerants or plastics.
- Pupils will assume the kneeled on one knee stance (the 'respect' position) when tending or cooking at the fire.
- Only 1 pupil at a time will help tend the fire 1:1 supervised by the nominated fire feeder.
- Pupils, adults and volunteers will not cross through the centre of the fire circle/seating area.
- Pupils and adults will step back behind log seats and walk around the outside of the fire circle.
- Pupils are not permitted to throw anything on to the fire.
- If wind direction is variable, the seating should be rearranged when appropriate, if at all possible.
- If there is a clear wind direction, seating in the line of smoke is to be avoided.
- When the fire is extinguished, the area will be tidied.
- The fire area will be checked by the Leader after the group has left to ensure the fire is completely extinguished.

Annex B - Tool Safety at Forest School

Forest School sessions are greatly enhanced by the use of various types of equipment which may include tool use. Pupils are encouraged to use the equipment available to increase learning and build confidence. The risk assessments carried out include individual tool and equipment operation. Clear guidance will be given on the use of tools before an activity begins, through the use of tool talks. Pupils can only use tools when under the supervision of an adult with adequate knowledge in the relevant tool use. When high risk tools are used, the adult to pupil supervision ratio will always be 1:1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as safety gloves and goggles will be used during activities as appropriate. All equipment is checked, cleaned, maintained and stored safely before, during and after every session. Tools are contained in a lockable box and stored out of reach of the pupils. When using tools during a session, a designated tool area will be set up to store tools safely when not in use.

Pupils are taught to respect the 'blood bubble' (safe working distances) and how to handle tools safely. Pupils will be taught to sit in the respect position when using the bow saw or bill hook for example, or standing for use of sheaf knives for beginners with the Leader. Pupils will only be trusted to use tools independently once the Leader has deemed that the pupils understand the safety of how to use the tool correctly.

There are a number of tools we use to help with crafting, whittling, maintenance, fire lighting and much more. When using any tool it is important to ensure they are kept clean and stored correctly for the next use. The Leader is responsible for the maintenance and storage of all tools.

In our sessions we may use the following with pupils:

- Bill hook – for splitting wood.
- Bow saw – for cutting any wood larger than a two pence piece (approximately 1 ½ inches in diameter).
- Loppers – cutting branches which are smaller than a two pence piece (approximately 1 ½ inches in diameter).
- Sheath knife – for cutting string or rope and whittling.
- Potato peelers – for whittling and developing the skills needed for using the sheath knife.
- Hammers – for hammering nails into wood and other woodland craft activities.
- Drills– used for drilling screws into wood and other woodland craft activities.