

St Mark's CofE Primary School

Forest School Handbook Including Policy and Procedures



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Introduction - 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 Association)

Forest School is a holistic learning process for all age groups and abilities of children through initiating and giving opportunities for different elements of child led learning and play. The approach to learning maximises the emotional and social development of aspects of education through its ethos and values.

Forest School comprises of regular woodland sessions. The environment enhances the experience of learning through first hand experiences to all those involved. Here opportunities, interests and creativity are developed through future learning. The group size of children and the child:adult ratios are so that individuals get the support and nurture they require at their learning level/ need through responsible risk taking experiences in a safe, nurturing environment.

Our Vision for Forest School

At St Mark’s, through our Forest School sessions, we aim to encourage independent, enthusiastic and creative life-long learners who develop holistically through well-planned activities that are interesting and based around a child-centred approach of learning. We also want to promote excellent mental health and wellbeing that comes through being outdoors, especially in a forest.

The Forest School Principles and how they link to our setting

- Forest School is a process of frequent, regular outdoor sessions. Here we aim for the children to have five weeks each year at Forest School.

- Forest School sessions are planned, reviewed and adapted for the needs of the children through previous session observations. All observations are an integral part of the Forest School process.
- Forest School takes place on the school's site, in the woodland area which is situated at the back of the school field.
- We aim to promote the holistic development of all children involved in Forest School through fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- Forest School sessions offer all learners the opportunity to take supported risks in a safe environment.
- Further information around the principles can be found [here](#).

Training

The St Mark's Forest School Trained Level 3 Practitioner is Trevor Calver.

Staff and Pupil Ratios

St Mark's follows the Hampshire County Council guidelines for adult to child ratios when sessions are held outside the school grounds. There must always be 1 adult by the fire when it is lit; a fire should never be unsupervised.

The ratios for Forest School are: under 5 years old 1:6 under 8 years old 1:8

Safeguarding and Health & Safety

St Marks' will follow the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. A copy of the Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Policy can be found on the school website.

All staff and helpers have an Enhanced DBS Disclosure check, which the School Office maintains a Register. All staff and volunteers are responsible for keeping children safe through the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

A summary of the policy is as follows:

- Every child has the right to be kept safe from danger and learn in a safe and secure environment
- All staff involved in Forest School hold relevant DBS checks.
- All Forest School staff attend regular safeguarding training.
- All concerns and disclosures are confidential and will only be shared with the school's designated safeguarding leaders and necessary agencies, if appropriate, as decided by the DSLs. This will be done promptly and also recorded in line with the school procedures.
- The DSLs at St Mark's are Charles Applegate (lead), Nikki Ford and Vicky Elms (deputies).
- If a concern is about an adult, the Low Level Concern or Whistleblowing Policies should be followed.
- Further information about safeguarding at St Mark's can be found [here](#).

Health and Safety at Work Act (HASWA)

The HASWA outlines the responsibilities of employers (in this case, the Forest School Leader) and the employees (being adults working with the group), as.....

Employers must	How this will be done
Tell you about risks to your health and safety.	Adults will be asked to read the risk assessment(s) at the beginning of the session.
Tell you how to do your job safely.	The Forest School Leader will introduce the adults involved to the activities and inform them of safety considerations.
Ensure that safe working practices and appropriate policies are in place to safeguard its staff and users.	Adults will record accidents and incidents, and review whether they could have been avoided. The Forest School Leader will make appropriate changes to procedures and policies, as necessary.
Inform you how to get First Aid.	The Forest School Leader will have a First Aid kit and will administer First Aid. There is also First Aid supplies and trained staff in the school reception.
Tell you what to do in an Emergency.	Staff will be given a copy of the Emergency Procedures at the start of their involvement in Forest School.
Provide you with any protection you may need to fulfil your role	Relevant safety equipment (e.g. gloves) will be given to anybody who needs it.

Risk Management Policy and Procedures

St Mark's aims to develop children's self-esteem, independence and motivation towards learning in a safe environment. In order that these aims can be met, the Forest School Leader will - Consistently apply the five-step approach to risk assessment for all Forest School activities:

- Look for hazards.
- Decide who may be harmed and how.
- Evaluate the risks.
- Record findings, including daily amendments to standing risk assessments based on site visits or observations.
- Review assessments on a regular basis.

We will also carry out Site Risk Assessments on each site where Forest School activities will take place on a seasonal basis (i.e. four Site Risk Assessments will be completed each year).

- Daily pre-visit checks will be carried out by the Forest School Leader on sites to be used prior to a Forest School session starting.
- Complete an Activity Risk/Benefit Assessment for every activity to be undertaken at Forest School.
- Ensure all staff and volunteer helpers have read the relevant Site and Activity Risk Assessments

prior to each FS session.

- Inform staff, volunteers and children of potential hazards and how these are to be handled in a FS session.
- Ensure that all staff, volunteers and children are aware of the emergency procedures for the Forest School site.
- Be responsible for teaching children adequate skills in order to keep themselves safe, particularly in relation to the use of hand tools and fire.
- Ensure children and adults will have access to drinking water during sessions.
- Ensure a nil-by-mouth policy is adopted in all Forest School sessions, except for food cooked as part of a fully risk-assessed Forest School activity.

First Aid

The Forest School Leader is responsible for First Aid and is qualified in Outdoor, Forest School, Pediatric First Aid. An adequate first aid kit and accident record, will be in forest school in all sessions.#

Ticks are common in the woodland at St Mark's. Where a tick is found on a participant, parents/carers should be informed as soon as practical so that they can remove it safely and medical intervention can be obtained.

Accident and Emergency Procedure

All staff, volunteers and children will be instructed on what to do in case of an emergency.

Firstly a whistle will be blown as a signal to stop what you are doing, and to return to the fire circle to find a member of staff and wait for further instructions.

The Forest School Leader will assess the emergency/accident situation (the extent of the injury/accident). The Forest School Leader will ensure that the rest of the group are safe from danger and are adequately supervised.

The Forest School Leader will attend to any casualties, giving First Aid as required.

If the Forest School Leader is injured or becomes ill, the Forest School Assistant will take charge of the situation as above and will call for one of the First Aiders from school to attend. They will then follow the procedure below.

In the Event of Injury

If anyone sustains an injury or illness which cannot be treated by First Aid on-site and requires medical assistance:

- In serious cases, the Emergency Services will be contacted using the school Walkie-Talkie which is carried by the Forest School Leader at each session. The School Office will be responsible for contacting the emergency services and, where necessary, the injured party's emergency contact.
- The rest of the group will be supervised away from the incident and if in danger, will be moved to safety.
- One member of staff from school will meet the ambulance at the main entrance and direct the crew to the incident site.
- If the injured party is taken to hospital, one member of staff will go with them and the injured party's emergency contact will be updated about the situation by a member of the School office staff.
- In minor cases, the Forest School Leader will arrange to contact the injured party's emergency contact so that they can be collected and taken to the hospital, doctor or home, as appropriate.

Emergency Contact Numbers

- Ambulance/Fire Brigade: 999
- School Office: 01256 346 111

Requesting attendance by Emergency Services (Ambulance)

Dial 999 and ask for an ambulance. Be ready with the following information:

- School Phone Number **01256 346 111**
- School Post Code **RG22 4US**
- Ambulance Access – **Danebury Road**

Requesting attendance by the Emergency Services (Fire Brigade)

Dial 999 and ask for the Fire Brigade. Be ready with the following information:

- School Phone Number **01256 346 111**
- School Post Code **RG22 4US**
- Ambulance Access – **Danebury Road**

An accident form will be completed as soon as possible and given to the School's Admin Team.

Cancellation Procedure including Weather

St Mark's will take place at the usual site in all weathers. On-going Risk Assessments will be taken, with regards the weather and the safety of the children. For example, heavy rain, strong winds, snow, or heat may be such that the session has to be cancelled on safety grounds.

Forest School will also be postponed if the Forest School Leader or Forest School Assistant is absent. Parents will be advised of the cancellation.

Any volunteers that are supporting Forest School will be advised by a telephone call.

Hygiene Procedures

Toileting:

- Children will be encouraged to use the toilet before leaving the school building.
- If a child needs the toilet during a Forest School session, the child will be sent in this may be with an adult depending on their age and ability, to be decided by the accompanying LSA.
- If a child has a wetting or soiling accident, they will be changed in accordance with the School's Personal Care Procedures. Assistance would be requested from School Staff via the walkie-talkie.

Hand Washing:

- Hands will be washed after every Forest School session

Snack time or cooking:

- During snack time or cooking activities, food hygiene regulations will be adhered.
- Children will wash and dry hands and sit on the base camp benches when consuming any food or drink.

Parental Consent

Parental Consent for Forest School participation will be obtained prior to the first session a child attends. Our letter is attached.

Use of Photographs

Photographs will be taken in accordance with the school agreement where parents are able to opt out of photographs being used, of their child/children, for the school's website or any other school publications.

Forest School Clothing

- Forest School sessions will take place in all weathers unless the safety of the participants is in question.
- *'There is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing'.*
- Suitable clothing is essential for everyone participating; everyone needs to be adequately dressed in order to gain their full learning potential during the session.

Children should have:

- Long sleeved t-shirt.
- Trousers, to reduce the risk of bites, stings and scratches.
- Waterproof jacket and waterproof over trousers (in wet weather).
- Long socks, wellies or old trainers (in very hot, dry weather).
- During the summer, a sunhat and sunscreen.
- During the colder months, extra layers such as a fleece, leggings, tights, hats and gloves are required.
- Children should bring their Forest School clothes in a separate named bag.

Suggested Activities for Forest Schools

Activities for Forest Schools are diverse and numerous but it should be reminded that we are trying to create independent learners who are inspired to try out their own ideas, explore their own interests and to attempt new ideas. Some activities might include:

- Shelter building
- Fire lighting
- Tool use
- Studying wildlife
- Playing team and group games
- Sensory activities
- Tracking games
- Cooking on an open fire
- Using a Kelly Kettle
- Rope and string work
- Art and sculpture work
- Woodland and traditional craft
- Developing stories and drama, and meeting imaginary characters
- Physical movement activities

General Rules for Tool Use

- All tools have a separate risk assessment and an activity Risk/Benefit Assessment which is completed for all activities.
- The Forest School Leader is nominated to ensure safe storage of tools on school premises.
- All staff ensure safe storage, safe usage and safe movement whilst at the Forest School Site.
- Tools should be kept clean, sharp and checked before and at the end of every session.
- Tools should only be used with a designated trained adult.
- The Forest School Leader and Forest School Assistant are responsible for overseeing safe use and maintenance of all tools.
- Tool Box checklists are used to ensure that all items are returned safely at the end of each session.

Fire Safety Procedures

Campfires are an important part of Forest School and are used in many sessions. St Mark's aims to ensure that all children and adults participating in Forest School sessions where fires are lit, do so safely.

Only the Forest School Fire Circle area will be used for campfires.

Campfire areas are enclosed by logs to make a Fire Pit to prevent the spread of fire.

Positioning of Children and Adults by the Fire

- The fire area is surrounded by a boundary of seating logs of at least 2m from the fire pit or Kelly Kettle. Children will sit on logs outside this boundary.
- When the campfire is in use, children are not permitted to access the area immediately surrounding the fire without permission.

- Children will be taught how to change seats by standing, stepping over the log and then walking around the outside of the seating area. They must never cross the inner area.
- Once seated around the campfire, the children must remain seated until directed by an adult to move.
- Long sleeves and trousers must always be worn.
- Children are not permitted to throw anything onto the fire.
- Advice on the appropriate way for dealing with smoke will be given to the children.
- If there is a clear wind direction, seating in the line of smoke is to be avoided.
- If wind direction is variable, the Forest School Leader should rearrange the seating if at all possible.

Fire Lighting

Training has been provided to the Forest School Leader regarding the way to construct and light a fire.

Safety and Responsibility

- A Fire Blanket, bucket of water, Burns Kit and first aid kit(including cling film) must be sited close to the campfire.
- Only adults are permitted to light fires, unless children are under the direct supervision of the Forest School Leader or Forest School Assistant.
- Fires are lit using a fire lighter, under the supervision of the Forest School Leader or by the Forest School Leader.
- Sticks/wood must be placed, not thrown, from the side of the fire. The hand should never go over the fire, Fire glove to be worn.

Extinguishing

- All fires must be fully extinguished at the end of each Forest School session.
- At the end of the session, the fire must be doused down with water until all signs of smoke and steam have stopped.
- Remains of the fire will be buried or are scattered throughout the woodland to enable natural decomposition, when the remains are completely cooled.

Arriving at the Forest School site

St Mark's aims to keep all children safe and the children will walk to the Forest School site on foot. The following procedures will be followed:

- The group will be given a reminder about quiet walking before leaving the school building (outward) and before leaving the Forest School site (return).
- The Forest School Leader or class teacher/LSA will assume a position at the front of the line.

Equality and Inclusion Policy

This policy operates in line with the whole school policy, a copy of which can be found on the school website. The principles that we follow are as follows:

- No child or adult will be discriminated against on any grounds including gender, age, background, race, religion or ability including SEND.

- Wherever possible, adjustments will be made to accommodate children with allergies, medical conditions or behavioural issues. This may include additional adult helpers, adapting the site if physically possible or adapting activities.
- All participants should feel that their experiences and contributions are worthwhile, so raising self-esteem and confidence.
- Forest School is a child-led experience and wherever possible the children will be allowed to follow their own interests providing they show respect for each other and the woodland environment

Daily Operating Procedure

Before the Session

- A session plan form will be completed, taking into account observations, interest areas and learning points from previous sessions.
- Activity Risk/Benefit Assessment Forms will be completed/updated for each planned activity. All adults will read the forms relevant to a particular session before it starts.
- All staff will have read the latest Site Risk Assessment, which will be relevant to the current season.
- The Forest School Leader will check that enough adults are present for the session to go ahead and that the weather conditions allow it to take place.
- The Forest School Site will be visited and checked before the children arrive.
- A Daily Risk Assessment will be completed.
- All children will be registered by their Class Teacher. They will then get changed for Forest School in the class shared areas and go to the toilet.
- The Pre-Session Checklist will be undertaken for safety of the site and to make the children and staff aware of any changes to the area.

During the Session

- A headcount check will be undertaken on arrival at Forest School and whenever the group is brought together.
- Risks will be continually assessed and appropriate action taken to reduce or remove any risks found.

After the Session

- A headcount check will be undertaken at the end of the session, before returning to school.
- All equipment is to be returned to the school building and checked before being stored ready for the next session.
- Resources will be checked, restocked and reordered where appropriate.
- Session evaluation will be completed by the Forest School Leader, along with any observational records that will be useful to the Class Teacher.

Missing pupils

Should a pupil ever be found to be missing from the Forest School group, the adults will contact the school office and senior leaders immediately. The Forest School session will be finished, children returned safely to class, and adults to resume the search and process involved when managing a missing pupil.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

St Mark's will adhere to the school's Confidentiality and Data Protection Policies. This is available on the school's IT system. All Forest School staff and volunteers must adhere to these policies.

Medical and Personal Information

- All adults will be made aware of any medical details such as allergies affecting the children attending on a need to know basis and kept confidentially.
- Only trained staff will apply First Aid to children and adults attending; volunteers must make staff aware if they are approached by a child needing care
- Any adults attending, with medical conditions, must disclose to the Forest School Leader; this information will be treated with confidentiality.

Cameras, Mobiles, Photographic and Video Permissions

- As part of the permission to attend Forest School sessions, parents will be asked to agree to their child being photographed or filmed for observational, training or school promotion purposes; any child without this permission will be recorded in the school's Forest School Handbook
- Only school cameras and iPads must be used for this purpose.
- Volunteers should only use school cameras under the guidance of the Forest School Leader.
- Mobile phones should only be used for emergency purposes.

Observations

- Trained staff will be required to undertake observations and assessments of the children attending, as part of the curriculum and wellbeing scales.
- Observations will be kept in school and remain confidential to that child and family
- Volunteers may give oral feedback to a staff member regarding an activity; this must be in strict confidence.

Adults Role in Promoting Positive Behaviours

- All adults at Forest School model appropriate behaviour and safe practices, whilst interacting with the children and each other; boundaries are shared, promoting positive reinforcement and choices and consequences discussed. All adults will promote the safety and well-being of the children at all times.
- St Mark's promotes excellent behaviour, including ensuring that children are not at risk of bullying. Forest School provision and interaction will follow the same high standards that St Mark's expects from all members of the school community.
- Our school policy, called "Relationships and Behaviour Policy", is central to our school, and the principles and procedures will be followed within Forest School.

Insurance

- Public Liability Insurance is provided fully by Hampshire County Council.

Manual Handling

- All staff have training as part of their induction, as well as annual refresher training, on manual handling. It is important that all training is followed to ensure adults remain safe.

Site Survey

St Marks C of E Primary School, Forest School.
Located at what3wordsClimber.tonsils.expecting
Grid 51.233348,-1.131141

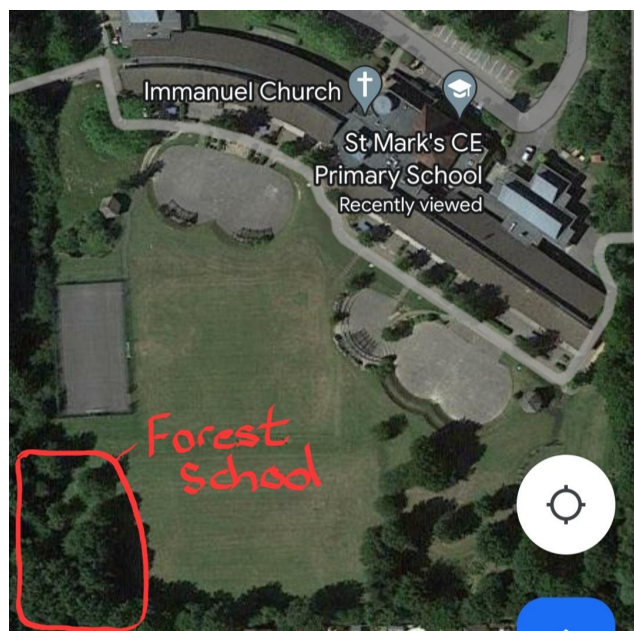
The Forest School is situated in the rear, south west corner of the school site, and is approximately 0.1 Hectare or $\frac{1}{4}$ of an acre in size. The site has a mixture of both broadleaf and coniferous trees with a grass entrance and clearing. The area is relatively level terrain with a mixture of grass, hogweed and sycamore saplings etc under foot. There are further adjacent trees bordering the school site and is situated in the corner of the school playing fields. Before the school was built in the 1990's the land was fields.

Species of the trees found in the forest school site are as follows:-

Lots of Sycamore
Common Dogwood
Field Maple
Horse Chestnut
Common Hawthorn
Beech
Willow
Ash
English Walnut
Scotch Pine



Site Map Location:-



Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA)

Potential Impacts	Nature of Impact	Action Required	Affect to Management Plan
Foot fall and floor compression.	This will have a very significant impact due to the small size of the forest school area and the large school numbers. Expected numbers are 90 children per week, all year round. The ground cover is a mixture of mainly grass and sycamore saplings.	Due to the small area available, dividing off pathways is difficult but some areas could be cordoned off for natural growth and nature studies. Woodchip will be used as grass deteriorates, mainly in the main entrance area. Sycamore saplings are an invasive species and need to be reduced anyway. Fencing the area will help stop extra entrances being used and reduce footfall in those areas	Maintain nature areas. Assess woodchip requirements each year. Ensure Sycamore saplings do not overtake the area and thus prevent light and nutrients to larger trees. Fence area
Lack of ground coverage	Natural ground coverage of dead wood etc should be maintained at 40% for a healthy forest. Due to the use this will be difficult to maintain.	Some areas could be cordoned off for natural growth and nature studies, maintaining ground coverage as far as possible.	Maintain natural ground coverage in some areas.
Fire	The ground under the fire will be damaged and with.	With a small site, maintain fire position for minimal impact and bury ash. Keep fires only as big as required.	Maintain fire position
Animal and Bird disturbance	Damaging nests and animal habitats	No fires under nests and maintain nature areas	Maintain nature areas
Mud play area	Damaging the natural growth in that area	Keep this in one area to minimise impact on the overall site.	Keep mud play to one area
Rope damage or similar to trees	Rope damaging / removing bark	Monitor trees and use of rope and protect trees as necessary.	Monitor tree damage

Sustainable Management Plan

Aim	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Fire Square	Pick Site and Layout correctly. Sand and fix Seats	Is it still working and in the right place? Maintenance	Assess and maintain area
Wooden Gazebo	Build and woodchip floor. Install display back boards. Gradually put up useful display information	Inspect and treat timber to maintain wood. Gradually put up more useful display information	Inspect, repair and treat timber. Gradually put up more useful display information
Entrance gate and fencing	Install entrance with gate and temporary fencing	Install permanent fencing	Maintain fencing
Dead Hedges	Build Dead Hedges around brambles and out of bounds areas with the children for both safety and nature.	Maintain dead Hedges around brambles and out of bounds areas with the children for both safety and nature.	Maintain dead Hedges around brambles and out of bounds areas with the children for both safety and nature.
Wood Chip	Cover Gazebo floor area and entrance as required.	Maintain woodchip as required	Maintain woodchip as required
Monitor tree damage	Inspect trees for damage due to forest school and adjust usage of area as required.	Inspect trees for damage due to forest school and adjust usage of area as required.	Inspect trees for damage due to forest school and adjust usage of area as required.
Fire	Check area is still ok and that its still best to keep it in one place.	Check area is still ok and that its still best to keep it in one place.	Check area is still ok and that its still best to keep it in one place.
Mud and water play area	Check area is still ok and that its still best to keep it in one place.	Check area is still ok and that its still best to keep it in one place.	Check area is still ok and that its still best to keep it in one place.
Ivy	Trim as required to prevent tree damage	Trim as required to prevent tree damage	Trim as required to prevent tree damage

Communication Strategy

Stakeholder	How will you communicate with them?	When will you communicate with them?
Governors	Email or Phone	Safeguarding issues.
DSL	In person email or phone	Safeguarding Issues.
Head Teacher Charles Applegate		Safeguarding issues, medium to large first aid incidents, staff issues, health and safety issues etc.
Hannah Woods, Ghislaine Burgess, Hannah Carter	Email, phone or in person	Timetables, parents, clothing, curriculum, etc.
Business manager	Email or phone	Financial matters, health and safety etc.
Site Manager, Diedrae Barbour	In Person or Phone	Site issues including health and safety etc.
Office Staff	In Person or Phone	First aid issues and Safeguarding forms.
Parents	Through Hannah Woods	Any issues or problems involving their children, clothing, first aid.
Other staff members	Email or teams	Support issues.
Hampshire Outdoors	Phone or Email	Forest School questions and rules.

Review Date

This handbook will reviewed a minimum of every 5 years

Date Reviewed	Changes Made	Name
July 2023	Created	Trevor Calver
4th September 2023	Page numbers and review date	Trevor Calver

Declaration from adults involved with Forest School

I declare that I have read the Forest School handbook and will refer to it regarding all policies and procedures.
I will carry out all roles and responsibilities set out within this handbook.

Name	Signature	Date
Mr Calver		July 2023
Mr Appegate		July 2023
Mrs Woods		September 2023
Mrs Burgess		September 2023

