



St Mary's Forest School Handbook





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1. The Forest School Ethos

Forest School is a unique educational experience and process that offers children the opportunity to succeed and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment.

Children engage in motivating and achievable tasks and activities throughout the year and in almost all weathers, with the appropriate footwear and clothing. Children will work with tools, play, learn and begin to understand the boundaries of behaviour, both physical and social. They will grow in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world.

The Forest School concept originates in Denmark, originally aimed at pre-school children, where it was found that children who had attended forest school then arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, having the ability to work in groups effectively, generally had high self-esteem and a confidence in their own abilities. These foundations helped them to raise their academic achievements.

A Forest School encourages children to:

- develop personal and social skills
- work through practical problems and challenges
- use tools to create, build or manage
- discover how they learn best
- pursue knowledge that interests them
- learn how to manage failures
- build confidence in decision making and evaluating risk
- develop practical skills
- understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- regularly experience achievement and success
- reflect on learning and experiences
- develop their language and communication skills
- improve physical motor skills
- become more motivated
- improve their concentration skills
- improve their communication
- and explore the world through all the senses available to them

2. What happens at Forest School

Typically, small groups of individuals (depending on child/adult ratio) take part in a programme of weekly sessions lasting for about two hours. The sessions involve practical hands-on activities which aim to build up participants' skills, abilities and confidence week by week.

All sessions are designed and led by our trained staff, with the help and direction of our Forest School practitioner. However, Forest School strongly encourages participant-led learning, so as the weeks progress, learners are given more freedom and responsibility to explore their interests and therefore initiate and direct their own learning.

Forest School uses natural resources to stimulate imagination, creativity and investigation. Activities can include:



- Shelter building
- Natural art
- Using knots and lashings
- Fire lighting
- Animal tracking
- Bug hunts
- Tree investigations
- Climbing and balancing
- Woodwork using tools, e.g. making musical instruments, jewellery, decorative items
- Creating bug homes and bird feeders
- Collecting, identifying and sorting natural materials such as leaves
- Team games

Most activities are curriculum-linked and span a number of subjects, including Maths, English, Design & Technology, Science, Music and Art. Forest school sits wonderfully in the topic based skills curriculum that we have at St Mary's.

3. The benefits of Forest School

Forest School is suited to all ages and abilities. The aim of Forest School is to develop the person as a whole. It is particularly suited to people who have a low sense of self-worth and who struggle for various reasons to learn in a traditional classroom setting.

Completing small achievable tasks, coupled with genuine praise from Leaders, helps to boost confidence and self-esteem.

For children at school, attitudes to learning are improved as they find that learning can be fun and enjoyable. This new positive outlook is then transferred to the classroom where they are found to be more motivated and able to concentrate better.

Forest School can also:

- Develop physical abilities and help participants to stay active and healthy.
- Heighten self-awareness and improve emotional and social skills.
- Promote co-operative and group working.
- Encourage participants to take care of themselves and others.
- Foster care, appreciation and respect for wildlife and wild places.
- Broaden knowledge and understanding of the natural world.

4. Forest School Staff

Our Forest School is organised and run by Katie McInnes who is completing her Level 3 Award for Forest School Practitioners. All staff and volunteers have undergone an appropriate selection process to assess their skills and suitability for working with children and have been subject to enhanced DBS checks. All sessions are staffed by two qualified first aiders and all staff have access to a recommended first aid kit.



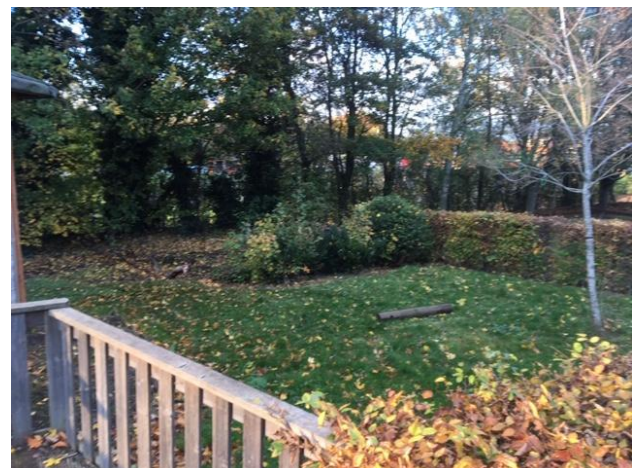
5. The Forest School site

Our Forest School takes place in a small woodland area on our lower school field. It is made up of mixed deciduous trees, mainly mature Sycamore, Rowan, Hawthorne and Beech. Around the perimeter of the playing field there are some mature laurel bushes which can be explored and climbed. The woodland is managed carefully at the moment and as our Forest School progresses we hope to allow the site to go a little wilder and develop a deeper diversity. The site is within school grounds and is not accessible to the public but the perimeters need to be carefully monitored. Children taking part in Forest School will also be encouraged to minimise their impact on the site.

This will include:

- Finding out about the different animals and plants that live in and amongst the trees
- Learning to respect animals' homes
- Careful observation of live animals
- Leaving lying deadwood in place
- Taking all materials and litter with them when they leave
- Ensuring that the site is left like they found it

6. Location of Woodland Site





7. Our Forest School Code of Conduct

Entering the Woodland

We will enter the Woodland respectfully and know that when at Forest School specific expectations are in place. We will explore, investigate, learn and play in a manner that will not damage our Woodland environment. We understand that we share our Forest School with plants and animals and that when we are in our Forest School we are sharing the environment with them.

Boundaries

Before each session begins children are made aware of how far that they can explore. We do have lots of fun beneath the trees and amongst the bushes. If children move to explore hidden areas an adult should also move into the cover deep enough to be able to see the children but allowing the children the freedom to explore independently. If you lose sight of a child shout '1, 2, 3, where are you?' The children have been taught to respond '1, 2, 3, I am here', or signal in other ways if non-verbal. This enables the leader to trace children who have strayed. Children who are known to need 1-1 support are given the support needed.

Lighting a fire

When lighting a fire the Forest School leader will take control of the operation and all accompanying adults will be briefed before we start. The person in charge of the fire safety and management will wear a clear and visible symbol as a visual cue to the children, we suggest a high visual jacket. A lit fire will not be left unattended at any point. A fire may not be lit until it has been confirmed to all that our fire safety equipment is in place. Open fires will be built within a fire square.

At the Fire Circle

An open fire will be lit within a fire square or stone circle. A fire circle using log sitting stools may be established around the perimeter, 2.0m from the fire square. No one may enter the fire circle perimeter unless invited to do so by an adult. There is no running past the fire circle. No items must be carried and placed within the fire circle unless by an adult. If you wish to move around the fire to a new stool you must step out of the circle and walk around the outside of the log circle. Even when the fire is unlit we will treat it as if it is lit.

Using Tools

All tools have their own clear code of conduct for correct use which will include consideration of specific personal protective equipment, correct use of a specific body posture, and consideration of the appropriate types of activity that each tool may be used for.

Picking up and playing with sticks

Children can carry sticks shorter than their arm's length but are encouraged to think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks may be dragged or carried with the help of another person when each person is at either end. Sticks must not be thrown. Sticks must not be pulled from living trees.

Picking up and playing with stones

Stones may be picked up and transported. Children often like to make patterns and pictures with them. Stones may not be thrown. They may be dropped but thought must be given to whether it is safe to do so i.e. what is beneath where I am dropping it?

Digging

Digging large holes is not encouraged. Children may carefully move soil to look for insects and their habitats using fingers or small sticks found within the forest but deep holes should not be



made.

Collecting wood

Wood is collected for fire lighting purposes. It is collected in four thicknesses – matchstick sized, pencil sized, thumb sized and wrist sized. This is a good mathematical activity involving sorting and matching. Sticks may be collected for creating pictures and patterns but should be collected sparingly so as not to disrupt creature habitats. Sticks should not be removed from the site and there are resources available within school in the Forest School area for activities where natural resources cannot be found on the site.

Eating and Drinking

Nil by mouth policy (No lick, no pick) for anything found in the area, unless this activity has been specifically planned for during the session. Children must be reminded not to put their fingers or hands in their mouths or noses. When having drinks and snacks children will use wipes & water to clean their hands before consumption.

Rope and String Use

We encourage the collection and transportation of materials. We do not allow children to tie up each other. If a child has a good idea and wants to tie up something, for example a tarp or a swing, an adult should help them as needed, modelling appropriate knot tying and modelling how to talk through ideas and decisions.

Carrying and Transporting Materials

Children are encouraged to roll, lift, drag and to pull materials, either by using their hands or by using ropes. We encourage safe lifting by bending our knees and keeping our back straight. Safe lifting should always be modelled by adults. Heavier objects should be rolled, lifted or carried by more people working together. (Safe lifting risk assessment)

Toileting

Children are invited to use the toilets before we leave the school buildings. Children will be allowed to return to the school building with an accompanying adult. The nearest toilets are to be found in the Key Stage 1 area.

Leaving the Site

We work according to the ethos 'leave no trace' that we were in the wood as much as is reasonably possible. Shelters should be taken down, imported materials need to be removed. All equipment is carefully counted out and back in again, especially when using tools and tent pegs. Very occasionally large items may be left between sessions. All rubbish will always be removed. If artefacts have been found or made these may be taken off the site with the consent of an adult.

Tree Climbing

An adult must be present when children climb trees in the Forest School. The ground cover should be checked for 'sharp objects' and the tree marked as suitable for climbing. A visual check must be made for loose and rotten branches. Children are permitted to explore to their own limits or to a maximum height of 1.5m. Adults should be near enough to catch if a child should fall but far enough away to not be invasive to the children's exploration.



8. 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

9. A typical Forest School session

Each Forest School session follows a simple routine. The session starts with participants getting ready to go outside by putting on appropriate clothing – waterproof coats, trousers and wellington boots. We go through rules and routines whilst still in class and children help gather any resources we need to take out with us in our trolley.

The group then walks to the Forest School site and gathers at the fire circle to sit on the logs. The circle is central to everything that happens at Forest School. It is a focal point where the group assembles and socialises. At the start of the session, participants and Leaders sit together and talk about what they did and particularly enjoyed doing at the last session, and what they are planning to do during the current one.

Many activities take place in or around the circle, such as natural art and woodwork. Half way through or at the end of each session participants gather together to have a drink and a snack. This often includes helping to light a fire to toast bread or roast marshmallows.

Early sessions involve participants getting to know the site and learning basic safety rules. They then move on to more complex and detailed tasks and are given more “free time” for personalised learning.

At the end of each session, participants help Leaders to pack away the tools and materials they have been using and help to return the woodland to the state in which they found it.



10. Equipment for Forest School

In addition to tools suited to the planned for activities, the Forest School leader will always take an emergency bag with them.

The contents of the **emergency bag** will vary depending on the time of year and weather conditions, the site being used, and the planned for activities according to the relevant risk assessments and daily risk assessment. There are of course also **essential items that should be carried out for every session:**

Trolley for transportation	Set of spare clothes
Firestriker/cotton wool/kindling	Spare plastic bags and bin liners
Squash/hot chocolate and biscuits	Wet wipes
Plastic beakers and plates	Tarps and tent pegs
Penknife	Disposable gloves
Whistle for emergencies	String and rope
Insect repellent (summer)	Pen and paper
Washing up bowls and hand wash gel	Fire blanket and bucket
Fire gauntlets	Kitchen towel
Drinking water in jerry can with date	

Emergency Procedure Information

Mobile phone with emergency contact numbers	Children's medical and contact information
Staff handbook and emergency procedures in water proof folder	Risk assessments including postcode and grid reference of location
School radio	

First aid kit

First aid guidance booklet	Disposable gloves (latex free)
Sterile non-medicated dressings	Eye bandage
Triangular bandages	Eye wash
Cleansing wipes	Instant ice pack
Space blankets x1	Burn cool x 4
Cling film	

Activities equipment

Wood – ash, hazel, elder, willow beads	Wool, ribbon, string
Felt pens and charcoal	Scissors
Paint brushes	Wood glue
Masking tape	Cotton sheets
Pots for mixing	Clay, wooden boards and modelling tools
Sieves	Pestle and mortar
Bug pots	Spoons
ID sheets	

Tools

Tool bags and tool box	Knives x1 in a lockable box
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Bow saws 12" x1	Loppers x1
Potato peelers x 20	Work gloves – adults and children's
Tent pegs (blunt ended) x 20	Rope – various sizes
Junior handsaws x 4	

11. The Forest School Day

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Forest School is a unique educational programme run by trained Leaders. It helps children and young people to develop their confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in the outdoor natural environment.

Forest School provides:

- A safe, supportive and positive environment for learning and discovery.
- Session plans and risk assessments for all activities.
- Activities that link to the National Curriculum and the St Mary's skills based curriculum and cater for different learning styles.
- High adult to child ratios, enabling individual one-to-one and small group work.
- Monitoring and reporting of individual children's progress and development.
- Greater involvement of parents in their children's education through the invitation to take part in a Forest School session with their children.

Responsibilities

Clothing

It is our responsibility to ensure that children are appropriately dressed for Forest School sessions. Any child not wearing appropriate clothing will not be able to participate. We will provide a shelter from the elements (outdoor classroom/tarp), but it is still important that pupils wear clothes that are warm and that are OK to get wet and muddy. These are: full waterproof clothing (including wellington boots); warm trousers; a long-sleeved jumper, fleece or t-shirt; a vest or t-shirt underneath; thick socks - thermal if possible or two pairs of thinner ones.

Discipline

It is our responsibility to discipline and manage participating pupils. It is good practice for the same members of staff to attend the sessions to maintain continuity for the children.

Safety and First Aid

The Forest School Coordinators (Katie McInnes and Lucinda Wulfse) are both qualified paediatric first aiders and carry a recommended first aid kit. Activities are thoroughly risk assessed and staff continuously monitor the safety of the group as activities progress. An emergency plan has been drawn up, which will be followed in the unlikely event of an accident. All staff and volunteers have undergone an appropriate selection process to assess their skills and suitability for working with children and have been subject to enhanced DBS. Forest School follows the same high staff to pupil ratio as all areas of the curriculum and activities at St Mary's.



Cancellation

Forest School sessions usually take place outdoors whatever the weather. However, sessions may need to be moved to a more sheltered site within the school grounds if there are high winds. A possibility for this is our outdoor classroom or the more open playing field by the nursery.

12. Essential Equipment

- First Aid Kit (See contents list, contents review record)
- Emergency Procedures
- Medical information for each individual and Emergency contact details for every member of the group (adults & children)
- Risk Assessments
- Communication Devices - school radio and mobile phone.
- Clean Water
- Emergency whistle
- Emergency Life Blanket
- Accident forms
- Medication for individuals (if not appropriate for the individual to carry the medication for themselves it should be clearly labelled – staff must have been trained to administer it and parental consent must have been received)
- Appropriate Clothing
- Sharps box and gloves

Other Possible Equipment:

- Wet wipes, hand gel
- Sun cream (parental permission required)
- Spare Clothing
- Thermos of hot water
- Chocolate/sugary food
- Plastic bag
- Roll Mat and Blanket
- Fire blanket
- Torch
- Bucket of water (minimum 5 litres)
- Emergency fire kit
- Knife
- Emergency shelter
- Burns kit
- Tick remover
- Bivi Bag

Clothing

No person will be permitted to go to Forest School without appropriate clothing that will protect them from extremes of heat or cold, keep them covered to reduce the likelihood of cuts and scrapes, that fits appropriately for comfort, and that meets any religious requirements.

Children and parents are encouraged to think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities, and to be aware they are likely to take some of our mud home with them after a session.



In the forest it can often be cooler than expected under the shade of the trees. Clothing list:

- Waterproof trousers
- Waterproof coat, with a hood.
- Long sleeved top
- Full length trousers
- Warm boots (wellies can be very cold during the winter)
- Warm Socks, and a spare pair
- Gloves and Woolly hat – Cold weather
- Sun hat: that fits well to ensure good visibility– sunny weather

We work on the principle that **“there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing”**, but staff must be aware of how children in their class react to different weathers and how this affects their sensory processing. We do have a selection of spare clothing but this will need to be matched to the child prior to the session and checked for suitability. Ask our staff for help.

First Aid Kit

- Contact Cards (location using postcode and OS grid reference)
- Latex Gloves
- Bandages
- Burns gel
- Burn dressing
- Dressings
- Eye wash
- Sewing Kit
- Scissors
- Cotton wool
- Antiseptic wipes
- Medication for individual children
- Tick removers
- Sterile water
- Cling film
- Blood bag (disposal sack for medical waste)
- Cream/spray for bites and stings (parental permission required)

When having a fire

- Flame retardant gauntlet gloves
- Fire Blanket
- Bucket of water
- Fire steel
- Cotton wool
- Matches

13. Using and Storing Tools

All tools are counted out and back in at the beginning and end of each session in which they are used. When not in use in the Forest they are kept secured away in a locked area. Before each tool is to be used it will be checked for damage and working order. Each tool type is kept in their own suitable containers, many of which are also lockable. Children must never be allowed to help



themselves and will always have adult supervision when collecting, transporting and using tools. Tools are only used for a specific purpose. All adults should model correct and safe tool use, storage and transportation at all times. When using a tool, they are used well away from others in the group, (two arm's length and the tool length) and ensuring that others are aware that a tool is in use. Only walking is permitted when transporting a tool.

14. Risk assessments

Food safety and cooking procedure

Food and drink preparation and sitting together whilst eating and drinking are important parts of Forest School.

This procedure has been devised using advice in Preventing Food Poisoning - Good Hygiene at Home published by the Food Standards Agency and 10 Ways to Prevent Food Poisoning on the NHS Choices website.

We will provide hand washing facilities at each session where food and/or drink is prepared and will ensure that all staff, volunteers and participants follow the Forest School food hygiene rules.

Forest School food hygiene rules

Everyone involved in Forest School should be involved in food safety and follow the food hygiene rules below. If you spot a problem, please point it out to the Forest School Leader. When involved in food and drink preparation you should:

- Wash hands before and during cooking.
- Not handle food if they are ill with stomach problems, such as diarrhoea or vomiting.
- Cover sores and cuts with a waterproof dressing.
- Avoid handling food when possible, and instead use spoons, tongs or other suitable implements.
- Tie hair back.
- Keep food that is waiting to be cooked separate from food that is ready to be eaten.
- Use separate chopping boards for preparing different foods, especially raw and ready-to-eat food.
- Prepare food on a suitable surface, e.g. chopping board, cup, saucepan and not on the ground.
- Ensure food is cooked thoroughly before serving. Food should be cooked right through and piping hot in the middle.
- Not reheat food more than once.
- Keep utensils clean and regularly wash tea towels and cloths.
- Store food in clean plastic containers with non-leaking lids.
- Take all rubbish and food scraps away with them at the end of the session to avoid attracting vermin to the site.

Food allergies and special dietary requirements:

Participants are asked to state any food allergies and special dietary requirements they may have on their Parental Consent and Medical form. This information will be used to plan what food and drink to provide during sessions, ensuring that the food and drink provided is suitable for all.

Safe use of tools

General

- Keep tools in good, clean order.
- Check tools are safe to use before the start of each session.
- Carry out tool maintenance (cleaning and oiling) once a week.



- Do not use tools with damaged blades or handles or with loose bolts or fixings.
- When transporting tools do not carry more than can be held securely and walk only.
- A blunt blade is more dangerous than a sharp one.
- Count tools in and out.

When not in use all tools will be securely locked away in the tool shed. Tools should be checked and cleaned before they are put away. Half termly the Forest Leader will ensure that each tool is thoroughly cleaned and oiled. Wear and tear will be monitored daily.

Bow Saws – use for cutting wood with a diameter greater than a 2 pence piece.
Wear a glove on the non-sawing (helping) hand, not on the tool.

- Use the saw to the side of you and not in front.
- Keep your non sawing hand away from the blade when sawing.
- Saw with easy relaxed strokes using the full length of the blade. Let the blade do the work – don't force it, especially if it sticks.
- Carry with the frame at your side with the blade facing down, like carrying a handbag.
- Keep the blade covered when not in use and especially when transporting.
- Ensure the item to be cut is firmly held.
- When using with children – Leader and child to kneel on floor with Leader on one side of saw and the child on the other, both in the 'respect position'. The Leader guides the saw and the child follows.

Billhooks – use for cleaving wood

- Never wear a glove on the hand holding the tool - it makes the handle hard to grip safely.
- Keep a safe distance from other people and be aware of those around you while you work. Stop if anyone comes too close.
- Hold billhook away from your body and cut away from yourself.
- Stop if you get tired.
- Ensure the wood you are cleaving is well supported by a sturdy surface.

Loppers

- Loppers – use for cutting wood with a diameter smaller than a 2 pence piece
- Always carry with blades closed (and locked if applicable), holding both handles to prevent them coming open.
- When not in use leave with blades closed (and locked if applicable).
- Do not exceed the cutting capacity of the tool.
- Use away from your body and keep hand not holding tool away from blades.
- Children only to use when sitting or kneeling.

Knives – use to whittle small sticks, peel bark and cut string

- Never wear a glove on the hand holding the tool - it makes the handle hard to grip safely. Wear a safety glove on your other helper hand.
- Keep a safe distance from other people and be aware of those around you while you work. Stop if anyone comes too close.
- Hold the knife away from your body and cut away from yourself.

Potato Peelers – use to peel bark

- Rest the wood you are peeling on the ground or on a bench and not on your leg.
- Hold the potato peeler away from your body and peel away from yourself towards the ground.
- Keep the hand not holding the tool away from sharp end of potato peeler.
- Keep a safe distance from other people and be aware of those around you while you work.



- Children only to use when sitting or kneeling – remind them not to move around when using the peeler.

Tent Pegs – (when used to hollow out elder piths)

- Rest the wood you are working with on the ground or on a bench and not on your leg.
- Poke out the piths away from your body towards the ground, and not towards you.
- Keep a safe distance from other people and be aware of those around you while you work.
- Children only to use when sitting or kneeling – remind them not to move around when using the tent pegs.

Forest School site risk assessment

Hazard	Risk	Safety measures
Trip hazards: · Uneven ground / holes · Wet slippery surface · Muddy ground · Icy ground	Medium	· Verbal/visual instruction to walk carefully and look where they are walking · Wear appropriate footwear · Mark off area if necessary · Remove obvious trip hazards on pre-visit site check if possible
Low branches causing eye injuries	Medium	· Point out location of low lying branches
Brambles, prickly or thorny plants and stinging nettles	Medium	· Show location of any brambles and stinging nettles and ask children them to avoid them
Insect bites and stings	Low	· Verbal/visual warning not approach or try to catch bees and wasps · Monitor site for nest activity and avoid nest sites · Keep arms and legs covered · Check anyone with severe allergies has their epi-pen and is able to administer it
Tasty looking fruit/berries/fungi	Medium	· Verbal/visual instruction that some fruit/berries and fungi are poisonous, and should not be eaten · Ensure hands are washed before eating and verbal instruction to keep hands away from face
Nuts eg hazel, acorns, horse chestnut	Low	· Be aware of children with allergies · Check anyone with severe allergies has their epi-pen and is able to administer it
Harmful litter eg sharp plastic, glass	Low	· Remove harmful litter during pre-visit site check · Point out location of any harmful litter as activity progresses and remove
Contact with harmful substances – soil	Low	· Ensure hands are washed before eating and keep hands away from face
Exposure to the elements – rain, wind, snow, ice	Low	· Make sure that children are wearing appropriate clothing · Use tarpaulins for shelter



		· In extreme cases work indoors and have alternative activities plan
Exposure to the elements – sun	Low	· Work in shade · Wear hats · Check sun screen is being worn · Provide regular drinks
High winds	Low	· Avoid areas with trees – work in playing field · In extreme cases work indoors and have alternative activities plan
Structural damage to trees	Low	· Check branches during pre-visit site check · If area's unsafe, work in meadow or work indoors and have alternative activities plan
Animal faeces	Low	· Look out for faeces during pre-visit site check and remove · Point out location of faeces during session so it can be avoided · Wash hands thoroughly if anyone comes into contact with faeces
Fencing perimeter	Low	· Pre session checks to assess any gaps in the school fence.
Asthma/Allergies	Low	· Have all children's medical information on hand at Forest School and take appropriate medication with you eg inhalers.

15. Fire Policy

As part of the Forest school experience it is desirable to have an open fire at times within the woodland to allow the children to enhance their learning and development with some risky activities.

Encounters with risk help children to manage their coping strategies and discover and explore the world through real experiences. This policy sets out the guidelines to follow to ensure safe practice is a thread throughout the activity.

Aim

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

Method

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 adult present within the fire circle when a fire is lit or hot embers remain, never leave a fire unattended.



Prior to the fire pit being built the soil or bedrock must have been assessed to avoid a fire being lit on a flammable surface such as peat. The fire should be surrounded by a 1 metre square of double logs to provide a good barrier to the fire in case a learner losing balance. Pegs should be used to prevent the logs being knocked. Fires should not be lit close to overhanging branches or on a really windy day.

There must be an adequate supply of fire water close to the fire pit to ensure there is enough water available to extinguish the fire if it gets out of control. 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 adults to pick up hot items and burns first aid equipment should be kept in first aid box.

Before visiting the area the children should have had the opportunity to ask questions and be given information about fire safety. When at the fire circle the rules should be demonstrated for the children to see. There should be no more than 2 people, adults and children, within the fire circle next to the fire at any one time. The best position for cooking is on one knee (the respect position) so you can move backwards easily and remain stable. Long hair should be tied back, tassels and ties tucked away and scarves removed.

Monitoring of policy

This policy will be reviewed annually but may also be influenced earlier by new research and government guidelines.

16. Health and Safety Policies & Procedures

St Mary's sets out clear statements of intent regarding the Whole School's approach to the health and safety of its children, staff and visitors to the School and the School Site.

Provided below is a list of additional points and measures which relate directly to our Forest School sessions. There is always a high Leader to participant ratio at Forest School.

The high number of Leaders means that participants can safely experience activities like climbing trees, walking across logs blindfolded, lighting (controlled) fires and using knives that are usually considered too risky in other situations. It also means that Leaders are able to give individuals one-to-one attention when needed, and to lead small group work.

All activities are thoroughly risk assessed before the start of each session and Leaders continue to monitor the safety of the group as activities evolve. There is always a trained first aider present at each session and a written emergency plan to follow.

Participants are also involved in completing their own risk assessments throughout the sessions. This gives them ownership of the process and to helps them to be aware of, and calculate, the risks involved in each activity. They are asked to state what risks and hazards they should be aware of and what steps they can take to reduce or mitigate them. For example, they are given flags to mark hazards like brambles and hidden ditches.



Daily Procedures

To ensure the safety of children and adults attending Forest School sessions, there are certain checks that need to be made before, during and at the end of each session. It is the Forest School Leader's responsibility to ensure that all checks have been completed.

This daily health and safety checklist provides a reminder of all daily procedures. This must be used each day.

Pre-visit checks

- Run through the site risk assessment and amend/update as necessary. Remove all visible litter and faeces.
- Remove obvious trip hazards and mark off areas as out-of-bounds where appropriate.
- Cut any overhanging vegetation from paths and boardwalk.
- Ensure risk assessments are completed for all activities.
- Erect shelter(s).
- Set up Forest School circle.
- Set up hand washing station.
- Check that the forest school rucksack contains all necessary items (see section on Forest School equipment), including all emergency procedure information, a stocked and in date first aid kit, fire blanket and dated fresh water.
- Check you have all the materials and resources needed for the activities you have planned.
- Check that all tools you are planning to use are in good working order.
- Check that your phone is in working order, has sufficient credit and is fully charged.
- Check you have a fully charged school radio.

At the start of the session

- Take register and head count.
- Remind children about physical boundaries (use visual cues when needed) and that they must stay within these. In the first sessions, and at the beginning of each session play a game to reinforce this.
- Remind children how they should behave and how to stay safe on site (see site risk assessment).
- Explain the need for, and principles of, fire safety.

Throughout the session

- Be vigilant.
- Remind children of how to stay safe by highlighting potential hazards (see individual activity risk assessments), reminding them of the boundaries and asking that they make an adult aware of any possible hazards that they spot.
- Carry out regular head counts at the start of activities and at break time.
- Take photos and make observations of individual children.
- Use de-escalating techniques whenever possible when dealing with behavioural issues.

At the end of the session

- Carry out a final head count and escort the group back to the school.
- Count and pack up all equipment.
- Count and pack up all resources.
- Clear fire area and make safe. Remove ash and cover over the site of fire.
- Evaluate the session.

Covid-19 measures

As per the school guidelines, all children will follow the catch it, bin it, kill it policy when blowing their noses and then wash hands afterwards. Hands will be washed before snack time and before



and after use of tools. As well as washing and drying hands, hand sanitiser will then be applied afterwards. Any adults working in Forest School will be able to wear face masks/visors if they choose to do so.

What to wear when taking part in Forest School

Winter

- Waterproof coat
- Waterproof trousers
- Wellington boots
- Warm hat, scarf and gloves
- Warm trousers
- Long-sleeved jumper or fleece
- Long-sleeved top
- Vest or t-shirt
- Thick socks - thermal if possible or two pairs of thinner ones

Summer

- Waterproof coat and waterproof trousers in bag
- Walking boots, trainers or wellington boots - sandals are not suitable
- Sun hat
- Sunscreen
- Long-sleeved top or light shirt - to protect shoulders and arms
- Light trousers - shorts/skirts are not suitable

Adult Roles & Responsibilities

- The Trained and Named Forest School Leader is always the person in charge of Forest school sessions.
- The Forest School Leader has overall duty of care for the children in their charge. However all adults involved in the Forest School session are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe.
- All adult helpers MUST sign and date a form to show that they have read and understood this handbook and the risk assessments appropriate to the session in which they are helping. They must sign and date the form stating that they comply with the general operating procedures for Forest School (code of conduct).
- The Forest School Leader or Assistant will always carry and take a first aid kit into the forest at every session.
- The Forest School Leader or Assistant will always carry an Emergency Bag into the forest for every session.
- The Forest School Leader will ensure that the Emergency Bag contains:
 - Essential survival equipment
 - A contact list for each child undertaking the activities: and
 - The School's telephone number (and location details for the emergency services)
- The Forest School Leader will always carry a school walkie talkie, a charged mobile phone and will ensure that there is easy access to a land line if the group is out of range.
- In the event of an emergency, the Forest Leader will ensure that the School contacts the emergency services. If contact with the school is lost the Leader will contact the emergency services.
- The Forest School Leader will review the risk assessments before every trip into the School's Forest Site.
- When tools are used the adult child ratio will be 1:1



- There is one exception to this – when using peelers for whittling the ratio can be 1:2.
- The Forest School leader is responsible for the maintenance and checking of all tools and equipment to be used at Forest school, prior to their use.
- The Forest Leader is responsible in training the children in how to use the tools and equipment safely and appropriately.
- The Forest leader will be responsible for the pre visit check of the Forest School site prior to a Forest School session.

Ambulance procedure

Call the emergency service/s that you require on 999 from a landline or 112 from a mobile. Notify a member of Senior Management.

Location of the nearest working landline if mobile not working / no signal is situated in the lower school office. Staff in the office are instantly available on the school radio.

Give as much information about the patient and their location as possible:

- Who has been injured
- What their injuries are
- If they have any medical conditions
- Where on the site the patient is
- The directions to the site and the patient

Arrange for an adult to stand in the car park, outside the kitchen. Forest leader to stay with the injured child and Lucinda to take the other children back to the classroom.

Don't hang up until you are told to do so by the call taker.

Try to stay calm.

Missing person procedure

The following procedure should be instigated and followed by the Forest School Leader responsible for a group in the event of any person (adult or child) going missing from the Forest School group.

- Carry out 1, 2, 3 routine. This signals that everyone should move to the Forest School circle.
- Conduct a head count to check that all other members of the group are present.
- Lucinda to stay with the group at the Forest School circle and await further instructions.
- Send the remaining staff and volunteers to search the immediate area for an agreed length of time (e.g. 10 minutes). Forest leader to accompany them. Arrange for everyone to return to the agreed meeting place at an agreed time.
- Ensure that each of the searchers has a mobile phone with sufficient credit and battery life. Searchers should stay within an area they know and be aware of their own safety.
- If the missing person is not found in the agreed length of time, everyone should walk to the school. Here the rest of the group can wait in safety and comfort.
- Alert school staff to the fact that there is a missing person.
- Organise a second search party. Any staff member who knows the site can be recruited to help this second search. Searchers should work in pairs with at least one carrying a mobile phone with sufficient credit and battery life. Arrange for them to search for a specified length of time (20 minutes) and return to reception at an agreed time.



If the missing person is not found by this second search, then with SMT consent, contact the police. The decision may be made to do this while the second search is in progress depending on circumstances.

At this point, a decision will need to be made regarding the rest of the group, in consultation with the SLT. It is likely that once they have changed out of their waterproofs, it will be best for the children to return to normal lessons.

Areas for search:

- All outside fields and areas.
- The school car park
- Toilets within school
- All classrooms and cloakrooms in school
- The nursery next door.

After the incident is over, complete a full report using the Incident Report Form.

Fire and Lockdown procedure

- In the event of a fire that cannot be put out quickly and safely by the Forest School Leaders, blow repeated long whistles to alert the group.
- Gather everyone together, conduct a head count and evacuate area to a safe location – playground meeting point in case of fire.
- Alert SMT and instruct one person to call the fire brigade and give directions to the site – see location and access via gates on Catons Lane that open onto the playing field .
- Ask a second person to telephone the emergency numbers (see emergency plan).
- Arrange for someone to stand at the entrance to the school to direct emergency services.
- In the event of a fire drill or a fire in the school grounds, the Forest Leader will gather the children together, conduct a head count and evacuate the area to the playground meeting point with the rest of the school.
- In the event of a lockdown alarm in the school grounds, the Forest leader will gather the children together, conduct a head count and evacuate the area, taking the children inside the school via the back entrance of the school to be locked in their classrooms as per school procedure.

Campfire procedure

St Mary's Forest School provides opportunities for children to get closer to nature and the outdoors through a variety of activities, which include learning about fire safety and how to make fires.

Children may also get the opportunity to light their own fires on wooden blocks or in small metal containers. This will only take place under strict supervision, with a one to one adult to child ratio.

All Forest School Leaders are skilled and practiced in fire-building and management. Kelly kettles and small fires only will be used and lit in the centre of the Forest School circle.

All Forest School activities are rigorously risk assessed. Sessions are planned in such a way as to introduce higher risk activities to children over a period of time. This allows Leaders to get to know the children in the group and for the children to learn how to behave responsibly and to build knowledge and understanding of the activity.



Boundary setting

In the first Forest School session, both physical and behavioural boundaries are agreed with the children. At each subsequent session, these boundaries are revisited and reinforced.

Developing routines – Sessions 1 and 2

- When they arrive at the Forest School site, children are shown how to sit round the Forest School circle (step over sit mats/tree stumps and sit down).
- The need for, and principles of, fire safety are explained. This will include the rule that when a fire is being used in the centre of the circle, only three children at a time are permitted to approach the fire, on instruction from the Forest School Leader.
- The children are shown how to move around the circle (step out of circle and walk around outside).
- For young children (Foundation and KS1), a game is then played to reinforce this – Leaders call out different statements that will relate to certain children in the group. E.g. “Everyone who has brown hair step outside and move around the circle” and so on.

In subsequent sessions, children will be asked to recall how they should behave at the Forest School circle. Depending on the behaviour and ability of the group, the use of lit fires will usually be introduced in much later sessions.

Engendering responsibility

Through practicing these established routines, the children at Forest School will be able to enforce/remind others how to behave. Peers expect responsible behaviour and to a degree will be self-policing.

Forest School Leaders’ camp fire procedures

To ensure that everyone stays safe on site and that risk is managed effectively, Forest School Leaders will follow a daily campfire procedure.

Forest School Leaders will:

- Keep igniters in a safe location.
- Ensure there is a supply of water/soil/sand to douse the fire.
- Always carry a fire blanket.
- Ascertain the location and size of the fire to be built and plan accordingly including fuel stocks.
- Carry out a pre-visit site check and risk assess the site and the activity.
- Be prepared to abandon the activity in the event of unforeseen circumstances rendering the activity unsafe and have another activity on standby.
- Alert the fire brigade in advance if necessary to avoid false alarm and misidentification of Forest School fires as being uncontrolled.
- Douse fires at completion and check them after 30 minutes to ensure that they have not spread.

When lighting fires, Forest School Leaders will:

- Not wear loose clothing and tie long hair back, and ensure that children have their hair tied back and also have no loose clothing.
- Wear fire gloves.
- Kneel on one knee for ease of moving backwards.
- Allow only three children at a time to help with fire construction / approach the fire.
- Try to keep away from the smoke.
- Put out the fire with water when finished.



Toilet and shelter facilities at Forest School

Toilet facilities

There are no toilets at the Forest School site. Children attending Forest School sessions will be informed in advance of the situation, and all children will be asked to go to the toilet before they leave school.

Children who need the toilet will go in pairs back into the ks1 classroom toilets in school. An assisting adult will accompany all children.

Shelter at the Forest School site

In case of inclement weather, a shelter from the elements will always be provided at the Forest School site. This will consist of the outdoor classroom and one or more securely fixed tarpaulins which will provide shade in the summer months and protection from wind, rain and snow in the winter.

Litter and Waste Water Procedure

All waste/litter created by Forest School, and any waste/litter will be collected for appropriate disposal.

- The Forest School Leader will provide waste containers.
- All waste produced or found on site during the Forest School session will be placed within the waste containers
- At the end of the Forest School session the Forest School Leader will remove the waste containers for appropriate recycling/disposal. A small amount of waste water is created at Forest School, from hand washing and washing up. Solid debris is removed from the water for disposal in the waste containers. The waste water is then disposed in the woodland over a wide an area as possible, so it will evaporate quicker.

Ticks

Ticks may be present in the woodland. We recommend checking your child for ticks after each Forest School session. These appear like small pin-heads on the skin, dark brown or grey in colour, they may grow to the size of a pea. The safest way to remove them is to use a tick twister.

Illness and Accidents

If a child becomes unwell during a session, the Forest School leader/school staff will give appropriate first aid and if necessary the child will be returned to the school building to allow staff to contact parents.

In the unlikely event of a more serious incident, first-aid trained Forest School leader and staff will take appropriate action, seek medical attention and arrange for the children to be taken to hospital if necessary. The form below will be filled out and given to the office to input on our accident system.



ACCIDENT REPORT FORM – ST MARY’S PRIMARY SCHOOL

This form should be completed if anyone is harmed as the result of an accident during a Forest School session. The incident will also be inputted on our accident system via the office.

This document will form the basis of a report should a claim be made, so try to be accurate and complete the whole form. If you would like to add any further information to clarify the incident, please use the reverse of the sheet.

Name/s of Forest School Leader/s _____

Name of injured person/s _____

Address of injured person/s _____

DOB of injured person/s _____

Where did the accident take place? _____

Date and time of accident _____

Who else was present? _____

What happened? _____

What action was taken _____

Whom did you notify and when _____

Follow up/further action required _____

Please delete as appropriate: Further information is/is not supplied overleaf

Signed _____ Date _____



17. Safeguarding Children, Confidentiality and Forest School

Everyone at St Mary's has a responsibility in relation to child protection.

We are committed to:

- taking all reasonable measures to safeguard and promote the welfare of each child and young person (pupil) in our care.
- the practice of safe recruitment in checking the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children and young people.
- protecting each pupil from any form of abuse, whether from an adult or another pupil.

Our aims:

- to raise awareness of individual responsibilities in identifying and reporting possible cases of abuse
- to provide a systematic means of monitoring, recording and reporting of concerns and cases
- to provide guidance on recognising and dealing with suspected child abuse
- to provide a framework for inter-agency communication and effective liaison
- to ensure that any deficiencies or weaknesses in child protection arrangements are remedied without delay
- to ensure that safe recruitment procedures are operated
- to design and operate procedures which promote this policy and which, so far as possible, ensure that teachers and others who are innocent are not prejudiced by false allegations
- to contribute to the operation of appropriate health and safety procedures
- to have regard to and be consistent with relevant statutory and regulatory requirements and guidance.

In addition, adults working within Forest School need to appreciate that when children feel comfortable and content, when their instinct to trust and risk take is encouraged, they may be moved to disclose information which they might have otherwise kept to themselves. Any volunteer, or member of staff, who finds that a child is telling them something that concerns them should follow the course of action set out below in simple steps:

- Listen to the pupil but ask NO leading questions. Allow the child to lead the discussion but do not press for details.
- Keep calm and offer reassurance. Accept what the child says without challenge.
- Make NO promises. You cannot 'keep a secret'. You should make it understood that there are limits to confidentiality at the start of the disclosure.
- Inform the DSL (Chris Jarman), or the one of the DDLs (Emma North, Sam Pike, Hayley Bloxham or Conor Clarke).
- Keep an accurate, written record of the conversation, including the date, the time, the place the conversation occurred in and the essence of what was said and done by whom and in whose presence. Keep the record secure and hand it to the CPO.



18. Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Forest School

The mission statement of St Mary's School emphasises the value placed on the individuality of all our children. We are committed to giving each child every opportunity to achieve the highest of standards, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, attainment, age, disability, gender or background. We actively seek to remove the barriers to learning and participation that can hinder or exclude individual children or groups of children. We aim to provide all our children with the opportunity to succeed, and to reach the highest level of personal achievement.

We will:

- Ensure equality of access for all children.
- Employ a range of styles, including collaborative learning, so that children can value working together.
- Seek to involve all parents in supporting their child's education.
- Take account of the performance of all children when planning for future learning and setting challenging targets.
- Make best use of all available resources to support the learning of all groups of children.

Our teachers ensure that our children:

- feel secure and know that their contributions are valued
- appreciate and value the differences in others
- take responsibility for their own actions
- participate safely, in clothing that is appropriate to their religious beliefs
- are taught in groupings that allow them all to experience success
- use materials that reflect a range of cultural backgrounds, learning styles and linguistic needs, without stereotyping
- have a common curriculum experience that allows for a range of different learning styles
- have challenging targets that enable them to succeed
- are encouraged to participate fully, regardless of disabilities or medical needs.

Forest School does mean Forest School FOR ALL. We do have a stock of extra all weather clothing but ask that both parents and children think about the usefulness of their clothing for outdoor activities, and to be aware that they are likely to take home muddy and wet clothes after a Forest School session. We encourage a level of risk-taking, always under close adult supervision, and actively foster friendships and collaboration between all children and adults. Forest School activities are always designed to produce success and enjoyment, even when this appears to be of a transitory nature. The Forest environment is an environment to which we are all entitled and we strongly believe that the experiences we will have there will linger in the memory for years to come. Children with medical needs or disabilities will be helped so that they can take part fully in each Forest School session.

Those children with challenging behaviour will be risk assessed and may need one to one supervision, but their entitlement to participate in Forest School remains the same. Forest School should not be used as a bargaining chip for good behaviour and should only be taken away after careful consideration with SLT.



19. Risk Assessment Guidelines

A SITE risk assessment is undertaken each week and a DAILY risk assessment and check is made prior to every Forest School session at our Forest site.

In addition, an ACTIVITY risk assessment will be established prior to any activity that may require it. These will include: whittling, cutting wood, shelter building, fire lighting and cooking on an open fire, and palm drilling.

Specific additional risk assessments will be undertaken for children whose medical condition or whose behaviour requires them.

The risk assessment process is detailed below:

- We look for potential hazards.
- We decide who might be at risk of harm.
- We think about how harm may occur and the worst outcome that we could face.
- We evaluate the current level of risk.
- We decide on a course of action or set of precautions that will be put in place to minimise the potential risk.
- We then re-evaluate the level of risk once our course of action and precautions have been put in place.
- We create a risk assessment and collate them in the Forest School file.
- We inform all adults with accompanying the group and require them to sign each relevant risk assessment to show that they have read and understood the assessments.
- We regularly monitor and review each risk assessment, half termly and as an action is needed.

20. Poor Weather and Cancellation Procedures

We will not go to Forest School if the conditions are deemed dangerous such as in high winds, during thunder storms, or during periods of extreme cold (temperatures below -5 degrees). If winds are between 32-38 mph we will move to open ground away from the trees. If the wind is 39mph or over then we will move away from the field altogether and prepare activities in the playground or classroom. The Forest school leader will use the Beaufort Scale visual indicators to help gauge this. We will use the BBC weather online forecast to make judgments about the expected conditions. The Forest School Leader will make the decision to continue with Forest school or postpone due to bad weather. When it is wet a shelter will be built immediately by a trained adult so that there is a sheltered area that is available from the start that can be used.

Forest School sessions may also be cancelled due to staff illness, which prevents staff/child ratios being met or due to a situation that poses a health and safety risk.



21. Designated Person Responsibilities Forest School

Leader: Katie McInnes

First Aider 1: Katie McInnes

First Aider 2: Lucinda Wulfse

Additional First Aiders in the school include: HS, RD, HF

DSL: CJ

DDL: EN



22. Letter to Parents

Forest School at St Mary's School

Dear Parents,

We have been running Forest School sessions at St Mary's for many years now and believe that all children should have a 'Forest School experience' during their time with us. Forest School will be starting week commencing 21st September. Reception will have their session on a Tuesday afternoon and Year 1 will have their session on a Wednesday morning. On those days, children should come to school in their Forest school clothes (see below).

The location will be the woodland area on the lower school field near the outdoor classroom. The Forest School leader is Katie McInnes. Please read the following important information, fill in the Parent School Agreement and return it to your child's class teacher.

Information about Forest School

Forest School is run by trained Leaders and aims to build up children's skills, abilities and confidence week by week through practical hands-on activities in the outdoors. It gives them the chance to explore, learn and discover at their own pace in a safe and supportive space.

Forest School uses natural resources to stimulate imagination, creativity and investigation.

Activities can include:

- Woodwork using tools, e.g. making musical instruments, jewellery, decorative items
- Natural art
- Fire lighting
- Using knots and lashings
- Shelter building
- Bug hunts

There are many benefits to Forest School. For example, it can:

- Develop physical abilities and help participants to stay active and healthy.
- Heighten self-awareness and improve emotional and social skills.
- Promote co-operative and group working.
- Encourage children to take care of themselves and others.
- Foster care, appreciation and respect for wildlife and wild places.
- Broaden knowledge and understanding of the natural world.

Safety at Forest School

There is always a high adult to participant ratio at Forest School. All activities are thoroughly risk assessed before the start of each session and Leaders continue to monitor the safety of the group as activities progress. There is always a trained first aider present at each session and a written emergency plan to follow.

Who will be running the Forest School sessions?

Sessions will be overseen by Forest School leader Katie McInnes. She will be assisted by Lucinda Wulfse and other St Mary's school staff.



What your child needs to wear for Forest School

The Forest School sessions will take place entirely outside whatever the weather. We will provide a shelter from the elements, but it is still important that your child wears clothes that are waterproof and warm and that are OK to get wet and muddy. Your child should wear:

- Waterproof coat
- Waterproof trousers
- Wellington boots (or sturdy walking boots)
- Comfortable long trousers
- Comfortable, warm long sleeved top or fleece
- Long sleeved T-shirt.
- Thick socks if the weather's cold - thermal if possible or two pairs of thinner ones



23. Helper Agreement

This handbook has been read by all support staff and volunteers who take part in Forest School. They have all signed this agreement.

I _____(volunteer at Forest School)

have read and understood all that is stated in this handbook and had the opportunity to have any questions answered about its contents or my role.

I understand that the Forest Leader is in charge of the activities within the session, and have read the relevant risk assessment for the activities to take place during my session.

I have provided my medical and emergency details to the Forest leader.

Signed _____

Dated _____



24. Legislation

This handbook has been written in line with the following legislation. Please find listed below the statutes along with a reference to the section of the handbook which shows its application within Forest School:

In loco parentis – 17. Safeguarding Children

Health & Safety at Work act (1974) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) - 14. Risk Assessments and 16. Health and Safety Procedures and Policies

Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations (1981) – 16. Health and Safety Procedures and Policies

Personal Protective Equipment Regulations (1992) – 14. Risk Assessments, 16. Health and Safety Procedures and Policies, 20. Poor Weather Procedures

Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (1995) – 16. Health and Safety Procedures and Policies and Accident Report Form

The Protection of Children Act 1999 – 17. Safeguarding Children

The Children Act (2004) – 18. Equal Opportunities and Inclusion

The Knives Act (1997), The Offensive Weapons Act (1996), The Violent Crime Reduction Act (2006) – 16. Health and Safety Procedures and Policies – 13. Using and Storing Tools, 14. Risk Assessments

The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) – See separate Sustainable Site Management Plan and Ecological Impact Assessment

The Equality Act (2010) – 18. Equal Opportunities and Inclusion

This handbook will be reviewed September 2022