



## St Catherine's Independent Nursery Forest School Handbook



# Forest School Leaders



Our Forest School leaders hold both an up to date paediatric first aid certificate, and a Forest School first aid certificate.

## Introduction to Forest School

Forest School is designed around children taking part in a range of activities in an outdoor environment which is located to the front of St Catherine's nursery at the bottom of the field in our enclosed Forest School area.

In Forest School the children will enjoy the time and space to explore and experience the natural world in all seasons and in all weathers, unless the weather is deemed too dangerous, e.g. high winds, and will develop new skills and interests while our Forest School leaders, Mrs Worsley and Mrs Handyside can scaffold their learning.

### **The Benefits of Forest School are:**

- Developing confidence and self-esteem and independence through small achievable tasks and exploration.
- Social skills: Children will develop skills in playing and working co-operatively with each other. Children will have time to listen to each other, talk and respond to each other and problem solve.
- Health and fitness: Children will have the opportunity to be active during the sessions in an outdoor, woodland environment.
- Developing fine and gross motor skills through a variety of purposeful activities.
- Children will learn about the natural world around them and gain an appreciation for nature which will encourage them to be responsible for the environment in later life.

- Curriculum Links: Forest School supports all the curriculum areas within the Early Years Foundation Stage framework.

### **We will do this by:**

The children will have the opportunity to take part in a planned Forest School programme of sessions led by our Forest School leaders. Our Forest School sessions will take place in all weathers all year round, unless the weather is dangerous, for example high winds. Therefore, it is important that children attend with appropriate clothing for Forest School (please see our Forest School Clothing Policy).

The Forest School ethos encourages and supports the child to choose what activities to participate in. Forest School practitioners will observe the children's interests and then support and extend their learning.

Some of the Activities that may take place:

- Tree climbing
- Playing games such as 'hide and seek'
- Hunting for mini beasts and then carefully observing them in their natural habitat
- Making shelters (big and small)
- Singing songs and telling stories
- Natural crafts such as making collages, 'journey sticks' with natural materials, bark rubbing and mud painting
- Play and exploration

Our Forest School leaders will observe the interests and needs of the small group and individual children. They will then plan sessions to meet those needs and support and extend learning through play-based activities and will support and develop children's growing confidence, knowledge, understanding and skills as the week's progress. As the children grow in confidence they will undertake new experiences and take appropriate risks in a nurturing environment whilst remaining safe and in control.

### **Health and Safety**

Our Forest School Leaders will ensure the health and safety of all the children and are fully trained in emergency outdoor first aid and carry out risk assessments before each session. A first aid kit will be taken to the site every session. Our Forest School leaders will ensure that all children have appropriate clothing and footwear and safety talks will be given to the children at the start of each session to establish routines and boundaries. A safety sweep and a risk assessment of the site will be made at the start of each session. A risk assessment will also be carried out for the different activities that will take place.

Taking risks is an important part of the Forest School ethos and children are encouraged to recognise risks and handle them appropriately and the Forest School leaders will always observe the children and ensure their safety.

## Policies and Procedures

During our Forest School sessions we follow our Forest School policy and procedure, which can be found on the nursery website, or a copy can be requested from a member of staff.

## Sheltering

In the event of very extreme weather i.e. high winds, thunderstorm, the usual forest school session will not take place.

During each Forest School session we will ensure that shelter is provided from sun and rain.

There is a permanent wooden shelter at Forest School.

In addition to this we will erect shelters from tarpaulins and the trees in the forest will also provide good shelter from sun and rain.

We will take ground tarpaulins to provide comfort in the cooler months.

## Toileting Policy

All children will be encouraged to use the toilet in the nursery setting before going to Forest School.

If children need to use the toilet during a Forest School session, a leader will escort them back to the nursery setting.



Any children requiring a change of nappy or pull up will also return to nursery with a leader.

All leaders are DBS checked in accordance with OFSTED regulations.

### Use of Tools

Using tools is a very important part of our Forest School education. It enables children to develop new skills, which in turn helps to build self-confidence and self-esteem. Tools are to be maintained in good order by the Forest School Leaders and we will inspect all tools before each session to ensure safety. All children will be taught how to handle tools safely and to treat them with respect.

We will do this by:

- Staff to child ratio will vary from 1:1 to 1:4 depending on the tool in use.
- Tools will be kept in the locked toolbox and only removed by the Forest School leaders.
- Adult and child sized gloves will be used as appropriate.
- Use of tools will be in accordance with our toolbox talks.
- Children will lose permission to use tools if the guidelines are not adhered to.
- All tools will be counted out and back into the toolbox at the end of the session.

## Fire Sitting

Our Nursery understands it is necessary to be aware of fire safety hazards and the importance of being vigilant.

We aim to ensure that everyone remains safe with little risk to health whilst using campfires and Kelly kettles.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring only the designated areas are used for the campfire.
- The campfire area will be enclosed by logs to prevent the spread of fire.
- The Kelly kettle will only be used on flat ground and clear of any leaves or debris.
- Logs around the fire area will be at least 1.5 metres from the fire pit (this is the boundary).
- Everyone will enter and exit the campfire area using our one way in and one way out system and the children will remain seated unless specifically requested.
- Once the fire is lit, an adult will supervise the fire at all times.
- Children are not permitted to throw anything on to the fire.
- With 1:1 support, children may help to refuel the fire wearing relevant PPE i.e. fire gloves.
- In the case of excessive smoke the children will be advised to turn their head to one side, placing their hand across their face, to close their eyes and count to 20 (or a leader will help them count) and seating



will be arranged with regard for the wind direction to avoid smoke.

- If food is to be cooked at Forest School, both leaders will transport, cook and store any food to be cooked in accordance with food hygiene regulations. Both practitioners hold a current Food Hygiene certificate.
- Only the Forest School leaders are permitted to light fires.
- Fires will be lit using a Swedish Fire Stick and only natural materials will be burnt.
- All fires **MUST** be fully extinguished at the end of the session, i.e. the fire must be doused down with water and stirred until all smoke and steam has ceased.
- Water will always be to hand during campfire sessions.
- Large build ups of potash, from several fires, need to be dispersed. This must only be done when it has totally cooled. It will be finely scattered throughout the woodland to enable natural decomposition.
- A fire blanket will always be available.

## **Forest School Clothing**

- To ensure that the children are sufficiently protected from the weather and the forest environment we require children to be wearing appropriate clothing and footwear. Clothing will get muddy so old clothes are required.
- We require children to have long sleeves and long trousers in both winter and summer. This is particularly

important in the summer to protect from tick bites, sun burn, stinging nettles and thorns.

### **Winter Clothing**

The general rule is to wear lots of layers which keep in the heat and can be removed if needed.

Children require:

- Warm hat
- Gloves NB not mittens
- Vest
- Long sleeved t-shirt/shirt Jumper/fleece
- Waterproof coat, Waterproof trousers or all in one (no jeans)
- Wellies with warm socks/walking boots
- Thermal underwear

### **Summer Clothing**

- Sun hat
- Sun cream applied before session
- Light long sleeved top
- Light long trousers (no jeans)
- Wellies or enclosed shoes/boots (no sandals)

Forest School teachers, Mrs Handyside and Mrs Worsley will ensure all the children are appropriately dressed before leaving for Forest School.

