

53. Forest School Policy

At St Catherine's Independent Nursery, we are committed to the importance of daily outdoor play and physical development in all children regardless of their age and stage of development. Forest School is a great opportunity for children to develop and experience the outdoors in the most natural way possible. All activities will be made accessible to all children, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities to ensure all children are able to freely and independently use the Forest School area.

Forest School provides a wealth of natural resources which help children to develop in a variety of ways, including independence, exploration and investigative skills, risk taking and self-esteem all of which support children to develop skills for now and the future. Children are provided with both adult-led and child-initiated opportunities to enable children to learn and practice new skills, knowledge and behaviours from the environment.

When in Forest School the ratio will be one practitioner to every six children (1:6), this enables the Forest School Leaders to spend more individual time with the children to enhance their learning to the best of their ability.

The Nursery will ensure all areas are safe and secure through close supervision and the use of robust risk assessments and safety checks. The Forest School Leaders and Staff are informed of the importance of these procedures and are trained appropriately to ensure these procedures are followed effectively.

The Forest School Leaders and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's Outdoor Play Policy and Procedures document. The Forest School Leaders and accompanying practitioners will also have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's risk assessments relating to Forest School.

This document will be reviewed annually by the Forest School Leaders.

Missing Child from Forest School

In the unlikely event of a child going missing within/from the Forest School, the following procedure will be implemented immediately:

- A Forest School Leader will inform the Nursery manager immediately and all staff present will be informed. Some staff will be deployed to start an immediate thorough search of the outdoor environment, then the Nursery building, followed by a search of the surrounding area, whilst ensuring that some staff remain with the other children, so they remain supervised, calm, and supported throughout.
- A Forest School Leader alongside the Nursery manager will then follow the Nursery Lost child policy and procedure.

Accident and First Aid in Forest School

- The Forest School Leaders must hold an up to date outdoor first aid qualification alongside an up to date paediatric first aid certificate. All other practitioners who

take part with Forest School activities alongside the Forest School Leader must hold an up to date first aid certificate.

- The person responsible for reporting accidents, incidents or near misses is the paediatric first aid trained member of staff who witnesses the accident. They must record and complete an accident form on the Blossom app, selecting 'Forest School' as the area where the accident occurred and report it to a Forest School Leader who will then report it to the manager. It should be done as soon as the accident is dealt with, while the details are still clearly remembered.
- The Forest School Leader will check the accident reports monthly for any possible patterns to be identified e.g., an accident occurring in the same place. This will be recorded in a separate file. Any patterns will be investigated and addressed, if necessary, by the Forest School Leader.
- The Forest School Leader has access to a First Aid kit and a Burns Kit which will be located in the Forest School environment at all times.
- The Nursery's policy and procedures for accidents and first aid will be followed at all times by all practitioners.
- If a serious accident, incident or near miss were to occur at or within the vicinity of Forest School a RIDDOR record and near miss report will be created by the nursery manager. The Forest School Leader and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's Accident and First Aid Policy.

Forest School's Fire Safety Procedure and Emergency Evacuation Procedure

- During all campfire activities the Forest School Leaders will ensure that there is a bucket of water next to the fire in case of emergency. A burns kit and fire blanket must be immediately available at all times, and flammable material must be removed before the fire is lit.
- The Forest School Leaders and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's risk assessments relating to lighting a campfire.
- It is the Forest School Leader's responsibility to maintain the safe use of the campfire and that the fire is kept under control at all times.
- The Forest School Leaders are the only adults who may light a campfire or lead an activity involving the fire. Any practitioner or assisted child who is involved with the lighting and maintaining of the campfire, must at all times wear protective gloves. All practitioners involved in any activities involving the campfire must have their hair tied back at all times. Whilst a campfire is lit, the Forest School Leader must not at any time leave the fire unsupervised for any reason, even if there are other adults present.
- At the end of a campfire activity, it is the Forest school Leader's responsibility to extinguish the fire in a safe way by using the bucket of water already at the scene. The fire must be completely extinguished and there is no detectable heat rising from it.

- In the event of a fire becoming out of control the Forest School Leaders will take responsibility for organising the safe evacuation of all children and adult's present in the Forest School area to the Nursery's designated fire assembly point (The School Playground) and alerting the Nursery manager immediately of the situation via mobile phone. The Nursery will then follow its Fire Evacuation Policy and Procedure.

Forest School's Fire Siting Procedure

St Catherine's Independent 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 1.5metres from the fire pit (this is the boundary).
- Everyone will enter and exit the campfire area using our 1 way in and 1 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 help the 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 Allergies, Allergic Reactions and Medication Procedure

- The Forest School Leaders and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of, and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's policy and procedures for children who have allergies and allergic reactions, which may relate to food/plant allergies etc. Staff will be made aware of the signs and symptoms of a possible allergic reaction in case of an unknown or first reaction in a child. These may include a rash or hives, nausea, stomach pain, diarrhoea, itchy skin, runny eyes, shortness of breath, chest pain, swelling of the mouth or tongue, swelling to the airways to the lungs, wheezing and anaphylaxis.
- The Forest School Leader and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's risk assessments relating to the outdoor environment.
- The Forest School Leader and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's Child Medication Policy and Procedures document and the Procedure for the use of inhalers/handheld medication. For some children their inhaler/medication may need to be immediately accessible during a Forest School activity, in which case it will be safely stored in a container alongside the first aid kit to enable all first aid trained practitioners to administer if necessary.

Forest School's Safe Use and Maintenance of Tools

- The Forest School Leader and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's risk assessments relating to the outdoor environment and use of tools and equipment.
- Activity Risk Assessments are completed by the Forest School Leaders for all activities involving the use of tools.
- At the beginning of an activity a Forest School Leader will demonstrate and explain the safe use of the tools required to complete the activity planned for that session. This is called a 'Tool Talk'.
- Any practitioner or child using a tool as part of an activity must wear a glove on their non-tool hand at all times and will be supervised on a one-to-one ratios with a Forest School Leader providing the correct level of support for the duration of the activity.
- Due to the young age of the Nursery children the Forest School Leaders will be responsible for the maintenance and cleaning of all tools.
- The Forest School Leader will wear appropriate protective equipment as necessary when carrying out tool maintenance and will follow the methods they developed from their training.
- Tools will be kept in the locked toolbox and only removed by the Forest School leaders.
- 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.

St Catherine's Independent Nursery Forest School uses the following tools with the children at present:

- Bow Saw
- Potato peelers
- Loppers
- Hand Drill
- One-eyed Auger
- Bill hook
- Sheath knife

Manual Handling in Forest School

- Correct handling techniques must be followed to minimise the risks of injury. A variety of injuries may result from poor manual handling and staff must all be aware and adhere to the Nursery's manual handling policy.
- The Forest School Leaders are responsible for modelling safe manual handling to the children and assessing their age and ability whether it is safe and appropriate for them to move loads such as logs or rocks, due to the weight, size, and shape, taking into consideration factors such as weather conditions.

Forest School Food Activity Management

- The Forest School Leaders and practitioners present are responsible for adhering to the Nursery's Nutrition and Mealtimes policy. They must, when possible, provide balanced and healthy options for children, as well as adhering to any special dietary requirements, preferences and food allergies that a child may have.
- The Forest School Leaders and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of, and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's policy and procedures for children who have allergies and allergic reactions.
- It is the responsibility of the Forest School Leaders when carrying out a food activity to maintain the fire and the cooking of the food. The Forest School Leader will supervise staff and children who assist with the cooking. When doing so they must be wearing protective gloves.
- The Forest School Leader and any staff present who will be handling food must hold an up-to-date Level 2 Food Hygiene certificate. Both will be responsible for demonstrating how to handle foods safely and hygienically.
- When children are preparing or handling food using tools such as knives it is the responsibility of the Forest School Leaders to ensure they are using them safely and correctly on a one-to-one ratio.
- A risk assessment will be completed before each activity involving cooking on the campfire.

Litter and Disposal of Waste from Forest School

- When in Forest School it is the responsibility of the Forest School Leaders and accompanying practitioner to demonstrate the correct way to dispose of litter and

waste to the children. They should also be made aware of why it is important to do so, encouraging children to care for their own environment.

- Children should be encouraged to tidy up after themselves and dispose of their own litter in a designated spot. This will be a carrier bag or bin bag provided by the Forest School Leaders who will dispose of it appropriately at the end of the activity.

Forest School Children's Toileting Needs

Children will use a portable toilet when in Forest School, the toilet will be placed in a secluded area to safeguard their privacy. A practitioner will accompany them and assist if needed, children are encouraged to wipe themselves and a practitioner will help and check to ensure they are cleaned thoroughly. Children are encouraged to maintain their own hygiene standards by washing their hands, being reminded, or assisted by the accompanying practitioner.

Forest School Parents Involvement

- We believe that in order for children to receive quality care and early learning that suits their individual needs, parents and staff need to work together in a close partnership. The two-way sharing of information is key to this. The nursery team welcomes parents as partners and this relationship needs to be built on trust and understanding. It is important that we, as practitioners, are able to support parents in an open and sensitive manner.
- Parents are encouraged to be involved with Forest School; it is the role of the Forest School Leaders to communicate with them. This is done through a termly newsletter updating parents on Forest School. The newsletter will inform parents of their children's activities, upcoming events and activities, and also asking for any additional support or input they could provide.
- 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. Please see our Forest School Handbook for more information on appropriate clothing and Footwear.

Forest School Code of Behaviour

- Within Forest School children are set clear boundaries of behaviour for themselves and also the safety of others. It is the responsibility of the Forest School Leaders to set these boundaries and make sure that all children and practitioners are aware of them at all times. Helping to promote positive behaviour at all times.
- If these boundaries are not adhered to it is the responsibility of the Forest School Leaders to implement strategies to control or distract any children who may present unwanted behaviour. A secluded 'Reflection' area will be available for children who may need their own space.

- Children who behave inappropriately, by physically abusing another child or an adult, or verbally, may be removed from the group. Any children who may pose a threat to their own or others safety may also be removed from the group.
- The rules and boundaries of behaviour within Forest School will comply with those of the Nursery. The Forest School Leader and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy and Procedures document.

Forest School Confidentiality

As the nursery's work with children and their families will bring us into contact with confidential information, it is a legal requirement for the nursery to hold information about the children and families using the nursery and the staff working at the nursery.

Within Forest School and the Nursery, it is our intention to respect the privacy of children and their families, and we will do so by:

- Ensuring that all staff, volunteers, and students are aware that information is confidential and only for use within the nursery.
- Ensuring the staff, through their close relationship with both the children and their parents, learn more about the families using the nursery.
- Ensuring all staff are aware that this information is confidential and only for use within the nursery setting.
- Ensuring staff do not discuss personal information given by parents with other members of staff, except where it affects planning for the child's needs.
- Ensuring any concerns/evidence relating to a child's personal safety are kept in a secure, confidential file within nursery and are shared with as few people as possible on a "need-to-know" basis. If, however, a child is considered at risk, the Nursery's Safeguarding Policy will override confidentiality.

The Forest School Leader and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's Confidentiality Policy.

Forest School Safeguarding Procedure

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, for the sake of this policy is defined as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment
- Preventing the impairment of children's health or development
- Ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.
- Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes. (Definition taken from the HM Government document 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018')

Within the Forest School environment and the nursery as a whole, we support the children within our care, protect them from maltreatment and have robust procedures in place to prevent the impairment of children's health and development. Safeguarding is a much wider

subject than the elements covered within this single child protection policy, therefore this document should be used in conjunction with the other nursery policies and procedures.

At St Catherine's Independent Nursery, we will work with children, parents, external agencies and the community to ensure the welfare and safety of children and to give them the very best start in life. Within Forest School and the Nursery children have the right to be treated with respect and to be safe from any abuse in whatever form.

To this end we will:

- Create an environment to encourage children to develop a positive self-image.
- Encourage children to develop a sense of independence and autonomy in a way that is appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- Provide a safe and secure environment for all children.
- Always listen to children.
- Provide an environment where practitioners are confident to identify where children and families may need intervention and seek the help they need.
- Share information with other agencies as appropriate.

St Catherine's Independent Nursery has a clear commitment to protecting children and promoting welfare. Should anyone believe that this policy is not being upheld, it is their duty to report the matter to the attention of Helen Brockliss at the earliest opportunity.

Forest School Equal Opportunities

The Forest School Equal Opportunities policy upholds the content of the Nurseries Equal Opportunities statement and beyond. The aim of the policy is to ensure fair treatment of all users within Forest School, it is the responsibility of all staff to promote equality of opportunity at all times. The Forest School Leaders and accompanying practitioners have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's Equal Opportunities Policy and Procedures document.

- We strive to ensure Forest School is a child led experience; the children are encouraged by practitioners to follow their own interests. All practitioners should demonstrate to the children respect for each other and their Forest School environment, encouraging children to do the same.
- Whilst in Forest School we will ensure that opportunities for learning and development are available to all. Discrimination of any kind is not acceptable, no child or practitioner will be discriminated due to their age, gender, race, religion, background, or ability including SEND.
- We aim for all children to feel appreciated, and that their ideas and contributions to Forest School are welcomed. Within Forest School and St Catherine's Independent Nursery we aim to raise children's confidence and self-esteem through well thought out activities.

The Forest School Leaders and accompanying practitioners also have full knowledge of and will pay regard to the contents of the Nursery's Inclusion and Equality Policy and Procedures document.

This policy was adopted on	Signed on behalf of the nursery	Date for review
<i>04/12/2025</i>	<i>H Brockliss</i>	<i>04/12/2026</i>