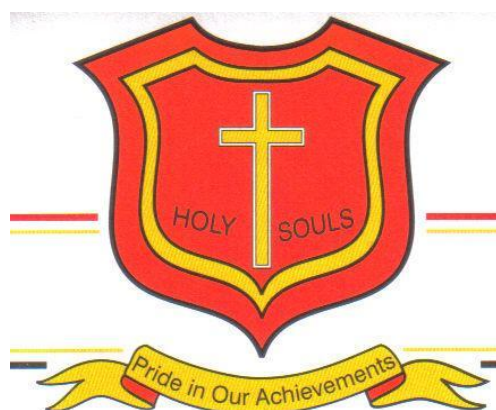




Holy Souls Forest School



Handbook





Holy Souls Forest School

Forest school is all about getting out into the woods to explore and learn. It was developed in Scandinavia in 1950's – using a woodland setting as an 'outdoor classroom' as a way of helping young people learn about the natural world. In the 1980's it spread through Denmark as part of their early year's education. Forest Schools were introduced to Britain in 1995 by Bridgwater College, Somerset.

Forest Schools uses the natural resources in the woodland and the children's interests to stimulate imaginative, creative and investigative activities; Children can identify wildlife, whittle sticks, help to care for wildlife, leap into puddles, climb trees and build shelters.

The child led and child centred activities help children to take risks safely, take care of themselves and others and take responsibility. It has structure but at the same time leaves lots of room for personalised learning opportunities – children allowed time and space to explore their own evolving learning interests e.g. studying a bug, searching for badgers, filming with a stick

Forest School Learning objectives-

- Build their self esteem and confidence
- Become independent learners
- Stay safe and establish their own boundaries for risk taking
- Show creativity, innovation, motivation and problem solving
- To be able to explore at their own pace



Research has found that the benefits for young people of all backgrounds in attending Forest School are:

- Increased self-confidence and self-belief
- Development in social skills and awareness of their actions on others
- Increased language and communication skills
- A keenness to participate — motivation and concentration
- Improved stamina and gross and fine motor skills
- Development of respect for and interest in the natural environment

At Holy Souls we have developed a program that will be delivered to years 1, 3 and 5 throughout the year. The program is cross curricular but has a particular emphasis on developing children's resilience, confidence and respect and interest for the environment.

Staffing

Forest school works best with a low ratio of children to adults so each class will be split into 2 groups. Each forest school session will have the forest school leader plus at least one other staff member. Mrs Akehurst has qualified as a level 3 Forest School Practitioner



What happens at Forest School.

Typically, small groups of individuals (depending on child/adult ratio) take part in a programme of six weekly sessions for 1 afternoon a week.

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, English, Design & Technology, Science, Music and Art.



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. Forest school helps to develop the whole child focussing particularly on their own self-esteem, self-worth, confidence and resilience, this in turn will give them the skills to tackle things more confidently 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.



The Forest School site.

Our Forest School takes place in a small woodland area at the bottom of our playground, down the banking. The site is within school grounds and is not accessible to the public. Given the nature of the site it is carefully monitored for tripping hazards. Children taking part in Forest School will also be encouraged to minimise their impact on the site. A 3 year management plan has been developed to ensure the site is looked after, maintained and renewed based on the usage. A site risk assessment has been developed for when the site is in use. As well as site sweeps carried out by site supervisor and Forest school leader to ensure the site is safe to use see appendix

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



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. When the children need to be called back together we will sing the Sticky Feet song which is taught to the children in the first session. Children who are known to need 1-1 support are given the support needed. A fire circle using log sitting stools may be established around the perimeter, 2.0m from the fire square. No one may enter the seating 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.

- **Lighting a fire – see policy**
- **Using Tools - see policy**

- **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 unless in the designated throwing area. 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**

Children must be reminded not to put their fingers or hands in their mouths or noses. When having drinks and snacks children will wash their hands with soap and water before consumption. Staff are made aware of any allergies before the sessions start.

- **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.

- **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.

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. A reminder about going to the toilet before we leave for the site will be given.

When we arrive on site the children sit in the seating circle. It is at this point we go through rules and routines. Adding rules cards to the washing line which remains there throughout the session.

The seating 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.

Half way through or at the end of each session participants gather together to have a drink and a snack. 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.

Suitable Clothing

On Forest school days the children will bring a change of clothes, waterproof clothing and wellington boots or walking shoes—as the children will be out in all weathers and having fun in the mud. School will provide water proofs to those children who do not have any, plus suitable footwear if possible.

In cold weather, children should wear: a pair of warm, comfortable trousers or joggers, a long sleeved t-shirt and a warm jumper—along with their waterproofs.

In warm dry weather, children should wear: light cool clothing. A top with long sleeves, comfortable trousers or joggers and sturdy boots or trainers, with a good grip—wellington boots will still be fine.

On warmer days children will need to have a sun hat and wear sun cream—we cannot do this for them.



Toileting

There are no toilets at the Forest School site. Children attending Forest School sessions will be informed in advance of going to the site. All children will be asked to go to the toilet before they leave school. Children who need the toilet, will go in pairs or with a forest school staff member back to school – Key Stage 1 area

Shelter at Forest School

If the weather is poor forest school have a canopy for shelter. Plus there will be additional tarpaulins set up if needed. If the weather is so bad that it is deemed unsafe, the forest school session will be cancelled. e.g. high winds, storm The canopy and tarpaulins will also be used in the hotter weather as shade.

Litter and Waste Water Procedure

All waste/litter created by Forest School, and any waste/litter found on site will be collected for appropriate disposal. The Forest School Leader will provide waste containers and any waste found 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. For larger amounts of water, it will be added to the water butt we have on site.



Risk Assessments and Procedures

- Forest School Site Assessment
- Tool Use Assessment
- Fire + Cooking Assessment
- Forest School Activities Assessment
- Procedure for Fire use
- Procedure for tool use.
- Emergency Action Plan
- Emergency Action Plan if leader is injured.
- Lost Child Procedure

Please see school website for the following policies:

Admission and attendance

Bullying

Grievances, disciplinary and capability

Online safety

Data protection

Complaints

Behaviour

Confidentiality and Access to information

Social media



Procedures for Using a Fire at Forest School

Fires and the use of Kelly kettles are an important part of the Forest School experience. At Holy Souls we aim to ensure that all children participating in sessions with fires and/or Kelly kettles will do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible.

Fires will only be used where it is appropriate to do so. Weather permitting – not too dry during hot weather or strong winds

- Fires will only be lit in a fire pit - ensure the area is clear leaves etc.
- Related safety equipment, including heat-proof gloves, a fire blanket, a burns kit and water will be kept within close range of fires, hair tied back.
- All children will be given clear guidelines about how to behave and move around the area when the fire or kettle is lit.
- A lit fire will be supervised by an adult at all times, in safe position as will all cooking activities.
- Participants will only be allowed to light fires under direct supervision of a trained leader using suitable materials and equipment – fire strikers, cotton wool, hay
- Leaders will explain to participants the importance of using only dead wood for fires and also of the importance of dead wood as a habitat
- Smoke inhalation will be reduced by burning dead wood.
- Those in smoky areas will be encouraged to move to less smoky areas
- All fires should be fully extinguished and all traces removed at the end of a session.
- Ratio 1:1

Food Hygiene & Eating

All participants on activities will be encouraged to wash their hands with water and soap, which will be provided, before eating food.

During some sessions, we may cook items such as popcorn, bread or marshmallows over the fire.



Procedures for Using Tools at Forest School

Using a range of tools will be necessary in some activities and is an important part of Forest school. It enables participants to develop new practical skills that help develop self-confidence. At Holy Souls we aim to ensure that all children participating in sessions with tools do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible. Tools that may be used include potato peelers, knives, bow saws, loppers, bush craft knives and billhooks.

The following guidelines are to be followed when using tools:

- Tools should be kept in a designated safe area when not in use - none should be left unattended outside this area - site supervisor room
- The forest school leader will check all tools are fit for continued use before the session
- Only tools that are in safe working order shall be used
- Walking around with open/ unmasked tools will not be permitted
- Tools are brought to site by forest school leaders only – carried in the correct manner or in the wheel barrow.
- Tools will be stored in the shed until required.
- Correct and safe use of sharp tools will be demonstrated to all staff and participants
- Before any tool use a tool talk will be given by the forest school leader
- PPE demonstrates – safe working area, kneeling position, safety glove if needed
- All individuals are to be supervised closely
- All knives will be closed/ sheaved immediately after use
- Saw guards will be replaced immediately after use
- Safe working distances and suitable ratios must be maintained at all times
- Only Forest school leader will carry put tool based activities (qualified)

All group members will wear suitable boots/shoes and outdoor clothing for the activity they take part in.

Guidance on Knife Use

- Designate a specific zone for those using knives
- Always carry knife with sheath firmly on
- Always pass knife with sheath firmly on and in demonstrated manner
- Always keep knife in sheath when not in use
- Ensure participants have had demonstration before use (& leader is confident of participant's ability) including grip and body position
- Knife work is always supervised by a responsible adult with a ratio of 1-1



Missing Child Procedure.

The forest school area gate will always be closed throughout the session.

In the first session children are taught the 'sticky feet' song – which lets the children know that they all need to come back together. A count of the group is then carried out. The following steps are carried out if it found that a child is missing from the group.

1. **Secure safety of whole group** - Group will be sent to sit in the seating circle with adult support. The forest school leader calls missing child's name. If no response the forest school leader will then search the site.
2. Using on site **phone** to ring the office to trigger school building search.
3. **Call emergency services** – by the school once the search has been completed.
4. **Inform next of kin** – as soon as possible
5. **Log the incident**
6. **Review risk assessments**



Emergency Action Plan

This emergency action plan will be used in the event of a serious accident at Forest school.

Emergencies are never wanted, but they are a possibility, and so we at Holy Souls ensure that all leaders are familiar with appropriate emergency procedures. Most emergencies can be resolved on-the-spot by the leader removing the group from potential threat and providing first aid. However, in the event of a serious incident, which could arise as a result of an injury, illness or threat, emergency services should be contacted and the following procedures followed:

1. **Secure safety of whole group** from further danger. Stop all work/activities if safe. Call in and locate group promptly as agreed with group in advance. If possible, remove whole group from any further danger or threat of danger.
2. **First Aider to attend to any casualties** with adult helper supervising the rest of the party. The additional adult should be called from school if necessary. A record of changes in casualties' state and anything administered to them to be made if possible.
3. **Emergency services contacted as necessary**, ideally by an adult helper – call 999. The leader will have a charged mobile phone – which is stored in the wooden bunker with accident book. (All staff/volunteers may use own phone in case of an emergency if needed. The head teacher should be notified as soon as possible. A member of staff will travel with the injured party if they need to be taken to hospital.
4. **Safety of the rest of group** will be maintained by the remaining staff and adults away from the scene of the incident. Children should be brought back in to school as soon as possible.
5. **Informing next of kin** should be carried out as soon as practicable after the incident by the school.
6. **Accident form** completed ensuring all details are included
7. **Review risk assessment** – what happened? Could it have been avoided? Adapt risk assessment if needed
8. Head teacher to report the incident to **RIDDOR**



Emergency Plan in case of Leader Injury.

1. **Secure safety of whole group** from further danger. Stop all work/activities if safe. Call in and locate group promptly as agreed with group in advance. If possible, remove whole group from any further danger or threat of danger.

2. **Second first Aider to attend to the leader** - adult helper required to supervise rest of the party if one is on site – If not a phone the school for help. An first aider should be called from school if necessary. A record of changes in casualties' state and anything administered to them to be made if possible. All staff to carry own mobile.

3. **Emergency services contacted as necessary**, ideally by an adult helper. The head teacher should be notified as soon as possible.

4. **Safety of the rest of group** will be maintained by the remaining staff and adults away from the scene of the incident. Children should be brought back in to school as soon as possible.

5. **Informing next of kin** should be carried out as soon as practicable after the incident by the school.

6. **Accident form** completed ensuring all details are included

7. **Review risk assessment** – what happened? Could it have been avoided? Adapt risk assessment if needed

8. 8. Head teacher to report the incident to **RIDDOR**