

# FOREST SCHOOL HANDBOOK



**"Let your light shine"**

**Matthew 5:16**

Updated 16/09/22



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Handbook written by Mrs J Lunnon

# 1. What is Forest School?

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*"It is not what we do to the child or for the child that educates him but what we enable him to do for himself, to see and learn and feel and understand for himself. The child grows by his own efforts and his own real experience."*  
*Susan Isaacs quoted in "First Hand Experience – What Matters to Children" by Diane Rich et al.*

Forest School is a holistic, child-centred, unique educational experience offering children hands-on learning in a woodland environment, giving them the tools to succeed and gain confidence, increasing self-esteem, self-awareness and enabling risk taking.

Play is recognised as a vital part of learning and development at Forest School, along with choice it is an integral part of the learning process. Forest School enhances the children's ability to develop their team working skills and also helps them to become more independent enabling them to make choices and initiate learning for themselves. We hope that the skills that the children acquire at Forest School will be used in later life.

Children who are less confident with the unfamiliar surroundings of woodland and green spaces gain that confidence, becoming competent to explore and discover whilst experiencing appropriate risk, helping them to develop learning in a natural environment. As a church school we believe that by initiating learning outdoors it enhances the children's ability to become more aware of their inner nature, thereby developing their spirituality.

Forest School promotes:

- self esteem
- self confidence
- learning
- respect and knowledge of the world around us
- admiration for God's creation
- awe and wonder

For more information: [www.forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school/](http://www.forestschoollassociation.org/what-is-forest-school/)

## 2. Our Forest School Code of Conduct

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The safety of the child is the most important part of our Forest School experience and because they are using real tools, it gives the child responsibility and enables them to assess risk. Safety issues are discussed, including responding to whistle alerts; boundaries are set by the children, giving them ownership of their experiences whilst at Forest School.

Before we leave school:

- children are asked to go to the toilet
- a register is taken and the number of children confirmed with the school office
- we ensure that the children are wearing appropriate clothing
- each child is given a hi-vis vest to wear en route to our setting
- a head count is done to ensure that everyone is present.

The children are taught the following top tips to stay safe; it is the first thing that we go over before the start of every session:

- make sure that you listen to the Forest School leaders
- do not cross the boundary areas unless told to do so by an adult
- treat all plants, animals and each other with respect
- when walking to our woodland area, keep a reasonable distance from the person in front ensuring that they are not hit by stinging nettles/tree branches etc. being aware of those around us
- be aware of poisonous plants, do not touch
- never put anything in your mouth unless told to do so by an adult
- respond to the whistle – 3 short blasts return to camp, continuous blast run to sound of the whistle
- do not stroke dogs, turn your back to discourage them; avoid treading in dog poo
- do not walk inside the log circle (there may be a fire there)
- children may climb trees but no higher than their own height
- if any rubbish is found (i.e. broken glass) an adult must dispose of it wearing gloves
- we must leave our site as we found it
- have fun!

### 3. Suggested Activities for Forest Schools

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There are no limits to the number of things you can do in the woodland and the children are there to explore and experience using their own individual personalities and preferences.

Any activities are suggested and if a child feels they do not want to engage in any of these activities, they do not have to.

Activities may include:

- ☺ art and sculpture work
- ☺ fire lighting
- ☺ knot tying
- ☺ physical movement activities
- ☺ playing team and group games
- ☺ sensory activities
- ☺ shelter building
- ☺ studying wildlife
- ☺ tool use
- ☺ woodland craftwork
- ☺ mud /clay modelling
- ☺ rolling down a muddy bank

## 4. Daily Operating Procedure

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Before the session a lesson plan will be completed giving details of suggested activities with timings and equipment that will be needed (children are not expected to take part in the activity if they do not wish to). Prior to the session all adults will be given the lesson plan, which will include activity risk/benefit, along with the site risk assessment, which will be relevant to the current season.

The staff/pupil ratio is checked prior to the start of the session. Weather conditions are checked before the session is due to take place and are constantly monitored during the day with alternatives activities in place if the weather is deemed unsuitable.

The equipment needed for the session will be assembled by the Forest School leaders at the start of the day so that it is ready for the adults and children to transport to the site. Tools are counted and checked to ensure that they are fit for purpose and anything that is damaged will not be taken and replaced as soon as possible.

The children will be registered by their class teacher; the morning group will have come to school ready for Forest School, the afternoon group will get changed after they have had lunch. The children will then be assembled outside Otter Class where a Forest School register will be taken. Each child will be given a hi-vis jacket to wear and asked to take a bag of equipment (wheel barrows are used depending on the age group of the children) and line up outside the school main entrance where the number of children attending Forest School will be confirmed with the school office before we leave. A Forest School leader will walk at the front of the line, with the other leader at the back of the line with additional adults, if necessary, in the middle. An adult will stand in the middle of the road to stop traffic while the children cross. On our arrival at our site a Forest School leader will carry out a site risk assessment before the children enter, this will include looking for potential dead wood falling from trees.

On leaving our woodland area we have a head count and again on our return. The Forest School leaders walk at the front and back of the line; hi-vis jackets are worn. On our return to school children are reminded to check for ticks and to be aware of them for the next couple of days.

## 5. Equipment for Forest School

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As well as the tools that are needed for planned activities, the Forest School Leaders will always have the following equipment with them:

- First Aid kit
- emergency procedures
- medical information for each individual and emergency contact details for every member of the group (adults & children)
- risk assessments
- accident book
- mobile phone (checked for working order and signal strength)
- clean water
- whistle
- medication for individuals (if not appropriate for the individual to carry the medication themselves it should be clearly labelled – staff must have been trained to administer it and parental consent must have been received)
- appropriate clothing

### Clothing

It is important that all children are appropriately dressed to participate at Forest School, with this in mind clothing must:

- keep them covered to protect from the likelihood of cuts, grazes, stings and bites
- be comfortable and allow for free movement
- be old, as they are highly likely to get dirty!

### Clothing list:

- full length trousers (not jeans)
- long sleeved top (even in hot weather)
- warm boots
- warm socks
- gloves and hat in cold weather
- sun hat, sun cream and drink in hot weather

We will go out in all weather (unless a storm/high wind is forecast) as “there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing”.

## 6. Using and Storing Tools

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All tools are stored in a locked unit at school. Each tool that we use at Forest School has a risk assessment which is reviewed annually and kept in the Forest School file.

The children will be shown the correct way to use each tool including checking that it is in working order before use. They will be shown the correct posture, the importance of communication with others around us when using tools and how to transport them safely to, from and around our woodland area. In addition to this they will learn that different tools are used for different jobs, some tools require the use of gloves which are supplied. Children are not allowed to remove tools from the tool box unless supervised. All tools are counted back into the tool box after use.

The tools and equipment are then checked after each session before they are put away into the locked unit at school to make sure that there has been no damage. Any tools that are blunt damaged or faulty will be repaired or replaced as necessary.

Tools that we use include:

- bow saw
- knife
- axe
- palm drill
- secateurs
- loppers
- potato peeler



## 7. Health and Safety Policy

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We aim to provide Forest School activities safely and with measured risk to enable children to have a beneficial, educational and enjoyable experience. Forest School leaders are fully qualified in Wilderness First Aid.

The following points will be adhered to, to ensure the safety of everyone in the group:

- Forest School leaders are always in charge of the Forest School sessions
- Forest School leaders have overall duty of care for the children in their charge. Additional adults involved in the Forest School session must take reasonable steps to ensure that the children are safe
- a fully equipped first aid kit will be at every session
- Forest School leaders will carry a mobile phone in case of emergency
- Forest School leaders are responsible for the maintenance and checking of all tools and equipment that is used
- Forest School leaders are responsible for training the children to use the tools and equipment safely and appropriately
- Forest School leaders are responsible for ensuring that risk assessments for site and tools are carried out at regular intervals
- if there is an emergency while at the site the Forest School leaders will follow the Accident and Emergency Procedure (see section 12).

## 8. Food Safety

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Warnham Primary maintains high food hygiene standards in relation to the purchase, storage, preparation and serving of food.

Cooking on the campfire will be undertaken only by a member of staff in possession of a Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate. Food/ingredients will be stored at correct temperatures prior to the session and checked to ensure they are in-date and not subject to contamination by pests, mould etc. A cool box will be used to transport and store any ingredients requiring refrigeration prior to use at the Forest School site:

- all such ingredients will be used within 2 hours
- unrefrigerated food will be served to children within 4 hours of preparation
- all utensils, crockery etc. will be checked to ensure they are clean before use
- waste food will be disposed of promptly
- when food items are to be consumed during a Forest School session, warm water with anti-bacterial soap in a bowl will be provided for hand-washing. Children and adults will be required to wash their hands immediately prior to preparing any food items and/or eating
- all medical records must be checked to ensure that no food item or ingredient is given to a child or adult with an allergy to it
- cooked food will not be re-heated.

## 9. Ratios & Parent Helpers

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Ratios for Forest Schools are in line with government guidelines and are as follows:

Years R to 3:1 adult to 6 children

Years 4 to 6:1 adult to 15 children

There is a greater adult: child ratio in cohorts where there is a child(ren) with SEND.

Parent/Volunteers who accompany school educational visit must:

1. Accept normal common law duty of care to act as a responsible parent towards **all** children, particularly those placed in their care by the Party Leader.
2. Be responsible for the pupils in their care at all times.
3. Be prepared to follow the instructions of the Party Leader, keeping at all times to the arrangements made for the group.
4. Maintain good order and discipline.
5. Follow procedures for medical, toilet visits to ensure children are kept safe
6. Make the Party Leader aware of any personal medical needs.

While at a Forest School session the adults will be able to ensure the children's safety by ensuring that they are correctly trained in the use of all tools and equipment. Children with additional needs will get 1:1 help dependent on ability.

Parent helpers to read Handbook prior to volunteering.

Parent helpers to read Risk Assessment on day of volunteering.

The use of mobile devices to record images and access social media by parent helpers is **strictly prohibited** during Forest School.



## 10. Safeguarding Children; Confidentiality and Forest School

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Whilst at Forest School we will follow Warnham CE Primary School's Policy for Safeguarding Children.

Any disclosures will be reported to the Child Protection Officer immediately.

A note of the date, time and place the conversation occurred will be made and handed to the CPO.



## 11. Inclusion and Equal Opportunities

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Whilst at Forest School we will follow Warnham CE Primary School's Inclusion and Equal Opportunities Policies.

At Forest School we encourage a measured level of risk taking under adult supervision with an aim to build bonds between children and adults. The activities that the children take part in are designed to give enjoyment and foster learning, which can sometimes take a bit longer than expected. Children will be given the chance to persevere at Forest School, for example fire lighting can take a while to master so they are given the opportunity to repeat a task, if they want to.

The environment that is provided in our Forest School setting is something that all children should be entitled to and we hope that the experiences of the children will linger in their memories for years to come.

Children with additional needs will be assisted so that they can take part in each Forest School session. Any children with challenging behaviour will be risk assessed and may need one to one supervision but will still be able to participate.

## 12. Risk Assessment Guidelines

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A site risk assessment is undertaken at the start of each session by one of the Forest School leaders. A risk assessment is carried out for every tool that is used and also on our Forest school site. We check that the weather is suitable for our session before we go off site and while we are there weather conditions are constantly monitored.

If the weather is deemed unsuitable then we will still have our Forest School session, but at an alternative site. An activity risk assessment is established prior to the activity taking place, this forms part of the lesson plan.

The risk assessment process is detailed below:

- look for potential hazards
- decide who might be at harm
- think about how harm may occur and the worst outcome that we could face
- evaluate the current level of risk
- decide on a course of action or set of precautions that will be put in place to minimise the potential risk
- re-evaluate the level of risk once our course of action and precautions have been put in place
- maintain all risk assessments and collate them in the Forest School file
- inform all accompanying adults of the relevant risks
- each risk assessment is reviewed and amended where applicable.

Children are registered before we leave school; one of the Forest School leaders walks at the front, the other at the back of the group. A head count is done at various times during the session, while en route, when we reach the site, before we leave our site and on our return to school.

## 13. Accident and Emergency Procedure

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In line with Warnham CE Primary School's Accident and Emergency Procedure, in the event of an accident, first aid will be carried out on site by the fully qualified Forest School leader. The rest of the group will be counted and in the care of the other adult/adults who will ensure that the children are returned to school safely and as soon as is practical.

The Forest School leaders carry mobile phones with them at all times and are fully qualified in Wilderness First Aid. Where a child needs to be taken to hospital a Forest School leader will contact the emergency services, direct the emergency services to the casualty and accompany the child to hospital until their parents arrive. The school office will be informed after the Emergency Services and additional adults will be requested to help return the remaining children to school if required. Parents will be contacted by the school office.

A record of minor injuries will be made in the accident book and reported to parents at the end of the session.

## 14. First Aid Policy and Procedure

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Whilst at Forest School we will follow Warnham CE Primary School's First Aid Policy.

- any illness or injury will be treated by a qualified first aider
- activities will be stopped and all tools accounted for and put away
- remove others in group from the situation, ensuring they are safe
- notify school office and if necessary call for further assistance or notify emergency services
- medical details of all children in the group are kept in the first aid bag
- school office to notify parents/guardians as appropriate
- all accidents will be written in the accident book and reported to parents at the end of the session.



## 15. Toileting Procedure

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Before a Forest School session, children will be given the opportunity to go to the toilet.

Once we are at our Forest School site should the children need to go to the toilet they will be allowed to use a secluded area for toileting. Children will be accompanied by a member of staff to an area on the Forest School site outside of the boundary. They will be shown how to dig a toilet hole approximately 30cm deep with a trowel and then left alone to use the toilet. The hole will then be refilled with the soil. If toilet paper is used it will be disposed of in a dog poo bag, removed from the site and put in a waste bin on return to school. The child will then wash their hands on return.

## 16. Missing Child Procedure

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On realisation that a child is missing the following procedure will come into action:

- the group will be called back to base using a continuous whistle
- activities will be stopped and all tools accounted for and put away
- head count and ensure rest of the group are safe and with a member of staff
- all available staff to commence immediate search of vicinity
- notify the school office and give as much information about the circumstances surrounding the incident
- the school office will notify the head and a decision will be made on whether to notify the police, then the parent or guardian.

## 17. Behaviour Policy

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Whilst at Forest School we will follow Warnham CE Primary School's Behaviour Policy. In addition to this, because of the tools and equipment that are used at Forest School, it is important that the children follow any instructions that are given by the Forest School leaders.

If any child shows signs of unacceptable behaviour that could be a danger to other members of the group, the following procedure will be adhered to:

- try to reason with child
- remove other children from the area of risk, if it is deemed to be necessary
- inform office and call for help as needed
- debrief child after calm down period over unacceptable behaviour
- log incident
- inform parents/guardian
- create risk assessment, if necessary
- close supervision and monitoring of behaviour in future sessions.

## 18. Poor Weather Procedure

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The Forest School session will not take place in the case of severe weather conditions such as high winds, thunderstorms or extreme cold. Before each session the Forest School leader will check a weather site to find out what the weather forecast will be for that session and a judgement will then be made.

There is always a contingency plan in the event of the session being cancelled due to adverse weather conditions which may take place on the school field or in the school.

On all Forest School sessions a tarpaulin is erected as soon as we enter our woodland area to ensure that there is somewhere dry to work and to store our equipment.



## 19. Insurance Requirements

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Warnham CE Primary School is insured under the West Sussex County Council policy which is through QBE European Operations Risk Management Partners (Policy Number: Y083462QBE0116A).

# 20. EMERGENCY SERVICES CONTACT FORM

Location of Forest School:	(near) Gregsons, Warnham, Horsham RH12 3XS
Forest School Leader:	Julia Lunnon      07708 246797
Forest School Helper:	
What3words:	///assess.treetop.regrowth
Grid reference:	TQ 149338 (TQ 14970 33822)
Details of exact location of incident within setting:	Woodland area at crossroads of public footpath
Address:	(near) Tilletts Lane, Warnham, Horsham, West Sussex
Nearest Postcode:	RH12 3XS
Mobile phone coverage:	Good
Nearest landline:	Tilletts Lane, Warnham
Best emergency vehicle access point:	
Need for 4x4 or helicopter:	
Designated safety point for the group:	
Nearest A & E:	Horsham Hospital RH12 2DR
Nature of problem and/or severity of injury:	

Warnham CE Primary  
Forest School site





