

Donington Cowley Endowed Primary  
School

# Forest School Handbook



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# 1. The Forest School Ethos

Forest School is a unique educational experience and process offering children opportunities to succeed, develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland environment.

Children engage through motivating, achievable tasks, and activities throughout the year and in almost all weathers, with appropriate footwear and clothing.

Children will play, learn, work with tools, learn and begin to understand boundaries of behaviour, both physically and socially. Growing in confidence, self-esteem and motivation whilst developing an understanding of the natural world around them.

The Forest School concept originated in Denmark, formerly aimed at pre-school children, it found that children who had attended forest school arrived at school with strong social and communication skills, having the ability to work in groups effectively, generally having high self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities. These foundations helped 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 language and communication skills
- improve physical motor skills
- become more motivated
- improve concentration skills
- 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 six weekly sessions lasting for about an hour. 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. 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 cover a number of subjects, including Math's, English, Design & Technology, Science, Music and Art. Forest school sits wonderfully in the topic-based skills curriculum that we have at Donington Cowley.

### **3. The benefits of Forest School**

Forest School is suited to all ages and abilities. The aim of Forest School is to develop the individual 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 Heather Taylor who holds a Level 3 Award for Forest School Practitioners.

Staff 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 a qualified first aider 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 school field. It is made up of mixed deciduous trees, mainly mature Oak, Hawthorn and Beech.

Also, there are a mixture of climbing plants such as ivy.

The woodland, cleared by staff, parents, children and friends of the school is managed carefully whilst we develop, as our Forest School progresses, we hope to allow the site to go a little wilder and develop a deeper diversity.

The site, although within school grounds, is accessible to the public, but the perimeters need to be carefully monitored as the site seems to be a magnet for local youths to break into. Given the nature of some of our young people, the site is carefully monitored for tripping hazards and items dangerous for those with PICA.

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**

We are fortunate to have such a beautiful area accessible to us with areas that allow us to explore, investigate and have adventures, all whilst learning.

## **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. Eventually we hope this area will be separately fenced. We do have lots of fun beneath the trees. 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, our forest school call, the sound of a 'warrior call' will be made, or signal in other ways if non-verbal. The children have been taught to respond to the warrior call and will return to the central circle area. 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, 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. Fires will be lit in a container and not allowed to go out of control.

## **At the Fire Circle**

An open fire will be lit within a fire circle. A fire circle using logs 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 log, 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 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. All staff should be aware of PICA issues and monitor these children carefully. 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 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, to the nearest toilet with an accompanying adult.

## **Leaving the Site**

We work according to the ethos 'leave no trace' whilst we were in the wood as much as is reasonably possible is left as it was. 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. 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. Tree climbing will be assessed initially by an inspection of the tree to be climbed, and the needs and abilities of the children taking part.

## **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. Children arrive for the school day wearing clothing suitable for forest school. Their uniform should be brought in a separate carrier bag, this allows a change of clothing should they require it. Additionally, waterproof coats, trousers, and wellington boots should be brought to school in another bag. 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 meeting area. The meeting area 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 is planned for their session.

Many activities take place in or around the circle, such as natural art and woodwork. Sometimes, drinks are made. This often includes helping to light a fire at the base of a Kelly Kettle to heat water for warm drinks.

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 the tools suited for the planned for activities there are also essential items that should be carried out for every session.

Trolley for transportation	Fire blanket and bucket
Drinking water in Gerry can with date	Fire striker /cotton wool / kindling
Spare clear plastic bags and bin liners	Kelly kettle and gloves
Spare water in Gerry can	Plastic beakers
Tarpaulins and tent pegs	Plastic plates
Penknife	Disposable gloves
Whistle for use in emergencies	String and rope
Facial tissues and kitchen towel	Pen and paper

### Emergency procedure information

Mobile phone with school emergency contact numbers (all staff). Walkie Talkie partnered with school office.	At a glance sheet - children's medical information
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## First Aid Guidance

First Aid Guidance booklet	Disposable gloves (latex free)
Mobile phones (all staff)	Safety pins
Walkie Talkie	Eye bandage
Triangular bandages	Eye wash
Cleansing wipes	Instant ice pack
Space blankets x 2	Burn cool x 4
Cling film	Sterile non-medicated dressings

## Activities Equipment

Wood- Ash, Elder, Hazel, Willow	Beads, wool, ribbon, string
Felt pens and charcoal	Scissors
Wood glue	Paint brushes
Masking tape	Cotton sheet
Pots for mixing natural dyes	Clay, wooden boards, and modelling tools
Sieves	Pestle and mortar
Bug pots, spoons	ID sheets

## Tools

Tool bags and toolbox	Knives x 5 in lockable box
Bow saws 12" x 3	Loppers x 4
Potato peelers x 20	Work gloves - adults 4 & children's 10
Tent pegs - blunt ended x 20	Rope - various sizes including poly prop.
Pruning saw x 1	Billhooks x 2

## Clothing

No person will be permitted to go to Forest School without appropriate clothing that will protect them from the extremes of hot 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 that 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. Children will be asked to bring their uniform into school to change in to, children will be sent home in their forest school clothing unless they are extremely wet, muddy or their clothing is unsuitable to wear home.

<b>Clothing List</b>	
Waterproof coat, with a hood	Warm socks, and a spare pair
Waterproof trousers	Gloves and woolly hat - cold weather
Long sleeved top	Sun hat that fits well to ensure good visibility - sunny weather
Full length trousers	Warm boots - wellies can be cold during winter

We work on the principle that **“there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing”** but staff must be aware of how different children in their care react to different weathers and how this affects their sensory processing.

## **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
- Adult to child ratios enabling individual one-to-one and small group work
- Monitoring and reporting of individual children's progress and development

## **Responsibilities**

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 and where possible waterproof clothing (including wellington boots if necessary), but it is still important that children wear clothes that are warm and are ok to get wet and muddy. These are 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 manage and discipline participating pupils, this will be in line with the DCEPS 'STEPS' behaviour policy.

## **Safety and First Aid**

The Forest school leader is a qualified first aider and carry a recommended first aid kit, additionally other staff supporting classes are trained first aiders. 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 have undergone an appropriate selection process to assess their skills and suitability for working with children and have been subject to enhanced DBS. First Aid will be carried out in accordance with the DCEPS First Aid Policy.

## **Cancellation**

Forest school 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.

## **12. Essential Equipment**

First Aid Kit (see contents list/review record)	Emergency procedures
Medical information for every member of the group (adults and children)	Risk assessments

Communication devices - mobile phones	Clean water
Emergency whistle	Emergency life blanket
Accident Forms contained in a folder specifically for Forest School.	Medication for individuals (if not appropriate for the individual to carry the medication themselves) it should be clearly labelled, and staff must have been trained to administer it and parental consent must have been received
Appropriate clothing	
<b>Other possible equipment</b>	
Hand gel	Torch
Fire blanket	Bucket of water
Emergency fire kit	Spare clothing
Knife	Thermos of hot water
Roll mat and blanket	Plastic bag
Burns kit	

### First Aid Kit

Cling film	Latex gloves
Bandages	Burns gel
Burn dressings	Dressings
Eye wash	Sterile water
Scissors	Cotton wool
Antiseptic wipes	Medication for individual children
<b>When having a fire;</b>	
Flame retardant gauntlet gloves	Bucket of water
Fire steel	Cotton wool
Matches	



### **13. Using and Storing Tools**

All tools are counted out at the beginning and back in at 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 correct 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. The trained adult will 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**

A daily risk assessment of the forest school site when used will be carried out and recorded on the weekly site risk assessment sheet. Additionally, all activities will be individually risk assessed in accordance with Forest School and DCEPS guidelines and policies.

### **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 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.
- A blunt blade is more dangerous than a sharp one.
- Count tools in and out.

- 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.
- Loppers
- Loppers - use for cutting wood with a diameter smaller than a 2 pence piece
- Always carry with blades closed (and locked if applicable).
- 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.
- 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.

## RISK ASSESSMENTS

HAZARD	RISK	SAFETY MEASURES
<b>Trip Hazards.</b> Uneven ground/holes Wet/slippy surface Muddy ground Icy ground	<b>Medium</b>	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.
<b>Low branches causing eye injuries.</b>	<b>Medium</b>	Point out location of low branches.

<b>Brambles or prickly thorny plants and stinging nettles.</b>	<b>Medium</b>	Show location of any brambles and stinging nettles and ask children to avoid them.
<b>Insect bites and stings</b>	<b>Low</b>	Verbal/visual warning not to approach or try to catch bees or 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.
<b>Tasty looking fruit, berries and fungi</b>	<b>Low</b>	Verbal/visual instructions that some fruit / berries /fungi are poisonous and should not be eaten. Ensure hands are washed before eating and give verbal instruction to keep hands away from face.
<b>Nuts, e.g., horse chestnut, acorns and hazelnuts</b>	<b>Low</b>	Be aware of children with allergies. Check anyone with severe allergies has their epi-pen and is able to administer it.

<b>Harmful litter, e.g., glass, metal, hypodermic needles</b>	<b>Low</b>	Remove harmful litter during pre-visit site check. Point out location of any harmful litter as activity progresses and remove.
<b>Contact with harmful substances - soil</b>	<b>Low</b>	Ensure hands are washed before eating and verbal instruction to keep hands away from faces.
<b>Exposure to the elements - rain, wind, snow, ice</b>	<b>Low</b>	Make sure that the children are wearing appropriate clothing. Use tarpaulins for shelter. In extreme cases work indoors and have alternative activities planned.
<b>Exposure to the elements - sun</b>	<b>Low</b>	Work in shade. Wear hats Check sunscreen is being worn. Provide regular drinks.
<b>High winds</b>	<b>Low</b>	Avoid area with trees, work on playing field. In extreme cases work indoors and have alternative activities planned.

<b>Structural damage to trees</b>	<b>Low</b>	Check branches in pre-visit site check. If area's unsafe work on playing field or work indoors and have alternative activities planned.
<b>Animal faeces</b>	<b>Low</b>	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.

## 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. This includes the use of Kelly Kettles. 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.

The fire will always be lit in a container - a fire pit. The fire should be surrounded by a 1 metre square of 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. Fireproof gauntlets should be kept at the fire area to allow adults to pick up hot items.

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 fire school knee 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.

### **Kelly Kettle**

The Forest leader may use this to heat water. Never leave the bung in whilst heating water. This is only to be in place during storage so as to keep the chamber clear from forest debris or insects and mini beasts. Once the fire is going in the Kelly Kettle base carefully add the chimney top to it by holding the handle parallel to the ground and supported on each side by your hands.

When lit, do not stand directly over, or look straight down the chimney. Never blow into the top. When pouring out the water support the base by holding the bung chain in one hand and the handle with the other. To put the fire out, pour the remaining water into the base. When not in use all tools will be securely locked away in the storage shed. Tools should be checked and cleaned before they are put away. Half termly, the Forest school leader team will ensure that each tool is thoroughly cleaned and oiled. Wear and tear will be monitored daily.



## **16. Health and Safety Policies & Procedures**

DCEPS 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 sufficient Leader to participant ratio at Forest School. The 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 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. A folder, with a numbered sheet identifying site risks will be completed before each session, along with any further risks identified during the visit, signed by the person completing the checks.

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

#### **Pre-visit checks**

- Run through the site risk assessment and amend/update as necessary.  
Remove all visible litter and faeces. Complete site risk assessment sheet.

- 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 trolley 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.

## **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.

### **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 will always carry and take a first aid kit into the forest at every session along with other identified emergency equipment
- A medical information list for each child undertaking the activities
- The school's telephone number will be stored in each member of staff's mobile telephone
- A Forest School Leader will always carry a 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 School 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 School Leader is responsible in training the children in how to use the tools and equipment safely and appropriately.
- The Forest School 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 Leadership.

Location of the nearest working landline if mobile not working / no signal is situated in the corridor outside of Rowan.

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 someone to stand outside of the school gate.

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 the Warrior call signal. 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.
- Have two members of staff or volunteers stay with the group at the Forest School circle and await further instructions.
- Send the remaining staff to search the immediate area for an agreed length of time (e.g. 5 minutes). Arrange for them 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 (e.g. 20 minutes) and return to reception at an agreed time.

**If the missing person is not found by this second search, then with SLT 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

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

## **Fire procedure**

- In the event of a fire that cannot be put out quickly and safely, the Forest School Leader will blow repeated long whistles to alert the group.
- Children will have already been advised/reminded of the emergency procedure on hearing a repeated long whistle blow, to make their way to the sports field meeting point.
- Alert SMT and instruct one person to call the fire brigade and give directions to the site - *see location and access to Donington Cowley Endowed Primary School*
- Arrange for someone to stand at the entrance to the school to direct emergency services.

## **Campfire procedure**

- Donington Cowley Endowed primary 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 through the use of Kelly kettles. 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.

- The Forest School Leader is 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 logs and sit down).
- The need for, and principles of, fire safety are explained. This will include the rule that when Kelly kettles or a fire are being used in the centre of the circle, only one child at a time is permitted to approach the Kelly kettle or 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 blonde 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 Kelly kettles and/or lit fires will usually be introduced in 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 Leader daily campfire and use of Kelly kettle and campfire procedures

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

The Forest School Leader 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, the Forest School Leader will:

- Not wear loose clothing and tie long hair back and ensure that children have their hair tied back and have no loose clothing.
- Wear gloves.
- Allow only one child 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

When using Kelly kettles, the Forest School Leader will:

- Only light a fire in the tray of the Kelly kettle in the centre of the Forest School circle.
- Kneel on one knee for ease of moving backwards.
- Never place the kettle on the fire without containing water.
- Only fill the kettle with water when cool.
- Place the tray of the kettle on a flat surface.
- Remove the cork before putting the kettle on the fire.
- Keep the spout on the opposite side to themselves and others.
- Remove the kettle from fire when the water starts to boil.
- Remove the kettle from the fire with the handle held vertically, using the chain to support it in an upright position.



## **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 back in pairs in KS2, and with an assisting adult in KS1.

### **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 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 Wastewater 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 wastewater 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 wastewater is then disposed in the woodland over a wide area as possible, so it will evaporate quicker.

## **17. Safeguarding Children, Confidentiality and Forest School**

Everyone at Donington Cowley Endowed Primary School 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 member of staff, who finds that a child is telling them something that concerns them should follow the Donington Cowley Endowed Primary School Safeguarding Policy.

## **18. Equal Opportunities, Inclusion and Forest School**

The mission statement of DCEPS is to provide a caring environment where everyone is respected and valued, where unity lies at the heart of our community. Our aim is to provide an enriching curriculum which evokes aspiration and inspires all children to be the best versions of themselves. Through determination, courage, excellence, pride and success, we strive to encourage children to become confident, ambitious and passionate learners, laying the foundations of knowledge, skills and understanding for life-long learning.

We believe a greater level of success can be achieved by realising the uniqueness of individuals. Creating an inclusive environment where individuals feel confident and at ease. We are committed to having a balanced, diverse and

fair curriculum to help ensure pupils learn to become respectful, accepting and inclusive of others.

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
- Make best use of all available resources to support the learning of all groups of children.
- appreciate and value the differences in others

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.

## 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 Procedures**

We will not go to Forest School if the conditions are deemed dangerous such as in high winds, during thunderstorms, or during periods of extreme cold. 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.

## **21. Designated Person Responsibilities**

Forest School Leader: Heather Taylor

First Aider 1: Heather Taylor

Additional First Aiders attending the session will be the class Teaching Assistants.

Child Protection Leader Sarah Ogden / Faye Tubb

Child Protection Officer: Sophie Foston

## **22. Insurance Requirements**

Donington Cowley Endowed Primary School. Town Dam Lane, Donington, Spalding, Lincolnshire. PE11 4TR

Email: [enquiries@cowley.lincs.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@cowley.lincs.sch.uk)

## 23. Letter to Parents:

### Forest School at Donington Cowley Endowed Primary School

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**Donington Cowley Endowed Primary School**

**Towndam Lane**

**Donington**

**Spalding**

**Lincolnshire PE11 4TR**

**Tel: (01775) 820467**

**Headteacher – Sophie Foston**

**e-mail: [enquiries@cowley.lincs.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@cowley.lincs.sch.uk)**

**website: [www.cowley.lincs.sch.uk](http://www.cowley.lincs.sch.uk)**



Dear Parent,

We are delighted to offer Forest School within the school grounds as part of our curriculum provision. The location will be the woodland at the top of the school field. Your child will be involved in Forest School for 3 sessions during the academic year.

#### **Information about Forest School**

Forest School is run by a trained Leader 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 an appropriate adult to participant ratio at Forest School. All activities are thoroughly risk assessed before the start of a session and the Leader continues 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, Heather Taylor.

### **What your child needs to wear for Forest School**

The Forest School sessions will take place entirely outside in the wood 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 arrive in forest school clothing, and bring their uniform in a bag:**

- Waterproof coat
- Waterproof trousers (if they own a pair)
- Wellington boots (or sturdy walking boots) (in a carrier bag)
- 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

We look forward to some exciting learning and adventures.

Heather Taylor



*Adapted from TES Forest School Policy from TES website. With grateful thanks to Coppice School*