

West Exmoor Federation



Forest School Policy & Procedures

Reviewed in July 2025

‘Educating with love for life in all its fullness’

Forest School Policy & Procedures

Our Forest School is based at Kentisbury Primary School and for variation in the lessons, we are also able to run these at a local National Trust property, Arlington Court, which is just three miles from the School. Forest School provides a unique and inspirational way of encouraging children to build independence, confidence and positive attitudes towards learning, as they explore and experience the natural world for themselves.

The ethos of Forest School is based not on what is learnt but how it is learnt. Children are encouraged to direct their own learning. Forest School works on John Dewey's theory that for most children the outdoors is their preferred environment and they can actually blossom in all subjects through Forest School sessions.

Risk Assessments

A detailed generic site risk assessment of Kentisbury School grounds, adjoining Parish field and National Trust property Arlington Court, which are the two sites used by the Federation's forest school, has been carried out by a qualified forest school leader. This is stored in the policy and procedure manual which is kept in the forest school file in the school administrator's office. They are also recorded within Evolve, DCC's Educational Visits Approval System. Copies of the risk assessment forms are also kept in the operating handbook which is taken to each session by the leader. Before each lesson or party the forest school leader will check the site being used and any amendments will be mentally noted. Should there be any change to the proposed actions on the generic copies then the children will be verbally advised.

Activities

All activities involving the use of tools and fire will be carried out in accordance with the policy and procedure manual. All activities will be carried out taking into account the proposed actions recorded on the risk assessments.

Site

The site risk assessment will include access to the site, boundaries, other users, canopy, shrub, field and ground levels, structures and animals, as well as any other relevant risks. Level of risk and proposed actions will be clearly recorded.

Travel

The forest school sessions will be held during the normal school hours and therefore the children will arrive at school in their normal way. Should any sessions take place off the school premises, but within walking distance, then the children will be accompanied by the correct adult to child ratio.

Should transport be required, the children will be taken on the federation minibus, driven by a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checked member of school staff. This member of staff will also hold a Passenger Carrying Vehicle Licence (PCV). The minibuses are fitted with safety standard seatbelts.

Parental consent

Parents will be informed in writing when their child is due to attend a forest school programme. Parents will be given detailed information about the purpose and benefits of forest school, and asked to give written permission for their child to attend. A form will also need to be completed by the parents giving details of any medical details their child may have. Permission will be sought for photographs to be taken during forest school sessions, for using simple tools and fire lighting.

Any parents with concerns or questions can contact Barbara Watts or Gini Hynes, forest school leaders at Kentisbury Primary School, Kentisbury, Barnstaple, North Devon EX31 4NG. Telephone: 01271 883263

Signed permission forms will be checked prior to collection for forest school. Any child without written permission will not be able to attend the session.

Health and Safety

The safety of all children engaged in forest school activities is paramount. Having a strong understanding of Health and Safety law and appropriate paperwork in place allows the Forest School practitioner to facilitate acceptable risk opportunities for the learners, appropriate to their needs and experience. For definitive guidance on Health and Safety in the UK please visit the Health and Safety Executive website: www.hse.gov.uk, the Devon Local Authority Health and Safety guidance: <http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/learningschools/schools/schools-services/healthandsafetyservice.htm> and Devon Educational Visits Guidance: www.devonldp.org.

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

The Health and Safety at Work Act outlines the general legal duties an employer has to their employees and members of the public to ensure their health, safety and welfare as far as reasonably practicable. It also outlines the duties employees have to the employer and each other.

Employers' duties include:

1. Deciding what could cause harm in the workplace and the precautions to stop it. This is part of risk assessment.
2. Explain, in a way employees can understand, how risks will be controlled and tell them who is responsible for this.
3. Consult and work with employees and health and safety representatives in protecting everyone from harm in the workplace.
4. Give employees the health and safety training they need to do their job, free of charge.
5. Provide employees with any equipment and protective clothing (PPE) they need, free of charge, and ensure it is properly looked after.
6. Provide toilets, washing facilities and drinking water.
7. Provide adequate first-aid facilities.
8. Report injuries, diseases and dangerous incidents at work to HSE.
9. Have appropriate insurance that covers all staff and members of public for tasks undertaken. Display a hard copy or electronic copy of the current insurance certificate where it can be easily read.
10. Work with any other employers or contractors sharing the workplace or providing employees (such as agency workers), so that everyone's health and safety is protected.

Employees' duties include:

1. Following the training they have received when using any work items the employer has given them.
2. Taking reasonable care of their own and other people's health and safety.
3. Co-operating with the employer on health and safety.
4. Reporting to someone (employer, supervisor, or health and safety representative) if they think the work or inadequate precautions are putting anyone's health and safety at serious risk.

The Health and Safety at Work act was originally written to support industry workplaces, however it is still applicable to all workplaces including Forest School. It is important to remember that these duties are to be met as far as reasonably practicable. Much of the debate around health and safety issues is about 'reasonability' – which is subjective to each individual. What may be reasonable to one person may be unreasonable to another. Therefore before addressing these duties it is useful to reflect on our individual (and staff team) views on reasonability.

Weather

We believe that children should be able to access fun and learning in all weathers, as long as it is safe to do so. Forest school will go ahead in all weather, with the exceptions being temperatures below 2 degrees centigrade, or high winds. On these occasions, the forest school leader will assess the risk as early as possible on the day of the session, and if the decision is made to cancel, that session will be rearranged. Please see clothing policy for further information on wet/hot weather.

Safeguarding

The protection of a child is our first priority.

It may be that due to the open and trusting nature of forest school sessions, the staff may be the first people to sense there is a problem. If a situation should occur staff will respond appropriately including noting any significant changes in children's behaviour, deterioration in their general well-being, unexplained bruising, marks or signs of possible abuse, neglect and or the comments children make which give cause for concern.

Staff follow the guidelines as laid out in the government booklet 'What to do if you're worried a child is being abused'. We also have a procedure should an allegation be made against a member of staff. This can be found in the Employee Handbook.

The designated safeguarding lead for the federation is Mrs J Peacock. The deputy safeguarding leads are Mr J MacKenzie (Lynton), Ms C Strachan (Parracombe) and Mrs J Kelly (Kentisbury).

Disclosure

If a child at forest school chooses to talk about an incident or situation that has happened to them it is important that staff know how best to deal with the disclosure, as described below.

Remembering that you are not there to seek the information or to put words into the child's mouth the following points should be taken into account:

- Arrange a time and place where a discussion can take place privately as soon after the child has initiated contact as possible.
- Stay calm and reassuring, try not to appear shocked or embarrassed at what the child may say.
- Explain that you cannot promise to keep what has been said a secret- you may have to tell somebody else who will be able to help.
- Reassure the child by letting them know that they have done nothing wrong and that you are pleased they have shared this with you.
- Do not pressure the child into telling more than they want to at this stage.
- Ask the child if they have told anyone else or if anybody else might know what has happened.
- Let the child know that you understand how difficult it is to talk about such experiences.
- Let the child know that they can come to you again and talk some more, be supportive, encouraging and most importantly let them know that they have been believed. Children, particularly young children rarely lie about sexual abuse.

It is important that the information you have been told is reported and dealt with as quickly and sympathetically as possible. Inform your forest school leader, immediately, who will then be able to advise you on how to deal with the situation and inform the relevant authorities if necessary.

Ratios

Forest school sessions and travelling within these sessions, will take place with the appropriate adult child ratio depending on the ages of the children in that group.

. The ratios are

- For children aged between 1 and 4 years old - 1 adult to 4 children.
- For key stage 1 children - 1 adult to 6 children
- For key stage 2 children- 1 adult to 8 children

Forest School activities that involve an over-night camp (but not include specific Forest School activities over-night) will ensure that the appropriate adult child ratio within our Off Site Activity Policy are adhered to.

DBS

All staff at forest school will hold a current enhanced DBS. Written records of DBS numbers can be found in the Single Central Register, available in each school office within the federation. Staff DBS checks are refreshed every 3 years, in line with good practice guidance

Any volunteers or work experience students who may occasionally attend a forest school session will not be left unsupervised with the children at any time, and will not take children to the toilet or carry out any intimate personal care. Visitors to the site during a session will be asked to inform the forest school leader and sign the register sheet.

First Aid

The appointed first aider is Barbara Watts, who holds a level 2 paediatric and outdoor first aid certificate.

Clothing and food

Waterproof trousers and jackets will be provided for children at forest school but parents will be asked to provide suitable footwear for their child such as wellington boots. Long trousers and sleeves will be worn at all times to minimise the risks of injuries.

Parents will be reminded of the importance of sending their child in suitable clothing for the current weather conditions. Should a child arrive at school without a coat/sunhat/jumper, we will wherever possible provide one from our store of spare clothes. In the event of suitable clothing not being available to ensure the child's safety, the child will be unable to attend forest school. From May to September, parents will be asked to provide sun cream and hats, and staff will regularly apply sun protection.

Children should bring a packed lunch and drink to all forest school sessions. Should a child be entitled to free school meals then these will be provided by the school.

Accidents and incidents

In the event of an accident, appropriate first aid will be administered immediately by Barbara Watts, the appointed first aider, or Gini Hynes, emergency first aider.

All accidents and incidents at forest school will be recorded in the accident book. A description of the event, injury, witness details and action taken will be clearly and accurately recorded and this will be kept in a confidential forest school file.

RIDDOR

(Reporting of Injuries, Diseases & Dangerous Occurrences Regulations)

In the event of a serious injury or dangerous occurrence the parents will be contacted immediately, and details recorded in the accident book.

Deaths, major injuries and dangerous occurrences will be reported to the Health and Safety Executive as soon as possible, however only the following need to be notified out of normal working hours:

- fatal accidents at work;
- accidents where several workers have been seriously injured;
- accidents resulting in serious injury to a member of the public;
- Accidents and incidents causing major disruption, such as evacuation of people, closure of roads, large numbers of people going to hospital etc.

Emergency procedure

In the event of any emergencies on site, children will be assembled quickly and calmly, and escorted to the school playground which is the assembly point. Register will be taken, and the forest school leader will be responsible for checking that all children and staff are evacuated from the site.

The forest school leader will carry a mobile phone for emergency use, and after ensuring the safety of the children and staff, will call the relevant emergency services. As far as possible, staff will explain the situation and reassure the children, and parents will be informed of what has happened.

The forest school leader will be responsible for completing an incident report after the event.

Missing child procedure

Forest school procedures are planned and organised to minimise the risk of a child going missing, and staff will always be aware of the children's whereabouts within the site. During the first session, children will be taught methods of alerting staff to their position, and the boundaries of the site. In the unlikely event of a missing child, a staff member will secure the safety of the remaining group, while the other staff will search the immediate area for no longer than fifteen minutes. The forest school leader will call the school office to inform them so that all available staff can search. If the child is not found, the police and the child's parents will be contacted immediately.

Confidentiality

The information that the federation keeps on record regarding personal details, such as registration forms, staff details, and children's information, are treated as private and confidential.

To ensure that confidentiality is maintained;

- Data protection regulations are taken into consideration at all times.
- Information given to or held with regard to parents, carers and children will not be passed onto third parties without permission unless the information relates specifically to a child protection concern.
- The information obtained regarding employment of staff will remain confidential to the people directly involved with making personnel decisions.

Staff must:

- Not discuss any information concerning children or forest school matters outside of the school setting.
- Photos of children taken at the setting must not be given out to parents without prior consent.
- Photos must not be sent via email, text message or posted on the internet.
- Under no circumstances are staff allowed to take pictures of children on their mobile phones- Mobile phones should not be used during working hours for any reason. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the forest school leader in the case of an emergency.
- Ensure that all children's records and observations are stored appropriately.
- Do not use children's surnames in observations.
- A breach of confidentiality may result in dismissal.

Toileting

All children will be taken to the toilet in the main school building immediately before the session. If a child then needs to go during the session they will be able to return into school. Should we be off site but near public toilets they will be able to go, either in pairs or accompanied by an adult depending on their age. If there are no public toilets they will be able to go in the woods, in which case a secure, private area will be arranged, with suitable precautions for personal hygiene, (toilet roll, wet wipes, and antibacterial gel will be kept in the emergency bag), All toileting carried out in the woods will be safely and hygienically dealt with, without causing any ecological damage.

Tools

During forest school sessions, children may have the opportunity to use tools such as bow saws, fixed blade knives, loppers and axes. The tools are always used in the context of constructing or learning a new skill, in order to support the children's learning and development. We feel it is important for children to be given some responsibility, and the opportunity to manage controlled risks for themselves.

All tools are checked by the forest school leader before every session for damage, and any deemed unsafe will be removed immediately. Activities involving tool use will be fully risk assessed, and where any tool use occurs, it will be done on a one to one basis.

Staff will observe and assess children before allowing tool use, and tools will only be introduced when the forest school leader is satisfied that it is appropriate.

The forest school leader has been trained to a high standard in the safe use of tools, and children will be taught to use them correctly.

On the site, tools are stored securely in a rigid tool bag, with a coded padlock to prevent children accessing them unsupervised. Tools are also transported to and from the site in this way, and stored in a secure storage shed.

Tool use procedures

Axe

- The axe will only be used after a tool safety check and on a one to one basis with children that are assessed by the forest school leader as being focussed and ready to follow the instructions.
- No child will be allowed to remove an axe from the bag and use it without permission.
- Work will be carried out in a clear safe designated area free from trip hazards.
- The children will be taught how to use and carry the tool safely.
- A chopping block will be used.
- At the end of each session the axe will be cleaned and safely stored away by the forest school leader.

Bow-Saw

- The bow-saw will only be used after a tool safety check and on a one to one basis with children that are assessed by the forest school leader as being focussed and ready to follow the instructions.
- No child will be allowed to remove a bow-saw from the bag and use it without permission.
- Work will be carried out in a clear safe designated area free from trip hazards.
- An “A” frame will be used to hold the wood steady.
- The children will be taught how to use and carry the tool safely.
- At the end of each session the bow-saw will be cleaned and safely stored away by the forest school leader.

Fixed-blade knife

- The knife will only be used after a tool safety check and on a one to one basis with children that are assessed by the forest school leader as being focussed and ready to follow the instructions.
- No child will be allowed to remove a knife from the bag and use it without permission.
- Work will be carried out in a clear safe designated area free from trip hazards.
- The children will be taught how to use and carry the tool safely.
- Children will be taught about the need of a safety zone around them.
- At the end of each session the knife will be cleaned and safely stored away by the forest school leader.

Loppers

- The loppers will only be used after a tool safety check and on a one to one basis with children that are assessed by the forest school leader as being focussed and ready to follow the instructions.
- No child will be allowed to remove the loppers from the bag and use them without permission.
- Work will be carried out in a clear safe designated area free from trip hazards.
- The children will be taught how to use and carry the tool safely.
- At the end of each session the loppers will be cleaned and safely stored

Drill

- The drill will only be used after a tool safety check and on a one to one basis with children that are assessed by the forest school leader as being focussed and ready to follow the instructions.
- No child will be allowed to remove the drill from the bag and use it without permission.
- Work will be carried out in a clear safe designated area free from trip hazards.
- The children will be taught how to use and carry the tool safely.
- A wooden block will be used.
- The Forest School leader will hold the wood secure whilst drilling.
- At the end of each session the drill will be cleaned and safely stored away by the forest school leader.

Fire lighting

On some occasions, the forest school session will include using a camp fire. This will only happen towards the end of a programme, when trust and behaviour boundaries are well established. Children will be taught the principles and safety rules of fire prior to lighting.

Children and adults, with the exception of the leader when lighting and tending to the fire, will not be permitted to walk inside the “fire circle”, at a distance of 1.5 metres around the fire. A fire will always be attended by a competent adult.

The site of the fire will be clear of trip hazards and there will always be water available in case the fire has to be extinguished quickly.

There will always be clean water available for first aid purposes should anyone burn themselves.

The fire surround will be pegged in and will remain pegged in even when the fire is not alight.

Fires will only be alight for as long as it is necessary to carry out the chosen activity, for example, cooking damper bread.

Fires will be fully extinguished with water in a safe and controlled manner.

Storm kettle

The storm kettle will be lit within the fire surround and the same safety precautions as fire lighting will be followed.

The kettle will be lifted with both hands, placing one hand each side and not on the wooden part of the handle. The bottom part of the kettle, where the fire has burnt, will remain hot and will therefore be lifted using two sticks to turn it upside down.

As with fire, it will be sprinkled with water until completely cool.

Food Hygiene

Allergy checks on the pupils will be made before deciding on what food will be cooked.

Hand washing facilities will always be available along with antiseptic hand gel.

Food cooked at forest school will be carried in a closed container such as a cool box.

When used, cooked and raw meat will be kept separate.

Food will mainly be prepared before hand in the kitchen but should the children be involved in the preparation then chopping boards will be provided and again raw and cooked food will be kept separate.

All food will be thoroughly cooked before eating.

Behaviour Management

Together we aim to help children learn right from wrong and build positive relationships within our forest school setting. We believe that we all benefit from a well balanced environment where we know what is expected of us and children are free to develop their play and learning without fear of being hurt or hindered by anyone else.

We wish to work with parents and carers to explain to all how we encourage good behaviour. All staff will ensure that boundaries are applied consistently. Children will then have the security of knowing what to expect and can build useful habits of behaviour which support their ever growing curiosity and understanding of the world around them, and keep them safe in a potentially high risk environment.

All staff will provide a positive image for children with regard to friendliness, care and courtesy, and will praise desirable behaviour appropriately.

When children behave in unacceptable ways we will explain clearly the cause and effect of their behaviour. We encourage children to understand what is right and explain to them and their parents and carers the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

Where appropriate this might be achieved away from the situation that has caused the difficulty. We will always make it clear to a child that it is the behaviour that is not wanted, not themselves and we will discuss with parents and carers our approach to any particular difficulties.

We understand that children's behaviour changes as their individual personalities grow and develop. If there are any behaviour problems they will be dealt with in the appropriate fashion respecting the child's individual level of development. Any recurring problems will be discussed with the child's parents and where necessary, objective observations will be used to help establish the cause.

The school SENDCo works closely with all staff to support children with an identified need.

Guidelines to aid successful behaviour management.

- Staff handling of behaviour must be consistent and developmentally appropriate.
- Physical punishment or threat of it in any form will not be tolerated and in the event of this happening instant dismissal will result.
- The only physical intervention that is considered appropriate is the holding or restraining of a child to prevent injury to themselves or others. Any such incident must be recorded in the Accident/incident log and the child's parents/carer must be informed.
- Only senior members of staff are authorised to carry out this action should a situation arise.
- The forest school leader is ultimately responsible for supporting behaviour management issues and seeking expert advice if necessary, and will also liaise with the federation Head Teacher.
- All staff should build positive relationships with parents in order to gain a good understanding of the child and to reduce incidences of negative behaviour from occurring.
- Staff must not humiliate children.
- Staff must never threaten or intimidate children.
- If you feel that you may lose your temper- WALK AWAY IMMEDIATELY. Taking yourself away from the situation will enable you to calm down and gain perspective. Always discuss your feelings with your supervisor.
- It is important to remember that the behaviour of one child should not adversely affect the behaviour of another.
- Set clear, fair and consistent boundaries.
- Praise ALL children for their positive behaviour.
- Ignore negative behaviour until it stops or unless a child is at risk of endangering him/her self or others. When the child is calm, sit and explain why the behaviour was not acceptable and try to identify why it occurred?

Consider the following.....

1. What happened before?
2. What did..... do?
3. What happened next?

- Staff must be consistent. Leave all personal issues at home.
- Always follow through on instructions to ensure that children know what is expected and what will happen next.
- Ensure activities are suitable for the age and abilities of the children.
- Ensure that all children are able to participate- even if they choose not to.
- Interact with all children – discuss the activity, join in and encourage children to communicate with one another.
- Use positive appropriate language at all times.
- Staff must communicate and cooperate in order to provide a consistent and reassuring atmosphere for the children and parents.

Inclusion

Inclusion is meant in the widest sense. It incorporates children and young people as well as the rights of parents / carer, students and all the staff. It includes individuals who are disabled and non disabled as well as those from minority ethnic groups, travellers, and any other diverse cultural groups.

It also includes those with English as an additional language and children in public care.

It also incorporates the rights of the child and equal opportunities, as well as any other groups at risk of social exclusion.

Aims:

- All children have the right of full access Education.
- All children have the right to learn in a caring and considerate environment where the staff and the children are all valued for their contribution to the group.
- Forest school is committed to the early identification of disabilities and to adopting clear and open procedures which are outlined in this policy.
- Forest school is committed to working closely with parents who are fully involved in all decisions that affect their children's education
- Forest school will provide, with available resources, the highest possible quality support and inclusive education for disabled children.

Purpose:

- To meet the individual needs of all the children attending our school.
- To ensure that inclusion and equal opportunities are put into practice at all times.
- To raise quality and standards.
- To recognise the right of the child.
- To encourage parent / carers to use the provision.
- To increased awareness.

Federation Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with all other Federation Policies.