

# Deeping St James C.P School

## Forest School Handbook



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**Forest School Aims**

Our Forest School is a long-term learning journey which the children will be involved in throughout their time at DSJ. The children will have the opportunity to learn in our wooded Forest School area within the school grounds, it supports our inquiry-based approach to learning at DSJ.

The holistic approach in Forest School helps learners to direct their own learning through a range of experiences these include natural crafts, tool skills, making fires, cooking, knot making, playing in the mud kitchen, woodland management, sensory activities and making shelters during these outdoor sessions.

These stimulating and varied learning opportunities will ensure that all learners will;

- be provided with opportunities so they can develop and learn as an individual.
- enjoy themselves.
- be provided with a safe natural environment in which they can take risks.
- be helped to understand, respect, appreciate and care for the natural environment.
- be encouraged to develop their self- confidence and self-esteem.
- develop their interpersonal, social and team working skills.
- be independent, self-motivated and considerate .
- develop self-motivation, resilience and self-awareness.
- develop their listening skills and turn taking.
- be able to work through problems and challenges.
- be able to develop practical skills, use tools to create, build and manage .
- be able to concentrate and then reflect on their learning.

These sessions are run by a qualified Forest School Leader with the necessary support.

**Forest School Principles** (Forest Schools Association)

Our Forest School aims are structured by the 6 principles of Forest School outlined by the Forest School Association;

- Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural environment, rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaptation, observations, and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.
- Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent, and creative learners.
- Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.
- Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

## Forest School and Learning Behaviours

The 4 key Learning Behaviours and Attitudes that we develop at Deeping St James CP School are well supported and embedded through our Forest School Education as the children participate in child led learning in our natural woodland environment. The learners are provided with exciting opportunities where they will be actively engaged in thinking and solving challenges both individually and as part of a group.

Forest School encourages the children to be a;



**Resilient Risk Taker** by the children taking risks in their learning, to not be afraid to come out of their comfort zones, to not let obstacles stand in the way of their learning and if situations change, change with it. Examples of this will be when they light fires, climb trees and try new experiences in the woodland.



**Determined Self Improver** by giving the children the chance to evaluate their work honestly and make self-changes to improve, to ask questions to find out answers, to have a passion to improve and to look after their body and mind for learning. Examples of this will be the children improving shelters/ dens and accepting when they need to try again.



**Persistent Problem Solver** by giving the children the confidence to ask 'how?' and 'what if?' questions, to gather, process and evaluate information to solve a problem, challenge ideas and their thoughts in a constructive way. The children are also encouraged to think in an imaginative way to solve problems. Examples of this will be when the children solve a problem like building an egg protector or whittling a stick that does not burn for their marshmallows.



**Cooperative Group Worker** – by encouraging them to be able to accept and appreciate the views of others, changing behaviours to suit different roles and situations, having empathy with others and being able to accept and help to others. Examples of this may be when working with others to light a fire or build a shelter or solve a problem.

**Forest School Staffing and Leadership**

Forest School Sessions at Deeping St James CP are run by a Forest School Leader (FSL). The FSL at DSJ is Clare Seaton who has trained as a Level 3 Forest School practitioner with a 2 day Paediatric First Aid qualification (which meets the requirements of Ofsted, Sure Start, PACEY and the PLA).

The Forest School Leader is responsible for organising, planning and running all the Forest School sessions.

The Forest School Leader ensures the children are always safe and therefore carries out all related risk assessments making sure that documents are relevant and up to date.

**Staff Roles and responsibilities**

The Forest School Leader will;

- Ensure safety of the adults and children within the sessions.
- Plan sessions appropriate for the age of the children taking part – Linked to skills progression.
- Ensure all accompanying adults have read the Forest School Handbook so they are able to support the FSL in running the sessions.
- Carry out relevant risk assessments and checks on the site and of equipment and tools.
- Keep the Forest School handbook up to date.

Sessions will be led by Clare Seaton (Forest School Leader or FSL), accompanied by the relevant Teaching Assistants (TAs) that would usually be working within the class at the time of the Forest School session.

The FSL and TA will carry appropriate first aid and give children's medication (such as asthma inhalers) as required. The first aid kit and any medications will be stored in the 'Happy Box' and will be taken out with the class.

**Forest School Area**

Forest School at DSJ is run specifically within the school grounds in a fenced off wooded area spanning 875 square metres. The area contains a range of trees (Beech, Hawthorn, Crab Apple and Sycamore,) shrubs (Holly, Dogwart) and a field layer of Brambles, Nettles and Ivy.

The area contains a wildlife pond that is also fenced off and can only be used with appropriate supervision. The whole wooded area is now specifically set up for Forest School Sessions (eg Mud-kitchens, Base Camp, Fire Circle, Dead Wood areas and Den Building Areas established) and can only be accessed from within the school grounds with appropriate supervision.

**Working with Parents/Carers:**

In order to keep Parent / Carers / Staff and helpers informed about our Forest School sessions at DSJ, the following is in place to ensure good communication;

- A copy of this Handbook will be available on the school website.
- Parents / Carers will be given information at the beginning of the year about Forest School at their classes 'Meet the Teacher' sessions.
- Parents / Carers will receive a general information letter before the start of their children's Forest School Sessions which will remind Parents / Carers of the dates and clothing required.
- Photographs and information about the sessions will be shared in the newsletters each term.

**Legislation and Forest School** (As of review date)

Legislation of importance to Forest School includes the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This act makes it a statutory that an employer has a duty to ensure the Health, Safety and Welfare at work of their employees (in the case of schools adults and children) and any equipment used by them, and that employees are responsible for the Health and Safety of themselves and others they may be affected by their acts. The risk assessments carried out DSJ Forest School are written with the Health and Safety of all participants in mind; children, volunteers and members of staff.

The Children's Act 1989, makes it important to consider adult ratios for all activities, equal opportunities and access, clear communication with parents and DSB checks for staff and regular volunteers. Routines and procedures are developed with reference to this act and safeguarding practices.

Staff attending forest school sessions within DSJ Primary School will be familiar with the following school policies:

- Health and Safety Policy.
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.
- Behaviour Policy.
- Equal Opportunity Policy.
- Hot Weather and Sun Safety policy.
- SEND Policy.



**Health and Safety, Safeguarding and Risk Assessments:**

Risk assessments are carried out for the site and the activities undertaken during Forest School Sessions. The risk assessments are attached as an appendix and are continually reviewed and amended. The FSL will perform a Dynamic Risk Assessment of the site before every session to ensure the site and equipment complies with all health and safety requirements before the children enter. This risk assessment ensures there is no litter or hazardous items before the session commences.

The risk assessment process requires the FSL to;

- identify the hazards.
- decide the harm they may cause.
- recognise who may be at risk.
- evaluate the existing preventative measures.
- assess the probability and severity of the risk.
- review preventative measures.
- ensure the benefits of the opportunity outweigh the risks.

The FSL will log any accidents in the first aid book and parents will be informed of any incidents that occur during a session eg trips, fall, cuts, grazes.

All the policies and procedures in this Handbook follow the requirements to safely run Forest School Sessions. All staff and volunteers have a duty to follow all policies and procedures and risk assessments when in and around the Forest School Area.

**Forest School Happy Box**

The following items will be found in the 'Happy Box'.

They will be checked by the FSL at the beginning and end of each session;

- First Aid Kit.
- Medical Information for the group.
- Risk Assessments.
- Forest School Handbook.
- Clean Water.
- Accident report book (in first aid kit).
- Individual Medication (as required).
- Wet Wipes.
- Rubbish Bags.
- Scissors.
- String.
- Pens.
- Chalks.
- Elastic Bands.
- Gloves.
- Reflection Dice.
- Planning.

**Typical Forest School Equipment**

- 2 Bow saws (in locked cupboard in shed).
- 12+ potato peelers.
- 6 hammers.
- 2 Bill hooks (in locked cupboard in shed).
- 2 Hammocks.
- 5 sheath knives (in locked box , in a locked cupboard in shed).
- 2 pruning saws (in locked cupboard in shed).
- 2 loppers (in locked cupboard in shed).
- 1 hand drill (in locked cupboard in shed).
- Large balls of string.
- 2 Kelly Kettles.
- 10 flint and steel.
- 2 Tarpaulins.
- Cotton wool.
- Pairs of children's protective gloves.
- Pairs of adult's protective gloves.
- Fire gloves.
- Water containers.
- Aqua roll.
- Plastic trays and plant pots for collecting.
- Trowels and forks.
- Air drying clay.
- Fire pit.
- Firewood and kindling.
- Hammers and nails.
- Cast iron cooking equipment.
- Additional 'natural' wood will be sourced for the school.

The resources for forest school are kept locked in the shed (located at the rear of the forest school area.) Only adults (or supervised children) will be allowed to access the shed and its contents.

### **Tool Safety**

The Forest School Leader is responsible for the safe usage and maintenance of all tools. Tools are to be checked at the beginning and end of each session to ensure they are safe to use.

- Children and adults will continually be briefed on the safe use of tools, through 'Tool Talks' and will adhere to the Tool Risk Assessment.
- Tools are to be stored safely in a locked toolbox/bag and accessed only by the Forest School Leader. Appropriate guards will be fixed to the sharp tools.
- Wellies or sturdy footwear is to be worn by adults and children when in the forest.
- When using hand tools, appropriate gloves are to be provided for the children to wear to protect them from injury and harm.
- An activity risk assessment for sessions and an overall risk assessment for the general forest area is reviewed and updated regularly by the Forest School Leader.
- Tool training and assessment of individuals should always take place prior to working with tools.
- Children are to be reminded of the forest school rules and safety rules at the start of each session.
- All children and staff are to wear the appropriate personal protective equipment associated with the tool work activity, i.e. protective gloves.
- When using tools (eg Bill Hook, Bow Saw, Loppers, Sheathed Knives), the Forest School leader will work 1:1 with the child or 1:2 as the children develop their skills.
- Other lower risk tools (eg Hand drills, Potato peelers) will be used at a higher ratio when their capabilities are assessed. These tools will be counted in and out of sessions.
- When pupils are not using tools, they should remain a safe distance from the area.
- Tools will be locked in the shed. The Knives will be locked in a moneybox inside a locked cupboard in the shed. The Bill Hook, Bow Saw and Loppers will be also locked in the shed cupboard.

The risk assessment specific to tool use can be found in the Appendices.

## **Fire and safety**

DSJ has a designated Fire Circle area in The Forest School site for the children to take part in specific campfire sessions. These activities will have a high ratio of adults to children (usually 1:10). The children will have the opportunities to light fires in small groups following the Fire Safety Risk Assessment in the Appendix.

### **All Fires**

- The children will be trained and supervised in how to approach and leave before lighting any fires.
- **We will never leave a fire unattended.**
- A boundary of seating will be at least 1.5 m from the fire.
- Fuel should burn itself out, but if it does not it will be extinguished with water or sand. This fire bucket ready in every session to extinguish.
- Long hair will be tied back and loose clothing tucked in.
- Any kettles or hot water will be moved with the appropriate protection by an adult.
- Fires will not be lit during very windy or very dry conditions.
- Water for the children's drinks will not be boiling.
- Children will have clear rules and boundaries for fire lighting.
- Before the children light fires their understanding will be assessed.

### **Fires and Fairy Fires (Small Fires):**

- Fairy Fires will be lit on safe surfaces eg Shells/ baking trays.
- The main fire will be lit in the designated fire pit area.

### **Kelly Kettles:**

- Used on flat surfaces.
- Kelly Kettles will be boiled with the cork out.
- Kelly Kettles will be checked and maintained by the FSL.

**Clothing**

The children are required to arrive suitably dressed for all weather conditions;

**Warm Weather Clothing**

- Sun hat.
- Sun cream.
- Long Trousers.
- Long Sleeves.
- Waterproof Coat and trousers.
- Wellies/ Walking Boots or sturdy shoes.

**Cold Weather Clothing**

- Hat.
- Gloves.
- Long Trousers.
- Long Sleeves.
- Layers of clothing.
- Waterproof Coat and trousers.
- Wellies / Walking Boots or sturdy shoes.

A Parentmail will be sent in advance to remind parents about the clothing that is required.

**Management for Sustainability of the Forest School Area**

As part of the children's learning they will be involved in the maintenance, protection and conservation of the Forest School area. It is important that we look after the flora and fauna in the area to limit the impact/damage that could happen through overuse.

The FSL has developed a '3 Year Management Plan for Sustainability' to do this.

Examples of some of the ways we will protect the area are:

- Rotating the areas used to allow recovery.
- Dead wood piles to encourage flora and fauna.
- Not taking branches off living trees (unless maintenance).
- Respectful picking.
- Bird feeding stations.
- Bird Boxes.
- Safe handling of living things.
- Building bug hotels.

**Appendices**

- a) Blindfold Risk Assessment
- b) Cooking Risk Assessment
- c) Dynamic Risk Assessment
- d) Fires, Fairy Fires and Kelly Kettle Risk Assessment
- e) Pond Risk Assessment
- f) Site Risk Assessment
- g) Tool Use Risk Assessment
- h) Weather Risk Assessment