

Forest School Handbook 2021

Forest School Leader – Alison Hopkins





Contents

Principles of Forest School	3
Our Vision Statement	3
Forest School Benefits and Inclusive Practice	3
Ecological Impact	5
Countryside Code	5
Forest School Rules	5
Clothing requirements	6
Forest School Code of Conduct	7
Sessional Procedures for Forest School	8
Suggested Activities for Forest School	9
Health and Safety Policies	9
Safeguarding Children and Confidentiality Policies	10
Legislation	10
Travel Policy	10
Equipment List	11
Medical and Emergency Contact Details	11
Emergency Procedure	12
Risk Assessment and Risk Management of Setting	12
Risk Management of Tools and Equipment used at Forest School	13
Designated Person Responsibility for each Session	15
Toileting Considerations	16
Insurance Requirements and Documentation	16
Declaration of review	16
Appendix 1 – Safety Sweep	17
Appendix 2 – Termly Risk Assessment Template	18
Appendix 3 – Adult Helpers Signature List	19
Appendix 4 – Parental Consent Form	20



Principles of Forest School

Forest School has its roots in Scandinavia and was first introduced to the UK in the 1990s after a group of lecturers from Bridgwater College went on an Early Years study trip to Denmark. The lecturers saw children who were free to roam the wooded area beside their kindergarten, using skills and knowledge in the outdoors such as climbing trees and using tools. The practices in Denmark are backed up by research which shows the long-term benefits of children being outdoors.

Ampney Crucis Forest School is held on our school site which consists of a pond, an open area with gravel, open grass area and trees. Each session gives the children of our school the opportunity to explore and experience the natural world through practical activities in the outdoors. These opportunities are designed to develop confidence, independence and self-esteem and are governed by a set of Forest School principles:

- Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions
- Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world
- Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning
- 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

Source: Forest School Association www.forestschoollassociation.org

Our Vision Statement

'Together we live, learn and flourish'

Our vision is that children are given the opportunity to explore, follow their own interests, building resilience, confidence, independence, problem solving, team work and communication, whilst learning about the natural environment around them, gaining appreciation and respect and allowing our ecosystem to flourish with our care. Children will be encouraged to take risks in order for them to learn new skills and to embed their knowledge and understanding.

Forest School Benefits and Inclusive Practice

At Ampney Crucis Primary School we are committed to ensuring we have inclusive practice that enables all children, regardless of difference, to feel a valued member of our school community. We aim to meet the educational needs of all our learners through the provision of challenging and exciting experiences and this extends to our Forest School provision which provides great benefits for all learners.



- Our aim is for our Forest School sessions to be accessible for all children. Our sessions build familiarity, flexibility, co-operation and mindfulness to help decrease barriers to interaction with peers and practitioners. Clear roles and rules within the sessions will support children to navigate successfully through them.
- There is a strong body of research that evidences positive outcomes for children learning in Forest School. Our sessions help children develop through a child-led approach and teaches them how to assess risks for themselves. They foster independence through activities and a holistic approach that gives them the space to learn on their own terms. This individualised approach enables us to achieve inclusive practice for all children, including those with SEND.
- Forest School is holistic and provides physical benefits as well as emotional benefits such as raised self-esteem. Each session will have whole group targets but additionally we apply this holistic approach to encourage personal progression and to enable the inclusion of any personal development plans of children taking part in our sessions. Individual targets will be drawn from individual plans, practitioners, other professionals and families, with the key stakeholder being the learner themselves.
- In our Forest School sessions we introduce the seeds of an idea. The aim is for children to then develop this by applying their own creativity and learning. Allowing children the space and time in our Forest School sessions to use their own initiative offers valuable insights upon which to build. The activities we plan will reinforce existing skills and give opportunities for new ones but activities are not restricted and sessions can incorporate any special interests to meet individual needs.
- Learning that takes place in the outdoors is powerful and memorable as all the senses are involved. At Ampney Crucis Forest School we are lucky to have a natural rich sensory environment that can be used to ensure a child's sensory needs are met in a positive, individualised and flexible way. Our Forest School space has a dedicated quiet space.
- We recognise that not all children communicate in the same way. Practitioners will aim to identify any barriers to communication such as: differences in processing times, feelings of anguish, frustration or stress, and differences in sensory processing, and ensure appropriate methods of communication are developed and used within our Forest School space. These may include written communication or signs and symbols.
- Transitions to and from our Forest School site and activities within it will be carefully considered and supported using systems that may already be used within school or by establishing new ones. The overall structure and routines of Forest School can support individualised needs.
- Our Forest School sessions positively encourage reflection from the adults and children who take part. Such reflection acknowledges that everyone, including practitioners, continues to learn throughout the sessions.



Ecological Impact

Whilst using the Forest School site we will minimise the harm caused to local plant species and wildlife. As part of the Forest School session the children shall be encouraged to be more responsible and respectful for the plants and wildlife that share our space. We will work to improve the site to encourage further wildlife, for example by adding a bat house or providing bird feeders. We will abide by the Countryside Code and our Forest School rules.

The Countryside Code

The Countryside Code dedicated to helping us learn how to respect, protect and enjoy the countryside:

- **Respect** other people:
 - Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
 - Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available
- **Protect** the natural environment:
 - Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
 - Keep dogs under effective control
- **Enjoy** the outdoors:
 - Plan ahead and be prepared
 - Follow advice and local signs

Ampney Crucis Forest School Rules

- No pick, no lick, be careful with that stick
Do not pick anything growing, do not put your fingers or anything else in your mouth, carry sticks with thumb on end and arm down
- Move around the outside of the base camp
- Look above, below and around for hazards
- Look after your Forest School and each other
- Look after tools and equipment
- Look after plants and animals
- Be sensible with tools and fire and follow the rules carefully
*Be careful with fire,
Be careful with tools,
Always follow our Forest School Rules!*
- Stop, tidy and return to base camp when you hear the whistle blow

Clothing Requirements

“There is no bad weather, just bad clothes”

Forest School sessions will take place in all weathers, so we ask parents and carers to ensure that their children come to school wearing appropriate clothing.

No child or adult will be permitted to take part in a Forest School session if they do not have the appropriate clothing. Children need to provide their own footwear but waterproofs are available for the infant children,

If a child has any specific sensory need around clothing this can be discussed with the Forest School Leader to ensure inclusion whilst maintaining safety.

Children wear their school uniform with a waterproof over the top. School If the weather is particularly warm in the summer, waterproofs may not be appropriate but children will be required to wear long sleeves and long trousers. Through the colder months of winter, children will need to wear additional layers to ensure they remain warm.

Forest School Clothing

- Waterproofs (over uniform)
- Sturdy footwear – trainers/wellies/boots

Hot Weather (*Summer*)

- Long sleeved top/long trousers
- Sun hat
- Sun lotion

Cold Weather (*Winter*)

- Additional warm layers
- Gloves/hat/scarf
- Warm socks



Forest School Code of Conduct

Entering and leaving the site

- Once entering the Forest School boundary, the children will go straight to base camp. We will discuss the Forest School rules for each session and will talk about showing respect to our Forest School environment.
- When leaving the site, all rubbish will be removed. When consent is given, children may take any natural resources that have been made.

Boundaries

- The boundaries will be outlined to the children in the first Forest School session. Any changes to boundary lines will be discussed with the children.
- The boundary lines will be outlined by blue rope or by fencing or natural barriers. The children will not go beyond these boundary lines.
- Any areas deemed unsafe will be roped off with blue rope and this will be highlighted to the children.

Tree climbing

- Trees which are suitable for climbing will be discussed with the children during the Forest School session.
- The children will be taught to check the tree before climbing and consider the risks of climbing the tree.

Digging

- Children can dig within the designated Forest School digging area.

Collecting natural materials

- If consent is given, children may be able to collect natural materials that are still living. Discussion with the children will be had about how much to take and the implications of collecting natural materials.
- Children are free to take natural materials that have fallen to the ground.
- If children are moving sticks, they are to put their hand on the end of the stick to ensure that it is being moved safely.
- Sticks which are longer than their arm will need to be dragged along the floor. Sticks are not to be thrown.

Eating and drinking

- 'No Pick, No Lick' will be followed. Children are not to eat anything from within the Forest School area. We will reinforce the potential impact of germs causing tummy upsets as a result of putting fingers in our mouths.
- Hands will be washed when back in the classroom.
- Water bottles can be taken onto the site and kept within the water bottle tray or within basecamp.



Sessional Procedures for Forest School

Procedures to be carried out before each session:

- A thorough safety sweep of the site will be done before each session to check for any hazards or litter. A written record will be kept of each sweep (see Appendix 1) in the Forest School Handbook file.

Weather procedures

- Check of weather conditions – if a thunder storm is forecast then it will not be advisable to carry out the Forest School session.
- Winds are considered to be high when above 34mph. The Forest School Leader will refer to Met Office and Beaufort scale to assess the viability of the session. If deemed unsafe the session may be cancelled.

Session Outline:

- Go to the toilet.
- Put on outdoor clothes and wellies (see clothing requirements).
- Children must line up and the lead adult will take a head count.
- An adult will lead the children to the site.
- Lead adult to take a head count at the boundary of the Forest School area.
- Children to walk into the site and sit at base camp.
- Discuss rules and walk boundaries, identifying any hazards.
- Provide instructions for the session, identifying resources and session focus.
- When the whistle is heard, stop what you are doing, tidy and return to base camp.

Procedures to be carried out at the end of each session:

- Check all resources are returned.
- Ensure Forest School area is tidy.
- Time for reflection given.
- Children to sit at base camp for head count.
- Walk back to school with adults.
- Remove outdoor clothing.
- Wash hands.
- Lead adult to ensure all resources are safely put away.

Suggested activities

- Natural art
- Shelter building
- Making journey sticks
- Knot skills
- Scavenger hunts
- Fire building
- Story telling
- Digging
- Bug hunting
- Flora or fauna identification
- Whittling
- Mindfulness



Health and Safety Policies

Ampney Crucis Primary School Health and Safety Policy can be found on the school website by accessing this link: <https://www.ampneycrucis.gloucs.sch.uk/school-policies/>. This sets out a clear statement of intent regarding the School's approach to the health and safety of its children, staff and visitors to the School. The following is a 10-point list of additional measures relating directly to Forest School sessions.

1. However many adults accompany Forest School sessions the person in charge is always the trained Forest School Leader.
2. The Forest School Leader has overall duty of care for the children in his/her charge, but all adults are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure children are safe.
3. All adult helpers must sign and date a form to show they have read this handbook and appropriate risk assessments and understand and agree to comply with the general operating procedures for Forest School (Appendix 3).
4. Whenever sessions are being carried out the Forest School Leader will inform staff of the group's whereabouts and for how long we intend to stay.
5. The Forest School Leader or Assistant will carry the Emergency Bag.
6. The Forest School Leader will ensure that the Emergency Bag contains:
 - Essential first aid and survival equipment;
 - A child register for those participating and;
 - The School's telephone number. Emergency contact details and full medical information is held in the school office.
7. The Forest School Leader will always carry a mobile phone.
8. In the event of an emergency, the Forest School Leader will ensure that the School contacts the emergency services.
9. The Forest School Leader will review the risk assessments before every session.



10. When tools are used the adult: child ratio will always be as set out in this document under **Risk Management of Tools and Equipment (page 16)**. The Ampney Crucis Practical Forest School Handbook also details full procedures for the safe use, staff:child ratios and storage of equipment.

Safeguarding Children and Confidentiality

Ampney Crucis Primary School Health and Safety Policy can be found on the school website by accessing this link: <https://www.ampneycrucis.gloucs.sch.uk/school-policies/>. This sets out a clear statement of intent regarding the school's approach to safeguarding and confidentiality. This will be followed at all times. This policy is based on:

- Section 175 of the Education Act 2002
- The Children Act 1989 (and 2004 amendment)

If during a session, a child discloses information that needs to be reported, the Forest School Leader will hand the session over to a member of Forest School staff and will immediately inform the Designated Safeguarding Lead. If this is not possible, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed as soon as possible.

Legislation

All policies that are relevant to Forest School can be found on the school website, which is found by accessing this link: <https://www.ampneycrucis.gloucs.sch.uk/school-policies/>

- Healthy and Safety Policy
- Equality Policy – this refers to the Equality Act 2010
- Behaviour Policy
- First Aid Policy – this refers to the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981

Travel Policy

At present Forest School sessions will be carried out on site.



Equipment List

Emergency Bag (kept in a backpack)

- Register (all emergency numbers/contact numbers and parental permission slips -appendix 4 - can be found in the school office).
- Mobile phone/means of communication
- Wet wipes
- Protective gloves
- First aid kit including plasters, bandages and wipes.
- Water bottle
- Blanket
- List of medical needs for the particular class attending the session
- Container for medical items carrying asthma inhalers and epi-pens (all clearly labelled)
- Carrier bags
- Risk assessments and safety sweep related to current session

Possible Activity Equipment

- Trowels and kneeling pads
- Magnifying glasses
- Gloves
- Buckets/Pots/Collection Bags
- Fire pit
- String
- Bow saw
- Potato Peelers
- Tarpaulins and ropes

*Any further equipment taken to the site must be deemed appropriate by Forest School Leader

Medical and Emergency Contact Details

A full list of medical needs, emergency contact details and permission slips for each child is kept in the school office. The Forest School Leader will carry, in the emergency bag, the medical needs and a register for the class currently undertaking the Forest School session.

In case of an emergency, the nearest A&E is:

- Great Western Hospital, Marlborough Road, Swindon. SN3 6BB (23min/17miles)

In case of an ambulance, the Forest School site is:

- Ampney Crucis Primary School, School Lane, Ampney Crucis, Cirencester. GL7 5SD



The local GP surgery is: The Avenue Surgery, 1 The Avenue, Cirencester GL7 1EH

Phone: 01285 653122

Emergency Procedure

The Forest School Leader is designated lead role for that session.

Medical Emergency In the event of a medical emergency, the following procedure will be followed:

- The area will be secured and made safe.
- First aid will be administered by the Forest School Leader or a member of staff who is first aid trained. Ampney Crucis Forest School Leader holds a Level 3 Paediatric First Aid qualification.
- The First Aider will stay with the casualty as they are observed and monitored.
- A member of Forest School staff will be asked to call the emergency services, giving the exact location and details of what has happened.
- A member of staff/parent helper will gather the children in an appropriate area and conduct a headcount.

In the event of a School Fire the following procedure will apply

- The Head Teacher will designate a runner (from the school building) to alert the Forest School Staff that the fire alarm has been activated.
- The emergency one continuous whistle will be sounded by the Forest School Leader and children will gather at base camp where a head count will be undertaken by the Forest School Leader before leaving the Forest School site.
- Staff will lead the children to the designated assembly point where a register will be taken.

Risk Assessment and Risk Management of the Forest School Area

Staying Safe - Forest School gives children the chance to take positive risks. This is where the benefits of taking part in a risky activity outweigh any possible harm. We take all reasonable steps to minimise risk before every session and have risk assessments in place for the site and activities. All our risk assessments are ongoing and will be changed to meet circumstances. Our risk assessments allow us to give the children the opportunity to experience risk benefits.

- If required, an individual risk assessment will be developed to ensure all children can experience risk benefit. This may include adaptations of activities, for instance two person sawing for safe inclusion.
- Practitioners need to be aware of any individual factors that may present risk such as sensory issues or epilepsy so that adaptations can be planned in advance.



There are four different types of risk assessment used related to the Forest School:

Site Assessment:

The annual risk assessment (appendix 2) of the Forest School site plus the relevant activity risk assessment is held in the emergency bag. A site assessment will be carried out every half term or when there has been a significant change in circumstances or during adverse weather conditions and the risk assessments will be updated accordingly.

Daily Assessment

A safety sweep of the site will be carried out before each session and will be held in the emergency bag (appendix 1). All previous safety sweeps will be kept in the Forest School file.

Activity Assessment

An assessment of each planned activity will be carried out before the activity takes place. This will include activities using tools or fire.

Ongoing Assessment

This is an ad-hoc, on-the-spot assessment carried out continually during each Forest School session. This might include a change in weather conditions or a change in planned activities.

Risk Management of Tools and Equipment used at Forest School

- Tools will be kept maintained and in good order
- Tools will be inspected before each session
- Children and adults will not use tools until they have been shown how to use them
- Tools will be kept in the locked toolbox or designated area when not in use
- Tools will be removed from the tool box only by the Forest School Leader
- Never run with tools
- Tools will be counted at the beginning and end of each session
- Permission to use tools can only be given by the Forest School Leader and may be withdrawn if the rules are not followed
- The designated tool working area should have sufficient space (at least two arms and a tool away from anyone else) and be clear of trip hazards. This is called the safety bubble.
- When using tools there is a designated tool area where the Forest School Leader and child will sit when using the tool
- First aiders and first aid kit will be close by



Potato Peeler:

- Must be with the Forest School Leader or kept in a locked tool box
- No glove for hand using tool, glove on the other hand
- 1:2 adult child ratio
- Only use in designated tool area
- Children will use tools in the safety bubble (see above)
- Elbows on knees
- Always have blade going away from user

Pruning Saw:

- Must be with the Forest School Leader or kept in a locked tool box
- No glove for hand using tool, glove on the other hand
- Kneeling on one knee for stability
- 1:1 adult child ratio
- Wood being sawn must be supported on a safe cutting bench

Bow Saw:

- Bow saws must have a guard on when not in use
- Supervision rates are 1:1 (or 1:2 if working in pairs)
- Bow saws are to cut anything larger than a 2 pence piece
- A glove must be worn on the helping hand
- Wood being sawn must be supported on a safe cutting bench
- Smaller children can work in pairs, adopted a “to me, to you” sawing action

Lopper:

- Supervision rates are 1:2
- Loppers are used to cut anything smaller than a 2 pence piece
- Loppers are used with bare hands

Knives:

- Knives must have a sheath on when not in use
- Knives must be kept in a locked tool box or in the designated tool area
- Supervision rates are 1:1
- Knives are always used on the outside of the body and away from the body
- A glove must be used on the helping hand

Mallet:

- Must be kept in the locked tool box or in the designated tool area
- No glove needed
- 1:1 supervision for infant children



Fire:

- The fire will be contained within the fire pit
- There will be a safe distance from the fire area to the seating area
- The seating circle will have a clear entrance and exit
- Walking within the seating circle is not permitted
- Water will be available to put out the fire
- A fire glove will be nearby
- The fire will never be left unattended
- A burns kit will be available
- A fire blanket will be nearby

Extinguishing the fire:

- All fires must be extinguished at the end of the session
- Whenever possible, all fuels should be burnt off to ash
- The fire must be doused with water and stirred until cool
- The ash should be scattered around the woodland to decompose

Kelly Kettles:

- The Kelly kettle must be placed on flat, clear ground
- The Kelly kettle will be removed from the fire pan by the Forest School Leader
- The Kelly kettle must never be heated with the cork in

Designated Person Responsibility for each Session

Forest School Leader

- To ensure the safety of children and adults as they travel to and from the Forest School site
- Responsible for making the decision of whether the weather is too extreme for a Forest School session to take place
- Ensure the safety of children and adults whilst at the site
- Ensure that the children are in the correct clothing
- Provide clear guidance and expectations to children and adults
- Carry out a safety sweep prior to each session
- Risk assess the site every half term
- Carry and take a first aid kit into the Forest School for each session
- Carry and take an emergency bag into the Forest School for each session
- Maintain tools and accessories needed for activities
- In the event of an emergency, the Forest School Leader will ensure that the emergency services are contacted



Forest School Support Staff

- Ensure the safety of children and adults as they travel to the Forest School site
- Ensure that the children are in the correct clothing
- Partake in children's activities
- Ask open ended questions rather than directing them to activities
- Record observations
- Must sign and date a form to show that they have read and understood the Forest School handbook and risk assessments prior to the session

Parent Helper

- Assist with carrying resources to and from the Forest School site
- Partake in children's activities
- Ask open ended questions rather than directing them to activities
- Record observations
- Must sign and date a form to show that they have read and understood the Forest School handbook and risk assessments prior to the session

Toileting Considerations

- Children should be encouraged to use the toilet before the session starts
- If a child needs the toilet during the session, they must inform an adult and return to use the school toilet

Insurance Requirements and Documentation

Please refer to the insurance documentation held in the school office.

Declaration of review

Written: October 2021

Signed:

Due to be reviewed and updated: October 2022

Signed:



Appendix 1

Safety Sweep

Date:	Time:	Weather:
Name of Forest School Leader:		

Checklist:	Yes/No	Comments:
Fallen branches		
Low branches		
Protruding thorns		
Brambles/nettles		
Slippery areas		
Broken glass/needles		
Vandalism/intruders		
Weather Effects		
Boundary line/fence		
Standing water		
Base camp		
Tool area roped off		
Emergency back pack		
Equipment ready		
Spare clothes		

Other Hazards identified:

Action Taken:

Appendix 2 Risk Assessment

Forest School Site Risk Assessment (example)

Venue:	Ampney Crucis Primary School
Assessment carried out by:	Alison Hopkins
Signature:	
Date:	(This assessment is reviewed annually unless accident/incident occurs requiring immediate review)

Please note Ampney Crucis School will always follow adverse weather warnings and cancel with as much notice as possible. We operate under a dynamic risk assessing process which is the continuous process of identifying hazards, assessing risk, taking action to eliminate or reduce risk, monitoring and reviewing, in the rapidly changing environment of the natural world.

Description of site

Forest School site on school grounds. Vehicle access via gate. Bordered by fence, cotswold stone wall. camp. Seating area in base camp. One fire pit. Pond covered with metal grill. Two areas divided by hedging with central access. Small open grass area. Gravel path.

Risks on site

Hazard	Level of risk	Action proposed	New level of risk	Who will take the action? When?	Risk Benefit
Branches at eye level – poking in eye (particularly up steep bank)	Medium	Warn children. Add a flag to the branch(es) to make more visible if deemed necessary	Low	FS leader, on the day	Confidence, motivation and concentration, physical skills
Nettles/Brambles – stinging/cuts/skin irritant	Low	Children to wear long trousers and long sleeves. Make children aware. Clear site as appropriate when it gets overgrown. Remind and reinforce FS rules.	Low	FS leader, prior to visit / circle time	Physical skills – navigation, knowledge and understanding, trust, respect
Low wall – children could climb over	Medium	Warn children of danger. Adult in both areas of FS at all times to watch. Plant trees along wall to form barrier.	Low	FS leader & support on day Trees planted on delivery from Woodland Trust	Independence, understanding, respect, trust

Appendix 3 Signature List

Name	Handbook Read	Date

Appendix 4 Parental Consent Form

Ampney Crucis Forest School Parental Consent Form

I give permission for my child..... to
 attend Ampney Crucis Forest School sessions which will be led by
 a fully qualified Forest School Leader

I understand that my child will work in groups containing 1 adult to 6 children
 for 4/5 year olds, 1 adult to 10 children for 6/7 year olds, 1 adult to 16 children
 for 8-11 year olds (these ratios maybe reduced or expanded in response to
 planned activities)

I understand that my child will, at an appropriate level, have opportunities to
 work with hand tools and small fires through the course of their Forest School
 work

I agree that my child’s medical and emergency contact details are up to date
 and are stored in the office

I agree to my child to be photographed for educational and website purposes

I agree to supply clothes for my child to wear at Forest School sessions (depending on
 weather and seasonal conditions):
 Waterproof suit (if available)
 Waterproof coat
 Wellies or walking boots
 Sun hat and sun cream for hot days
 Long sleeved top and long trousers for hot days
 Woolly hat, scarf and gloves for cold days
 Additional layers for warmth for cold days

Signed:

Date:

Please return this form to the school office in time for your child to take part in Forest School sessions. If you have any queries or concerns, please contact the office or your child’s teacher.