



With friendship, trust and kindness, we fly!

The Swallowtail Federation of Church Schools

Forest School Handbook



Written by J. Wones, FS Level 3 Trained

March 2016, (reviewed and updated March 2017) Signed: J. Wones

April 2020 - Reviewed and updated by Lucy Amis. Signed:
(FS Level 3 Trained) linking directly to Catfield Primary School.

Sept 2022 reviewed and updated linking directly to Hickling Infant School. Signed: S. Cushion

April 2024- Reviewed and updated by Allison Pell (FS Level 3 Trained). Signed:
Linking directly to Sutton Infant Academy

Review date: April 2025

Contents

<p>Vision, Introduction and Ethos – 3 Role of the adult – 4 Code of conduct – 4 Health and Safety – 5 Extreme Weather & Cancellation – 6 Food, Drink and Hygiene – 7 Toileting – 7 Equipment (including for emergencies) – 7 First Aid Training Declarations – 8 Policies and Procedures – 9 Personal Protective Equipment – 10 Emergency Procedures – 11 Equal Opportunities – 12 Safeguarding – 12 Confidentiality – 12 Behaviour – 13 Use of Photographs – 14 Communication – 14 Daily Operating Procedures – 14 Signature Page - 15</p>	<p><u>Appendices</u> Parental Consent Form – 16 Risk Assessment for Sutton Site – 18 Risk Assessment for Hickling Site – 22 Risk Assessment for Catfield Site – 26 Fire Risk Assessment – 31 Tool Use Risk Assessment – 33 Foraging Risk Assessment – 35 Pond Dipping Risk Assessment – 36</p>
---	---

Green text only applies to Catfield. Blue text only applies to Hickling. Red text only applies to Sutton.

Swallowtail Federation's Forest School Vision

By providing Forest School at Swallowtail, we offer the opportunity to enhance learning, increase self-esteem, independence, resilience and risk-taking in our children through inquisitive play and choice.

Introduction and Ethos

*Forest School is based more on the process of learning than it is on the content
– more on the 'how' than the 'what.'*

Forest School Training Company

Key Features of Forest Schools



Image taken from mumsnet website

The idea originates from Scandinavia where it was found that children who had been to a Forest

School during their pre-school years, were confident, had strong communication skills and well developed social skills. These then set the platform for academic success.

Role of the Adult

The staff at Forest School, by observing and working with the children when appropriate, will allow them to explore their own preferred learning styles while developing a lifelong love and understanding of the natural environment. Through carefully planned activities, children from all year groups can take part, enabling them to excel in all areas of their personal, academic and spiritual development.

All adults at Forest School sessions will:

- listen and show empathy
- observe learning
- join in with pupil's activities/play when invited to
- model appropriate skills and behaviour
- ensure the health and safety of pupils and follow safeguarding procedures
- * use non-judgemental language

Code of Conduct

Entering and exploring the site	Children are taught to explore and play with thought and care for the environment. Children are asked to give thanks to the site when leaving.
Boundaries	Children are told and/or shown the boundaries of the site. Children are familiar with games and calls such as '1, 2, 3 where are you?' and '1, 2, 3 come to me.'
Picking up and playing with sticks	Children can carry sticks shorter than their arm's length but make sure they think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks can be dragged or carried with a child at both ends. Sticks must not be thrown, nor should children be allowed to pull them from living trees.
Picking up and playing with stones	Children may pick up stones to transport them, but they must never be thrown.
Digging	Children may carefully move soil to look for insects and their habitats using lolly pop sticks, fingers or small sticks found within the forest, but deep holes should not be made other than where specifically directed in the mud kitchen area; other than where specifically directed in low-traffic areas and for a specific purpose; other than where specifically directed in low-traffic areas and for a specific purpose
Using ropes and string	Children may use rope and string to tie or make things, such as mobiles or to put up a shelter. Adult will model appropriate knots and support the children as necessary. Children will be supervised when using ropes and must always ask an adults permission before taking one from the storage shed.

Fire	Wood maybe collected from the site for fire lighting, but only what is needed. Fires will be created in a fire square and never left unattended. See fire risk assessment for more details.
------	---

4

Using tools	Tools are used for a purpose and all trained adults should model their correct use, storage and transportation at all times. Tools are used well away from other active children and only walking is permitted when carrying them. Gloves are never worn when using tools. See tool use policy and risk assessment for more details. Tools will be used in a work-zone that is identifiable to students using a roped off area.
Eating and drinking	Nil by mouth policy for anything found in the Forest. Children must be reminded not to put their fingers or hands in their mouths or noses. When having drinks and snacks children will use soap & water to clean their hands or antibacterial hand gel before consumption. Clean, soapy water will be kept in the bird-hide until ready for use at snack time, to maintain cleanliness.

Health and Safety

Health and safety during Forest School is important in ensuring children are kept safe but still allowed to take part in exciting activities, including tool use and tree climbing. Within Forest School, we complete risk assessments to ensure all possible risks are thought about and managed, but we also teach children how to manage their own risks too. Exposing children to risks allows them to learn and develop strategies for overcoming these in the future.

“They won’t understand about risk if they’re wrapped in cotton wool. Risk itself won’t damage children, but ill-managed and overprotective actions could!” (Forest School Association, 2020)

The following points are additional to our Health and Safety policy and procedures (available on our website) that directly relate 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.
4. The Forest School Leader or Assistant will always carry a First Aid kit and an emergency bag containing a mobile phone (for emergency use only). The Forest School Leader is responsible for adding to this bag as well as checking dates. First aid administered will be documented in class files after each session by the Leader.
5. When tools are used the adult: child ratio will always be 1:1, until the Forest School Leader is comfortable that they are confident using tools and the ratio can be 1:2.

Forest Schools aims to encourage risk management strategies that will ensure that young children start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others. Through appropriate risk and challenge, children can build their confidence and solve problems and it is the Forest School Leader

who is responsible for ensuring that there are no unacceptable levels of risk. To do this we:

- Look for potential hazards and decide who might be at harm.
- Think about how harm may occur and the worst outcome that we could face.

5

- Evaluate the current level of risk and decide on a course of action that will be put in place to minimise the potential risk.
- Re-evaluate the level of risk once our course of action has been put in place.
- Create a risk assessment and collate them in the Forest School file.
- Inform all adults that accompany the group and require them to sign each relevant risk assessment to show that they have read and understood them
- Regularly monitor and review each risk assessment.

Through effective risk assessment and management, the Forest School leader is responsible for ensuring that pupils are not exposed to unacceptable levels of risk. Risk assessments in place are:

- site risk assessment
- activity risk assessments (e.g. for tool use, fire)
- any pupil specific risk assessment (e.g. behaviour, medical)
- a daily site check before each session

As well as risk assessments, there will be appropriate staff to pupil ratios for each session, taking into account activities planned for, children's age and the needs of individuals. Minimum adult to pupil ratios will be as follows: Pre-school & Reception 1:6, Years 1 & 2 1:8, Years 3 & 4 1:10 and Years 5 & 6 1:12.

Extreme Weather - Cancellation

Forest School sessions will not take place:

*in high winds (maximum of 7 on the Beaufort Scale = 38mph)

*electrical storms

* if the Forest School Leader assesses the needs of the group with regards to excessive rain, cold or heat based on the age group, appropriateness of clothing they were sent to school with & available resources at the school. The Leader will assess as to whether the session requires alternative arrangements to be made for the overall comfort and enjoyment of the group.

*if after having done the daily site check there is something that prohibits the pupils from accessing the site.

* The session will also be cancelled if the Forest School Leader is unable to take the session

For these reasons, the session will be cancelled, children will remain in lessons in school and Senior Management will be notified.

Food and Drink

Pupils will have access to drinking water by bringing their water bottles to the fire circle area.

*If children need to refill bottles, they will be directed inside.

*If children need to refill bottles, they will be directed inside.

*If children need to refill bottles, they will be directed inside

If meals or snacks are offered, pupils will wash and sanitise hands before eating and all food waste/rubbish will be taken back to school after the session.

Children may be involved in a session where the Forest School Leader has planned to cook on the fire. Where this is the case, the Forest School Leader will ensure hygiene and cleanliness standards are met (e.g. utensils, cups etc are sterilised) and the fire policy is followed. They will also be aware of any food allergies of both children and staff. All staff working with food will hold a level 1 food hygiene certificate. If a full meal is prepared, then staff will hold a level 2 food hygiene certificate.

Toileting

As the sessions are taking place on a school site, the children will walk back to use the school toilets if needed.

*Children in Years 1 – 6 are able to go to the toilet without the need for supervision unless SEND or Behaviour plans are in place for an individual.

*Children in Pre-School and Reception who require support toileting and removing waterproofs support will be accompanied by an adult.

Higher adult to child ratios are implemented where this is the case to ensure that even when an adult is required to leave the outdoor site for toileting, the session has the correct ratio of adults to children.

Equipment (including for emergencies)

Equipment for Forest School sessions will depend on the activities being undertaken, but may include:

- shelter building materials – tarps, ropes, guy lines, large branches
- bug hunting pots, spoons, ID guides, camera/ipad (photograph finds)
- mirrors, magnifying glasses, binoculars
- art and sculpture materials - clay, mortar and pestle, wool, scissors
- puppets to develop and tell stories, nature related stories, non-fiction texts
- fire lighting kit
- tools

In addition to tools suited to the planned for activities, the Forest School leader will always take an emergency bag with them. The contents of the emergency bag will vary depending on the time of year, weather conditions, the site being used and the planned for activities according to the relevant risk assessments and daily risk assessment.

Essential equipment	Possible additional equipment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First Aid Kit (appropriate for no. people out during sessions and remoteness of site, kit needs to be regularly checked and restocked as necessary) ● Emergency procedures (signed) ● Medical information and emergency contact details of all in group (updated termly) ● Appropriate risk assessments (updated annually or after related incident/near miss. A daily site risk assessment is carried out and signed by all adults working on the forest school site at the start of each session) ● Means of communication (red card, phone) ● Clean water ● Whistle ● Medication for individuals (in a secure box or grab bag) ● Recording forms for safeguarding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fire kit and burns kit ● Eye wash ● Bivi bag or survival blanket ● Thermos of hot water ● Chocolate/sugary food ● Torch ● Welfare Kit <p>(containing items such as: wet wipes, hand gel, nappy sacks and toileting items, trowel, sun cream)</p>

First Aid Training Declarations of Current Staff

The Forest School Leader, Miss Amis, has undertaken a 16 hour First Aid Course for Forest School. (October 2022, to be refreshed October 2025)

The Forest School Leader, Allison Pell, has undertaken a 16 hour First Aid Course for Forest School, including Paediatric First Aid (March 2024, to be refreshed in March 2027).

Policy and Procedures

Tools

Tools may be used at Forest Schools if learners wish to develop new skills, but will always be done safely. There is an assessment undertaken by the Forest School Leader detailing the benefits and risks of using tools at the end of this handbook. We believe that by giving children the chance to use risky equipment during Forest School, it will help to build their confidence, self-esteem, creativity, strength, listening and instruction-following skills.

“Tool play is so important for children, and develops many key skills and abilities. Using tools in forest school allows children to experience danger in the form of risky equipment but in a safe environment. It helps them to manage risk, and become completely involved in the activity that they are doing” (Early Impact Learning, 2020)

The Forest School leader will ensure that:

- *tools are safe to use (cleaned, maintained, replaced when necessary)
- *gloves are never worn when using them, long hair is tied back and loose clothing (e.g. scarves) removed
- *participants will never help themselves to any tool and when a tool is in use it will always be on a 1:1 or 1:2 basis with the Forest School Leader or other trained adults in a designated area, away from other learners/activities (minimum of an arm’s length away)
- *all tools are stored in a locked box or cupboard and are transported safely

Fire

A fire can act as a focal point for a group at Forest School, but also can provide heat and warmth. In addition, having a fire during Forest School can be beneficial to children’s wellbeing. Through having these experiences children may develop increased self-esteem and confidence when taking part in activities connected to the fire. There is an assessment undertaken by the Forest School Leader detailing the benefits and risks of fire lighting at the end of this handbook. Prior to having a fire, all learners are included in creating guidelines for behaviour around the fire and demonstrate that they understand these guidelines. All adults and children are then responsible for ensuring these guidelines are followed.

The Forest School leader will ensure that:

- *a fire circle is established away from overhanging trees and is attended at all times
- *participants understand not to walk through the fire circle or run near it
- *hair is tied back and nobody around the fire has any loose clothing (e.g. scarf)
- *a fire blanket, plunge bucket, fire glove and full watering can is placed nearby
- *only dead wood is used and only enough wood is used as needed
- *any fire is fully extinguished at the end of a session

Foraging

Forest school sessions may include foraging, for example of blackberries or nettles. The Forest School Leader will take a 'risk benefit' approach and ensure that:

- *participants are offered gloves to avoid stings
- *allergy information for the group has been checked prior to the session
- *participants understand that hands should not be put in or near or mouth during Forest School sessions
- *participants understand that nothing is to be eaten until the 'find' has been identified with an adult using identification books and the Forest School Leader is confident it is edible.

Play

In Forest School, we believe that play is vital to the healthy learning and development of all children. In sessions, children are given the freedom of choice to move their bodies in lots of challenging and fun ways that may be new to them (Greenland). They have the opportunity to be resourceful, resilient and reflective to build community (Claxton). The key focus is allowing the children to learn through discovery and interaction with their environment (Bruner) to contrast with the heavily prescriptive, supported learning they experience in modern schooling and society.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The Forest School Leader will assess each activity and decide on whether any PPE is required. If it is, appropriate PPE will be offered in the correct sizes and in good working order.

PPE includes the appropriate clothing for the weather conditions, for example woolly hat/sun hat, thick socks, extra jumper. All participants including adults are encouraged to keep their skin covered with long trousers and sleeves to avoid sting and possibility of ticks (all adults and parents are provided with a leaflet informing them about ticks). All participants must have sensible footwear, either wellington boots, walking boots or sturdy trainers. Waterproof trousers and coats are provided by the school, but the children are welcome to bring their own waterproof coat as an extra layer in cold weather.

Insurance

The Swallowtail Federation insurance policy is held by Head Teacher Mrs. Natalie Butcher.

Emergency Procedures

At present, all Forest School sessions will be held on the school site and some of these procedures will only be needed if a group is taken off-site.

First aid

1. Ensure the rest of the group is safe – where appropriate delegate responsibility.
2. If appropriate, remove the danger or people from the danger.
3. Qualified First Aider called to check A-B-C, administer First Aid and if necessary use 'red card' carried with first aid bag/displayed in forest school shed or a mobile phone to get further assistance from school secretary. School secretary to respond to card by bringing a phone to the Forest School Leader to call for further assistance (999) if required.
4. Have medical form details available in emergency bag and call parent/guardian as appropriate.
5. Record full details through school incident procedure and within Forest School First Aid folder.
6. Follow up to parents as usual.

If the first aid is for 'walking wounded', then parents would be called in in the first instance to take the child to the hospital. If unavailable or not within a short distance, then two members of first aid trained staff will take the child. The rest of the group will be head-counted and taken back to school by a Forest School assistant.

If an adult is injured, the FS Leader would administer first aid as needed and assess whether further medical help is required. In the event that the Leader is injured, another first aid trained staff member would administer first aid.

Lost or Missing Child

1. As soon as a child is found to be missing, man an immediate search of the vicinity and use "1, 2, 3 where are you?" procedure. Continue immediate search for 15 minutes.
2. Assemble the rest of the children and ensure they are safe.
3. If child is not found during immediate search and as we are on site, adult is to send 'red card' into School/use mobile phone to alert and then school calls police as well as the parent/guardian.
4. Follow school critical incident procedure.

Serious Accident

1. Follow First Aid procedure.
2. Stay with casualty, but ensure rest of group is removed from the situation and is safe.
3. School to call parent/guardian or next of kin ASAP.
4. Follow school critical incident procedure – See RED BOOK kept in school office.
5. Gain advice on follow up from police

Irregular occurrence, uninvited person or stranger

1. The intruder will be challenged and asked to leave politely.
2. If a child is involved, then police should be called and the child/children involved should be removed from the situation and made the feel safe. In an emergency, an adult will organise a calm group activity such as story time or yoga.
3. Follow school's critical incident procedure.
4. Parents/guardians should be briefed by FS Leader ASAP.
5. Inform Safeguarding Officer and gain advice.

Poor Weather Conditions

1. Based on the Beaufort Scale, FS sessions will not take place if winds exceed a force of 7 (38mph) on the scale, indicating that tree branches or whole trees moving, wind whistling past wires and feeling resistance when walking against the wind. If group leader feels uncomfortable, take emergency 'safe' route out of the site ASAP.
2. Use indoor areas or shelter outdoors (away from the trees) as an alternative.

Behaviour Problems

1. Trained members of staff to use de-escalation strategies.
2. Remove other children from area of risk, if deemed necessary.
3. If necessary, Trained members of school staff to use appropriate restraint techniques, as per school policy on restraint.
4. Debrief child after calm-down period.
5. Log incident and inform parents/guardians.

Equal opportunities

Swallowtail is committed to the idea that there should be equal opportunity for all. Our policies help to ensure that we promote the individuality of all our children, irrespective of ethnicity, attainment, age, disability, gender or background. At Forest School, we all learn alongside each other and from one another.

Children with medical needs or disabilities will be helped so they can take as full a part as everyone else in Forest School sessions. Those with challenging behaviour are risk-assessed and may need one to-one supervision, but their entitlement remains the same.

Although we encourage children to take responsibility for their own clothing and appropriate footwear for sessions, we do have a stock of spare wellies and waterproof trousers for children to borrow.

Safeguarding

Our full safeguarding policy can be found on our website.

'The child's welfare is of paramount importance. Our school will establish and maintain an ethos where pupils feel secure, are encouraged to talk, are listened to and are safe.'

All staff complete safeguarding training at the beginning of each school year and any staff beginning mid-way through the year complete it as part of their induction. All staff are required to have a DBS check and any volunteers helping regularly at Forest School sessions will also be required to undertake a full check. Any volunteer or member of staff who finds that a child is telling them something which concerns them should follow these simple steps:

- Listen, but ask NO leading questions. Remember that you must not promise to 'keep a secret'. The general rule is that adults should make it clear that there are limits to confidentiality at the beginning of the conversation.
- If the child is very upset and seeking comfort adults may provide this comfort in an appropriate way following our Federation policies. For example, a side hug using one arm can be used.
- If a disclosure is made, the adult must fill in a recording form (carried in the emergency bag.) If additional adult help is required to cover whilst the form is filled in, the 'red spot card' can be sent into school. The form must be passed to a Designated Safeguarding Lead: Head Teacher, Natalie Butcher; [Lucy Amis](#), [Abby Blake](#), or [Sabrina Holmes](#) as soon as possible. This procedure is still the case if the disclosure is about a member of staff.

Confidentiality

Adults working within Forest School sessions must appreciate that conversations had within the setting are confidential. If an adult finds a child is telling them something that concerns them, the safeguarding

procedure outlined above must be followed.

In addition to this:

- All parental consent forms and medical information are kept with the Forest School Leader during sessions and are otherwise kept securely in school.
- All adults supporting Forest School sessions will be made aware that discussions with participants at Forest School are confidential

12

Behaviour

At Swallowtail, we aim to promote an environment where everyone feels happy, safe and secure. The expectations during Forest School sessions of behaviour remain the same:

- Show care and consideration for others and the environment
- Keep yourself and others safe
- Listen when other people are talking/giving instructions
- Be kind and co-operate with others

Forest School may present children with situations and feelings and emotions that they haven't experienced before, or feelings and emotions that they are unsure of how to manage. This may mean that children could present some challenging behaviours during Forest School sessions. Adults during Forest School sessions will act as facilitators and respect children's wishes and feelings. They will recognise that behaviour communicates a problem and will work with children to solve it. Rosenberg recommends that we respond with non-violent communication. This includes 4 steps: Observations, Feelings, Needs and Requests.

Observations: Make neutral statements of what you actually/objectively see or hear.

'I can see Tom is using the hammer you need...'

Feelings: Express how you feel in relation to what you have observed.

'I can see it is making you feel frustrated.'

Needs: Express what the child needs/what you need in relation to your feelings.

'...because you are not able to finish your picture.'

Requests: Make a request of the actions you'd like.

'Would you like to help me get some wood for the fire and finish your picture when the hammer is free?'

Children will also be encouraged to communicate in this way, allowing us to completely understand their feelings and needs at that time in a calm and understanding way.

Forest School sessions provide an environment where children are not judged or compared and therefore not overtly praised, as this can create competition and comparison between children resulting in negative feelings. In Forest School we aim to build children's self-esteem and confidence and therefore instead of using phrases such as 'good girl' or 'I like your leaf printing' we will comment on the process the child took and choose to express our observations: 'it is interesting that the small green leaves printed better than the bigger ones'.

If the above strategies for non-violent communication and calming techniques are not successful, staff are trained in de-escalation strategies to deal with challenging behaviour and the school's behaviour policy will be followed. Individual children may have a behaviour plan that is individual to them and their needs. All staff need to be aware and have read and understood these before Forest

School sessions begin. It is the responsibility of the Forest School Leader to check this has happened. If the Forest School Leader deems it necessary, an individual risk assessment may be created for individual children for Forest School sessions.

In our Federation, children know that bullying is wrong and that it is unacceptable behaviour. Staff and adults will deal with incidents of bullying according to our policy (on our website).

13

Use of photographs

Parents/carers complete consent forms for use of photographs and digital media prior to sessions. This includes use of photographs on our school blogs and twitter pages. Adults accompanying the group are made aware of any pupil who may not be photographed.

Communication

The Forest School leader is responsible for communicating with stakeholder groups regarding Forest School on the site. This will include gaining permission from parents and informing them of what Forest School is and the type of activities their children will be taking part in. This information will be shared via this handbook, our school website, letters/emails sent home as well as our social media updates. Informing Forest School support staff of risk assessments, daily operating and expectations during sessions. This will be completed via reading of this handbook, planning and face to face meetings prior to each Forest School session. It will also include keeping governors, maintenance staff and other school staff informed about the operating, risk assessments and expectations during sessions, completed via emails and school staff meetings.

Daily Operating Procedure

Before the session

- Forest School leader to check all relevant risk assessments are in place, including daily site check and have been read by all adults supporting the sessions.
- Forest School leader will prepare and share session plan with all adults supporting the session.
- The Forest School Leader will check that enough adults are present for the session to go ahead and that the weather conditions allow it to take place.
- The equipment required for the session will be assembled, checked and prepared.
- All children will be registered by their class teacher. They will then get changed for Forest School, go to the toilet and apply sun cream when necessary.

During the session

- Head counts
- Ongoing risk assessments to take account of weather, safety and behaviour.

After the session

- A headcount will be undertaken at the end of the session.
- All equipment returned to storage shed and storage shed locked. Tool check – count and store in a locked

Appendix 1

Forest Schools Consent Form

Name of Child.....

Medical Information

Medical information will be obtained from the medical information you provided at the start of the school year. However, if there is further information that you would like to make us aware of that might affect your child’s involvement in Forest Schools (e.g. phobias, complaints) or any other allergies (e.g. material, food, medicine, pollen, dust, etc.)

Please write below:

Please give the date of your child’s last Tetanus Jab if known ___ / ___ / ___

Consent

As a parent/guardian of the child named above, I agree to my child participating in the Forest School activities taking place. I understand that activities may include, walking, craftwork, pond dipping, tool use, fire lighting skills, den building, campfire cooking and other related activities. I give my consent for the equipment and tools necessary for the activity to be used by the young person mentioned above. I understand that a strict code of

practice for working with children will be followed and all activities will be risk assessed and I will be informed of any extra details of activities that are out of the ordinary pattern. I have read the information leaflet about ticks and agree to check my child after each forest school session.

Photos

I give permission for my child to be photographed/videoed whilst at Forest School and for these images to be used on the school website and in school publications.

Yes No

Signed: Date:

Name (in print):

Relationship to child:

I give permission for my child to have school sun cream applied during Forest School sessions when deemed necessary.

Yes No

Signed: Date:

Name (in print):

Relationship to child:

