

Ellingham C of E Primary School

Forest School Handbook



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Introduction

As a church school, it is fitting that our Forest School space is in the church yard at St Maurice's Church in Ellingham village, just a short walk from the school. We visit every week and in all weathers. In our 'other classroom', there are no tests or marks, we make our own plans and carry them out to the best of our abilities. We are challenged, by the weather, the terrain, our own ambition and the world around us and we are learning important lessons about our place in this magical world of tree trunks and leaf mulch, minibeasts and funghi. We learn to look carefully at the tiny details of nature and to look wide to the big skies and the huge trees. As we love and care for this tiny pocket of God's world, we are preparing to take on the stewardship of our planet for generations to come.

Our Forest School is managed by Mrs Swinbank, with Ms Foster as her assistant and Gabby, our wonderful volunteer. We visit on Thursday mornings and stay all morning, taking our snacks and a hot drink. We provide children with all outdoor clothing and wellies, but ask that you apply high factor sun cream on hot days and that children always come to school in long trousers as there are nettles

A progression of Forest School activities for all age groups

	EYFS	KS1	Lower KS2	Upper KS2
Den Building	Making a mouse house / dinosaur den from natural materials	Making a group den with ropes and tarpaulin.	Individual dens, tying knots. Choosing materials for a natural den.	Individual dens using natural materials or tarpaulin. Testing in rain/water.
Fire Lighting	Making doughnut firelighters from newspaper. Cooking on a fire and moving around a fire safely.	Selecting dry materials to add to fire. Making a spark with flint and steel.	Using tinder to make a flame, adding to main fire.	Individual fires. Siting and clearing a group fire safely.
Tools	Using a peeler to sharpen a green stick. Learning safe tool routines.	Using a knife to peel bark. 1:1 supervision with a cutting block	Making a fire stick. Using a folding saw to cut small branches 1:1 supervision.	Splicing using a bill hook with 1:1 supervision. Whittling a kazoo/mallet.
Ecology	Learning names of common trees, flowers, animals and birds. Investigating and creating habitats for wildlife.	Learning characteristics of deciduous and coniferous woodland and looking at adaptation of wild life to habitat.	Investigating ID charts for trees and plants. Looking at life cycles and human impact on the environment.	Native and non-native species, pond/stream life. Relationship between different plants and animals. Food chains.
Arts and Crafts	Natural collage, making paints, building simple structures.	Making 3D maps and pictures, outdoor sculpture, tying grasses / sticks.	Knots and lashing; picture frames, weaving, mobiles, shapes.	Whittling, trail signs, making woodland creatures, natural dyes.

Benefits of a Forest School Experience

Forest School benefits children in a many ways, and is a creative and exciting way to learn about the world around us.

- Pupils develop many of the 'characteristics of effective learning' in a Forest School environment. They are stimulated to ask questions, motivated to work hard and persevere at difficult tasks, and excited to explore and make observations about the world around them.
- Forest School provides the perfect environment to study ecology, minibeasts, habitats, food chains, flora and fauna, weather and climate and environmental issues, as required in the National curriculum and EYFS curriculum.
- Forest School equips pupils to be an effective member of the school and wider community, promoting team work, respect for the environment, and a sense of belonging.
- Forest School provides pupils with experiences of awe and wonder and spiritual development, as they engage with the natural environment and learn to love God's beautiful world.
- Children are encouraged to be stewards of their small piece of the world, preparing them to be stewards of their planet as they grow and become independent world citizens.

Safety at Forest School

When we are out in the woods we take safety very seriously and put lots of measures in place to ensure that your children can play and explore with the correct supervision and precautions. However we also want your children to learn to take risks and learn to assess risk for themselves. If we protect children from all risk they can grow up anxious about the outside world, or be unaware of how to keep themselves safe.

For this reason we allow your children to explore freely around our site and to join in with tree climbing, camp fires and using tools as well as finding their own challenges. We find that children do not take on inappropriate risk when left to choose for themselves, but we always supervise every child involved in a potentially risky activity and have 1:1 supervision using tools and around fire.

With safety in mind, here are the policies we adhere to when out at Forest School. If there are any incidents at Forest School, school is immediately informed and they are dealt with in line with our current policies and procedures. Mobile phones and a full outdoor first aid kit are carried at all times and all staff are fully first aid trained. All our health and safety policies can be viewed in full on our school website.

Our Safeguarding Procedures

- *Mrs Swinbank as the qualified Forest leader will be present on site AT ALL TIMES.*
- *ALL Staff and volunteers will have a current DBS check*

These are the recommended ratios for Forest School,, which we adhere to:

Foundation Stage 1 Adults :4 Children

Key stage 1 1 Adult : 6 Children

Key stage 2 1 Adult : 10 Children

- *A minimum of 2 staff will be on site at any time.*
- *Any safeguarding concerns will be taken directly to the safe guarding officer; Mrs Lakey or Mrs Stapleton.*

In the event of a serious accident the following procedure would take place.

The Forest School assistant would:

- *Secure the area*
- *Make the group safe, keep them calm, do a head count*
- *Continue to reassure and do circle time activity*
- *If necessary ring school for assistance and request they contact next of kin.*
- *Once help arrives escort the group back to school*

The Forest School leader would :

- *Carry out first aid and monitor casualty THROUGHOUT.*
- *If required, call emergency services and give location and details of the injury/casualty/medical history.*
- *Send Forest School volunteer to road side to await ambulance.*
- *Insulate casualty and if necessary provide shelter.*

COMPLETE AN INCIDENT FORM when you return to school.

We also follow strict hygiene routines to keep your children safe. We use wipes and hand gel and have access to running water at the church for hand washing before snack time. We also now have the use of a composting toilet, which is clean and well stocked. We always carry several changes of clothing as well as extra warm layers in winter and sun cream/hats in summer.

Our Forest School Agreement

At Forest School, we all agree to the same commitment:

“Look after yourself, look after each other and look after the world around you.”

This agreement covers all our activities, is simple to remember and makes the staff and children think carefully about the way they speak and act in the woods. We aim to encourage and support each other, rather than criticize or complain, and we are all still learning on our forest school journey.

A Typical Forest School Session

A typical morning at forest school always begins with good preparation; we visit the loo, discuss what clothing we need to wear and check we all have the correct gear and equipment. For our youngest children this is a real challenge and they quickly learn to be independent dressing and undressing.



Our walk to the woods is always full of surprises; highland cows, Jacob sheep, knee

deep mud, beautiful moths and butterflies, tiny flowers or a baby toad! It is also the time when children share their news, sing spontaneous and crazy songs, build up real stamina.....it can be a long walk for little legs.....and let off some steam.



Once in the churchyard we usually spend some time looking at the breathtaking flowers that grow along the path. Spring sees carpets of



snowdrops, daffodils, primroses, and in summer violets and buttercups, cowslips and dandelion clocks are everywhere. We walk in quietly and the children are allowed to choose our route around the churchyard.

When we get to our special space we are ready for our snack, hot chocolate, fruit and biscuits to keep us going. We then move down into the deeper woodland where we have constructed our own den and have a number of safe climbing trees.

Every week we have a challenge which is optional and can be adapted for all ages. We also have free time to work together on our own plans, to climb and crawl and plan and chat. The walk back to school is quieter and more reflective as we talk about the things we have seen and done, and wonder what is for lunch. Back at school we look after our suits and wellies, washing them and putting them to dry before washing our hands well before lunch.



We hope this has given you an insight into Forest School at Ellingham. If you have any questions please contact Mrs Swinbank at school by telephone 01665589233 or email karen.swinbank@ellingham.northumberland.sch.uk.

