



St. Martin's Church of England Primary School
Forest School Handbook for Parents

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Forest School promotes:

Self-esteem
and self-
confidence

Awe and
wonder

Learning in all
curriculum
areas

Respect and
knowledge of
the world
around us



Introduction

The purpose of this information booklet is to give an insight into how St. Martin's will deliver its Forest School sessions and to share our enthusiasm about it. Its partner Handbook contains all of our detailed policies and procedures and is available to view and download from the school's website.

At St. Martin's, through our Forest School sessions, we aim to embed our values of resilience and independence by creating a carefully planned, child-centred approach focusing on the holistic development of the child.

What is Forest School?

'Forest School is a unique outdoor education programme run by trained leaders. It gives children and young people the chance to explore, learn and discover at their own pace, developing their confidence and self-esteem in a safe and supportive space' (Forest School Association).

The ethos of Forest School is based on a fundamental respect for children and young people and for their capacity to instigate, test and maintain curiosity in the world around them. It believes in the child's right to play; the right to access the outdoors (and in particular a woodland environment); the right to access risk and the vibrant reality of the natural world; and the right to experience a healthy range of emotions, through all the challenges of social interaction, building a resilience that will enable continued and creative engagement with their peers and for children to reach their potential.

Forest School is based on the process of learning rather than the content - more on the 'how' than the 'what'. This means that genuine Forest School practice steps out of the shadows and limitation of 'planned activities' and ventures collaboratively into the realms of the unplanned, unexpected and ultimately unlimited.

Children and young people are given encouragement to direct their own learning, which often requires catalysing on the part of the Forest School leader either through stimulating play in the outdoors or through scaffolding a child's learning, but mostly through simply observing how children are in the outdoors.

A woodland environment is central in supporting this very dynamic approach to learning on many levels: the passage of time, from the changing of the seasons to the contemplation of an ancient tree; the dynamic nature of an outdoor environment, which is an infinite source of smells, textures, sounds and tastes; a range of visual stimuli from near to far, high to low, very big to very small; and the infinite layers of historical, cultural, spiritual and mythological significance that speak of our deep relationship with trees and woodland through the ages (FSTC).



Forest School Setting

Forest School, by definition, should take place in a woodland area and, as a school, we are lucky to have access to beautiful heathland, commons and woodlands. Forest School will take place over two different settings, one within the school grounds and one within the National Trust's Ranmore Common (see map in Appendix 2). The different sites allow us to offer a broad and exciting range of activities.

A little background information

Did you know that much of Surrey is in the Metropolitan Green Belt? It contains a good deal of mature woodland (reflected in the pair of interlocking oak leaves on the official logo of Surrey County Council). Among its many notable beauty spots are Box Hill, Leith Hill, Frensham Ponds, Newlands Corner and Puttenham and Crooksbury Commons. Surrey is the most wooded county in England, with 22.4% coverage compared to a national average of 11.8% and, as such, is one of the few counties not to include new woodlands in its strategic plans. Box Hill has the oldest untouched area of natural woodland in the UK, and one of the oldest in Europe.

Surrey also contains England's principal concentration of lowland heath, on sandy soils in the west of the county. With non-intensive agriculture, there are many commons and access lands, together with an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways, including the North Downs Way, a scenic long-distance path. Accordingly, Surrey provides much in the way of rural leisure activities, with a very large horse population. The highest elevation in Surrey is Leith Hill near Dorking. It is 294 metres (965 feet) above sea level and is the second highest point in south-eastern England after Walbury Hill in West Berkshire.

How will we get there and back?

We will walk to both sites. The off-school site is 2.4 miles from St. Martin's and is accessed via a gate leading onto a public pathway that takes us directly to the site. All children and adults will be expected to walk in pairs and will be accompanied by the appropriate number of Forest School staff. All of our equipment will be transported using a specifically designed trolley and staff will follow specific guidelines in its handling.

Staffing and ratios

Due to the requirement to have a fully trained Forest School member of staff, Forest School is currently only available to children aged 4 to 5 and 6 to 7 years old (our EYFS and current Year 2 cohort). The statutory staffing ratio is one adult to six children and we plan to take up to 12 children with two adults in both EYFS and Year 2, thus covering our legal requirement.

The Forest School Leaders at St Martin's are **Mrs Julie Gill** (Forest School First Aid; Level 3 Forest School Leader; Class Teacher), **Mrs Laura Bradney** (Out Door First Aid; Level 3 Forest School Leader, EYFS Class Teacher) and **Mrs Kathryn Howard** (Combined Outdoor Forest School First Aid with Paediatric Level 3: Level 3 Forest School Leader, Year 2 Class Teacher).



What the children need to bring

It is absolutely imperative at Forest School that children are dressed appropriately for all weathers and come prepared for unexpected weather changes.

If your child arrives without appropriate clothing, they will not be allowed to come to Forest School.

PLEASE ENSURE THAT ALL ITEMS ARE NAMED

Required kit list:

- **Comfortable walking boots or sturdy shoes.** We advise against wellington boots because they are not comfortable for long walks and their feet will get cold. Sandals are not at all suitable neither are snow boots.
- **Warm under-layers for colder months.** Vests, socks, long johns, thermals – the more layers the better!
- **Full length trousers and long-sleeved top / sweatshirt and fleeces** – light layers for warmth. Please ensure your children has a long-sleeved top throughout the year including the summer. Legs and arms must always be covered, even when it is warm and dry. This helps to prevent ticks, stings and bites. Leggings do not provide a thick enough layer to prevent stings etc. and so should be avoided. Jeans are also unsuitable due to the length of time it takes for them to dry.
- **Sturdy and good quality waterproof coat and trousers.** The children will be out for approximately three hours. If they get cold and wet they will struggle to gain much from the sessions. Jump suits are not suitable for the type of activities the children may undertake.
- **Warm hat and gloves (not mittens)** for when it is cold. Two pairs of gloves are better than one pair of thick ski gloves.
- **Sun hat** for when it is sunny – with a legionnaire flap if possible.
- **Water bottle** - filled with water and not squash please.
- **A packed lunch**, packed in a plastic bag and not a lunch box. This must be in bags / containers which they can open / close for themselves. The food should not require cutlery and the no-nut policy should be adhered to. We do not encourage the children to share their food.
- **Small waterproof rucksack**, ideally with a chest strap. The children will be expected to carry everything they need in their own rucksacks.
- **A spare set of clothes (top, trousers, pants, socks)** so they can be changed if needs be.



What the children will be doing at Forest School

Activities for Forest School are diverse and numerous but it should be reminded that we are trying to create independent learners who are inspired to try out their own ideas, explore their own interests and to attempt new things.

Activities might include:

- Shelter building
- Fire lighting
- Tool use
- Studying wildlife
- Playing team and group games
- Sensory activities
- Tracking games
- Cooking on an open fire
- Using a Kelly Kettle
- Rope and string work
- Art and sculpture work
- Woodland and traditional craft
- Developing stories and drama, and meeting imaginary characters
- Physical movement activities

We propose to make the most of the unique resources available by using natural materials, working with a wide range of tools and fires, and we will encourage high levels of independence and team work.

The sessions will follow a pattern with which the children will quickly become familiar. This will begin with getting to know the woodland area, their boundaries and what keeps them safe. We propose to introduce a new activity with each visit which the children can choose to join or not. Our key philosophy is for each child to determine his or her own experience, for the leaders to observe the children and attempt to identify areas that will be of interest and facilitate those interests.

The activities will cover aspects of the National Curriculum – for example in DT, they can develop sawing and drilling skills; in science, they can identify the habitats of different animals and study food chains through identifying animal scat; in literacy, children can create and retell stories using props they have made. The opportunities are limitless!



Risk Assessments and Safety Information

The Forest School Handbook contains all risk assessments for both of the Forest School sites and for associated activities. These will be updated as necessary to take into account changes, including seasonal variations. Additionally, both sites will be assessed on each visit.

The health and safety of the children and adults is paramount at all times throughout each session and activity. Safe practice is reinforced through regular call and response, "1, 2, 3, Where are you?" "1, 2, 3, here I am!" and "1, 2, 3, Stop!" as well as "No pick, no lick, be careful how you carry a stick!" Children will be reminded of our nil by mouth rule – nothing is picked and eaten unless it is a planned activity such as campfire cooking or blackberry picking. The children will be taught how to use a small amount of water to wash their hands before eating and reminded not to put their hands in their mouths or around their noses unless their hands have been cleaned. Over a period of time, children will begin to carry out their own internal risk assessments which is a large part of their journey to becoming independent thinkers and, where possible, they will always be included in assessing the risks for any of their activities.

Forest School takes place in all weathers, apart from high winds or thunderstorms when it is deemed unsafe by staff to enter the wooded site. The weather will always be monitored and, providing we know of poor conditions in advance, Forest School will take place on the school site and activities will be adjusted accordingly.

Forest School activities are covered by the school's insurance. A copy of our Schedule of Insurance and Public Liability Certificate is contained within the Forest School Handbook.

Tool use

Using tools is an integral part of Forest School as it enables the children to develop new, practical skills that help them to develop self-confidence. Over the sessions, children will learn to safely use a range of tools from vegetable peelers to bow saws. They will be shown how to use them safely and how to ensure that their working partners also remain safe. The use of tools will take place in very small groups or 1:1 with an adult.

An inventory of tools will be maintained and all tools will be checked, cleaned and stored in a secure box at the end of each session.

Rules and expectations are set out very clearly at the beginning of each session and all tool use is modelled clearly and safely by qualified members of staff. If a child exhibits persistent bad behaviour which impacts upon their safety and the safety of others, then that child will be withdrawn from the activity.



Fire Safety

Campfires are an important part of Forest School and are used in many sessions. St. Martin's Forest School aims to ensure that all children and adults participating in Forest School sessions with fires do so safely and with as little risk to their health as possible and there is a detailed Fire Safety Policy in the school's Handbook.

For your information, a few key points are given below:

- Fire will only be lit in designated areas.
- The fire area will be cleared and then enclosed by a square of logs to prevent the spread of fire.
- There will always be a red 'fire' bucket of water, fire blanket and appropriate gloves by the fire circle.
- Children will be taught the key safety rules when around the campfire.
- Children will be seated in a log circle, 1.5 metres away from the fire.
- Belongings are kept outside of the circle. Children are not allowed to walk across the circle. If they get up to move, they step back out of the circle and walk around the outside.
- Fires will always be supervised by the Forest School Leader when lit and will never be left unattended.

Cooking and eating

Lunch or snack time and cooking on a fire is a regular feature of St Martin's Forest School sessions, including eating lunch or having marshmallows and hot chocolate. Staff will apply food hygiene controls in line with Food Standards Agency guidance and good practice.

The following principles will always be followed:

- Everybody will wash their hands before handling food and drink using soap and water, wipes or antiseptic hand gel, using the washing facilities provided.
- All food is to be stored in air-tight containers.
- All cooking utensils, crockery etc. will be checked to ensure they are clean before use.
- All staff will be aware of any special dietary needs of children with food allergies, and any medication will be in the Forest School Leader's medical bag.
- Food will be stored and cooked correctly.
- All equipment and waste will be cleared away from the site following the 'leave no trace' policy.

Ticks

Please take the time to check your child for possible tick bites after Forest School sessions. Wearing long sleeved tops and trousers tucked into socks will deter unwanted guests!



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In the event that your child has been bitten by a tick, we will contact you to request you collect your child and seek medical attention for the safe removal of the tick. Attached to this Handbook is further information about ticks. Please take the time to read it carefully.

Toilet arrangements

Children will be encouraged to use the toilet before leaving school. If the need arises whilst at Forest School, children will be accompanied by a member of staff to go for a 'wild wee'. Any further toileting waste will be disposed of accordingly.

In case of an emergency

If there is an injury to children or adults:

- The trained first aider will administer aid.
- Staff who are not involved in the first aid will ensure the safety of the remainder of the group.
- Emergency services will be alerted if necessary.
- Accident forms will be completed and you will receive a copy.
- Parents will be informed. It is therefore **ESSENTIAL** that we always have up to date contact details for all parents/carers and all emergency contacts.

If you need to contact us, your first point of call should always be with the school's office, which will then contact the Forest School Leader.

Environmental considerations and conservation

One of the principles of Forest School is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. In our sessions the children are shown an appreciation and taught about respect and responsibility for the Earth. Both children and adults are encouraged to respect their environment, to be aware of conservation issues in the woodland around them and develop empathy and care for wildlife is developed.

Each child will be responsible for their own rubbish and to make sure that they leave no trace of having been there. They will be taught about the impact on the woodland of picking flowers, plants or pulling branches from trees. They will learn about the different plants and animals that inhabit the forest and how they depend on each element within their habitat and food chain for survival. Over time, this knowledge will encourage them to think before acting and respect the environment they are in.

Photographic and Video Permissions

As part of the permission to attend Forest School sessions, parents will be asked to agree to their child being photographed or filmed for observational, training or school promotion purposes. Any child without this permission will be recorded in the school's Forest School Handbook.



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The school's photographic policy can be found within the school Handbook and on the school website, but the following guidelines will be adhered to:

- Only school cameras must be used for this purpose.
- Volunteers must only use school cameras under the guidance of the Forest School Leader.
- Mobile phones must only be used for emergency purposes and to contact the school's office.

Things to remember

- Children will be tired, especially in the early weeks of starting Forest School.
- They may get wet or muddy.
- They may get stung by insects or nettles.
- They may get minor bumps, scrapes and bruises during their adventures.
- There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing.
- They will have amazing adventures and make long-lasting Forest School memories.



Forest School Code of Conduct



Entering the Forest

We will enter the forest respectfully and know that when at Forest School, specific expectations are in place. We will explore, investigate, learn and play in a manner that will not damage our forest environment. We understand that we share our Forest School with plants and animals and that when we are in our Forest School we are sharing the environment with them.

Boundaries

Before each session begins children are made aware of how far that they can explore and of any fixed boundary markers. If children move to explore hidden areas an adult should also move into the cover deep enough to be able to see the children but allowing the children the freedom to explore independently. If adults lose sight of a child they shout '1,2,3, where are you?' The children have been taught to respond '1,2,3, I'm here' through games that are practised regularly. (See site risk assessment).



Lighting a Fire

When lighting a fire, the Forest School Leader will take control of the operation and all accompanying adults will be briefed beforehand. A lit fire will not be left unattended at any point. A fire may not be lit until it has been confirmed to all that fire safety equipment is in place. Open fires will be built within a fire square. (See fire/activities risk assessment).

At the Fire Circle

An open fire will be lit within a fire square. A fire circle using log sitting stools may be established around the perimeter, 1.5m from the fire square. No one may enter the fire circle perimeter unless invited to do so by an adult. There may be no running past the fire circle. No items must be carried and placed within the fire circle except by an adult. If anyone wishes to move around the fire to a



<p>new stool, they must step out of the circle and walk around the outside of the log circle. Even when the fire is unlit, it will be treated it as if it is lit. (See fire/activity risk assessment).</p>	
	<p><u>Using Tools</u></p> <p>All tools have their own clear code of conduct for correct use, which will include consideration of specific personal protective equipment (PPE), correct use of a specific body posture and consideration of the appropriate types of activity that each tool may be used for. (See tool use guides and activity risk assessment).</p>
<p><u>Picking Up and Playing with Sticks</u></p> <p>Children can carry sticks shorter than their arm's length but are encouraged to think about how close they are to other children. Longer sticks may be dragged or carried with the help of another person with a person at each end. Sticks must not be thrown or pulled from living trees.</p>	
	<p><u>Picking Up and Playing with Stones</u></p> <p>Stones may be picked up and transported. Children often like to make patterns and pictures with them. Stones may not be thrown. They may be dropped but thought must be given to whether it is safe to do so, i.e. is there anyone beneath where they are dropping it?</p>
<p><u>Digging</u></p> <p>Digging large holes is not encouraged. Children may carefully move soil to look carefully for insects and their habitats using lolly pop sticks, fingers or small sticks found within the forest but deep holes should not be made.</p>	



Collecting Wood

Wood is collected for fire lighting purposes. It is collected in four thicknesses: matchstick, pencil, thumb and wrist sized. This is a good mathematical activity involving sorting and matching. Sticks may be collected for creating pictures and patterns but should be collected sparingly so as not to disrupt creature habitats.

Eating and Drinking

There is a nil-by-mouth policy for anything found in the forest, unless this activity has been specifically planned for during the session (e.g. blackberry picking). Children must be reminded not to put their fingers or hands in their mouths or noses. When having drinks and snacks children will use wipes and water to clean their hands before consumption.



Rope and String Use

We encourage the collection and transportation of materials. We do not allow children to tie each other up. If a child has a good idea and wants to tie something, e.g. a tarp or a swing, an adult should help them as needed, modelling appropriate knot tying and modelling how to talk through ideas and decisions.

Carrying and Transporting Materials

Children are encouraged to roll, lift, drag and to pull materials, using either their hands or ropes. We encourage safe lifting by bending our knees and keeping our back straight. Safe lifting should always be modelled by adults. Heavier objects should be rolled, lifted or carried by more people working together. (See activity risk assessment/health and safety policy).





Toileting

Children are invited and encouraged to use the toilets before we leave the school buildings. Children may go to the toilet in a designated area behind bushes.

Leaving the Site

We work according to the ethos of leaving no trace that we were in the forest, as much as is reasonably possible. Shelters should be taken down and imported materials removed. Very occasionally large items may be left between sessions. All rubbish and toileting items will always be removed. If artefacts have been found or made these may be taken off the site with the consent of an adult.



Tree Climbing

An adult must be present when children want to climb trees at Forest School. The ground cover should be checked for sharp objects and the tree should be marked as suitable for climbing. A visual check must be made for loose and rotten branches. Children are permitted to explore to their own limits or to a maximum height of 1.5m. Adults should be near enough to catch if a child should fall but far enough away to not be invasive to the children's exploration. (See activity risk assessment).



FOREST SCHOOL PERMISSIONS, MEDICAL INFORMATION & CONTACT DETAILS

All children attending Forest School must have these signed permissions and have returned the medical and contact information at least a week prior to the first session.

Name of child _____

Woodland areas contain natural hazards such as stinging nettles, insect and ticks*, thorns and splinters, etc. It is inevitable, therefore, that the children will occasionally get bumps, scratches and scrapes etc. We will have a first aid kit and will attend to minor injuries such as cuts and stings and will try to remove splinters if requested by the child. Please sign below to say that you are aware of the increased risk of minor accidents and that you agree to the administration of first aid.

Signed _____

Date _____

Please also read and sign the following statement:

I understand that if my child is not appropriately dressed for the weather or is showing signs of being unwell, my child may not be able to take part in the session. Additionally, if my child is behaving in a way that affects their safety and that of others then they will not take part in the session.

Signed _____

Date _____

Mobile telephone contact numbers _____

*See previous information regarding ticks.

Please inform us of any relevant medical information:

Please return this form to:

Mrs K Howard
Forest School Leader



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Packed Lunches:

NAME: _____

Please indicate below if you intend to provide a packed lunch for your child or you wish the school to provide one as part of the free school's meals program. Tick as appropriate.

I will provide a lunch	
I would like the school to provide a lunch	

If you wish your child to be provided with a lunch, please allow your child to choose from the options below.

Please be aware this choice will remain for the six week block that your child will be at Forest School.

Please choose from the following (tick your options):

Sandwich	Ham	Cheese	Tuna
Dessert	Cake	Cookie	
Additional snack	Carrot	Cucumber	

Please return this with the Permissions, Medical Information & Contact Details form.

Please advise us of any allergies your child may have:

Please return this form to:

Mrs K Howard
Forest School Leader



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Date: _____

Dear Parents/Carers,

Forest School

The first Forest School session will take place on the afternoon of **Tuesday** _____ and your child _____ will be attending. There will be six sessions across the half term on Tuesday afternoons. Please read the accompanying Parent Handbook and return the completed forms as soon as possible.

On the day, the children should come to school wearing their Forest School clothes and have their waterproofs in their rucksack and their boots in a separate bag. They should wear their normal school shoes into school so that they are comfortable during the morning. The weather is likely to be changeable so layers of clothing work much better in these conditions. Please ensure that your child has a hat, gloves and scarf and that they have additional items of clothing in their rucksack to put on should they begin to feel cold. Waterproof clothing is essential. Please be aware that clothing may get damaged or ripped due to the terrain the children will be working in.

Please ensure you return the necessary forms by _____ at the very latest so that the kitchen staff can cater for the children appropriately.

If there are any problems with equipment, please let me know as soon as possible.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs K Howard

UK & Ireland – ticks can be active all year round in long grass, bracken, heather, woodland and hedgerows, especially where deer and livestock are present



BE TICK AWARE

Ticks can carry organisms which may cause physical and neurological illness in humans and animals



Prevention

- > Wear gaiters or long trousers tucked into socks
- > Use insect repellent
- > Check yourself for ticks regularly

Removing ticks

- > Wear surgical gloves
- > Use a tick-removal tool or fine-nosed tweezers
- > Disinfect the tick bite
- > Wash your hands afterwards
- > Make a note of the date and place of the bite
- > Contact your GP if you notice signs of a rash or flu-like symptoms

What NOT to use when removing ticks

- > Creams/petroleum jelly/oils/spirits/freezing agent/powders or other substances
- > Cigarettes/matches/lighter
- > Your fingers or teeth
- > Anything that squeezes the body of the tick

(All these methods may cause regurgitation / back-flow of infective fluids)



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