

Escrick Church of England Primary School

Forest School Policy



Intent:

Escrick C of E aims to use a natural outdoor woodland area and/or school grounds to offer the children the experience of Forest School. Our approach to outdoor learning encourages children to become independent, use their imagination, take appropriate risks within boundaries and initiate learning for themselves.

Forest School is a holistic approach to learning, incorporating children's individuality and develops their skills for lifelong learning. It supports many areas of learning including the emotional and spiritual aspects of learning where self-esteem and self-confidence can grow and positive relationships with peers can be formed. It develops peer learning with the adults providing support and enabling activities to take place. Forest School explores the outdoors and the natural environment with practical, useful activities all year round.

At Escrick we provide children with experiences that encourage an appreciation, awareness, respect and knowledge of the natural environment whilst learning to respect and care for their own local environment.

Objectives:

Our Forest School program seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Nature Connection: To nurture a strong bond between children and the natural world, fostering a sense of wonder, respect, and appreciation for the environment.
- Holistic Development: To promote the holistic development of children by providing opportunities for physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth through nature-based experiences.
- Life Skills: To facilitate the development of essential life skills, including problem-solving, teamwork, communication, and resilience, in a supportive and outdoor setting.
- Environmental Awareness: To educate children about the importance of environmental sustainability, conservation, and ethical responsibility towards nature.
- Play-Based Learning: To encourage child-led, play-based learning experiences that allow children to explore, experiment, and create within a natural context.

Guiding Principles:

Our Forest School program is guided by the following 6 forest school principles:

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

Implementation

- Sessions: Forest School sessions are conducted on a fortnightly basis, offering all children ample opportunities to engage in outdoor learning experiences.
- Curriculum Integration: Forest School session experiences are designed to complement the school curriculum and enhance learning across various subjects.
- Safety Measures: Stringent safety protocols are in place to ensure the well-being of children during Forest School sessions, including appropriate adult-to-student ratios, first aid provisions, and site assessments.

- Site Selection: Forest School sessions take place in our safe and suitable outdoor environments.
- Assessment and Reflection: Our educators regularly assess and reflect on the effectiveness of Forest School sessions, making adjustments to improve program outcomes and student experiences.

Getting to the Forest School area

The Forest School area must be accessed via the small gate next to the Forest School shed. This must be shut by an adult when all pupils are involved in the session are safely in the area. Children in Key Stage 1 and EYFS are not to be permitted to leave the session without an adult and in Key Stage 2, may be permitted to leave the session unaccompanied depending on the situation.

Health and Safety Considerations:

Forest School sessions by their nature encourage children to develop their own risk management skills and will support them to become responsible for themselves and others around them. Children will be reminded of rules and safe play if they are considered too dangerous. Risk assessments will be carried out before each visit and for the use of all tools and equipment. The Forest School Leader will assess weather conditions regularly and will evacuate the area if they become too extreme. All children and adults will wear appropriate clothing depending upon the weather conditions. An open fire risk assessment will be carried out before a fire is allowed and protection procedures followed. A Forest School Leader will be present at all times and children will be reminded of safe practice.

The school has a Health and Safety Policy, Safeguarding Children Policy etc. to enhance aspects of health and safety

Equality and Inclusion:

All children will be included with all activities and no form of discrimination will take place, reasonable adjustments will be made to make it inclusive for all. Inclusion is a thread which runs through all of the Forest School activities regardless of a child's ability, disability, gender, race, culture, etc. Esrick C of E Primary School has an Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Policy and an Equal Opportunities Policy which will be adhered to during Forest School sessions.

We aim to, and are committed to:

- providing a safe, secure and progressive environment in which children can flourish and in which all contributions are valued;
- including and valuing the contribution of all children and adults to our understanding of equality and diversity;
- making inclusion a thread which runs through all of the activities of Forest School sessions

Child Protection

- Forest School sessions are led by trained Forest School Leaders and supported by members of staff.
- Everyone involved in Forest School is fully briefed on health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities. Staff and volunteers are made aware of the relevant school policies and procedures and ensure that they adhere to the guidance contained in them .
- All school staff and regular volunteers have current DBS checks.

Cancellation Procedure

There may be times when Forest School sessions have to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. These may be:

- Staff illness – which prevents staff / child ratios being met.
- Severe weather conditions.
- Any situation that poses a health and safety risk.

In the event of this situation arising we recommend that:

- Cancellation decisions are made as soon as possible and that the school, staff and volunteers are contacted via telephone, email or appropriate means on contact.
- We will endeavour to run Forest School sessions whenever possible, however reserve the right to cancel on the day, but will aim to inform all involved participants as soon as possible.

Assessment and Reflection:

Children's progress and development during Forest School sessions will be informally assessed through observation, anecdotal records, and reflections. Reflective practices will be encouraged among children, teachers, and practitioners to enhance learning outcomes and experiences.

Behaviour:

During Forest School sessions we operate within the Behaviour Policy of the school. When a child's behaviour threatens the well-being of him/herself or others, and he/she does not respond to a verbal warning, he/she may be returned to school.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

The Forest School leader MUST always carry a radio, first aid kit, required resources for the session, relevant risk assessments and policies (if needed to refer to).

Emergency Telephone Numbers:

School office – 01904 728570
Emergency Services - 999

This policy was reviewed in September 2026

TO BE REVIEWED: October 2027