

ST ANNE'S

FOREST SCHOOL HANDBOOK

Learning, growing and flourishing outdoors

St Anne's RC Primary School • Greenacres

A practical guide for staff, families and volunteers

Updated: November 2026 | Review annually and whenever school procedures change

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This handbook gives an overview of how Forest School operates at St Anne's. It should be read alongside the current school and Trust policies listed at the end.

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Our guiding principle

Children should feel safe, valued and listened to, while having the freedom and support to explore, make choices, try things out and learn from experience.

01 Welcome

At St Anne's RC Primary School, Forest School gives children regular opportunities to learn, explore and grow through meaningful experiences in the natural environment. It is rooted in our Catholic mission and our responsibility to care for creation.

Our woodland and outdoor spaces offer a different kind of classroom: one where children can develop relationships, curiosity, confidence and practical skills through first-hand experiences. Children are supported to take appropriate risks, make decisions, solve problems and learn at their own pace.

This handbook is an operational overview. It does not replace school or Trust policies, statutory guidance, activity risk assessments or the professional judgement of the Forest School Leader and senior leaders.

Who it is for

- School staff, Forest School Leaders and accompanying adults
- Parents and carers who want to understand the approach and arrangements
- Volunteers who have been approved to support sessions

02 Forest School at St Anne's

Forest School is delivered in the school grounds and, where approved, at local sites including Strinesdale and Leesbrook. Sessions take place during the school day and are planned around the needs, age and experience of the group.

The programme is designed to build familiarity with the environment over repeated visits. Activities may include nature exploration, den building, creative work with natural materials, teamwork, seasonal observation, practical skills and, where appropriately planned, tool use and fire activities.

Sessions are led by an appropriately competent Forest School practitioner. The Leader is responsible for the safe delivery of the session, briefing adults, checking the site, reviewing risk and adapting or stopping activities when needed. All adults must understand their role and follow the Leader's instructions.

Forest School may be adapted, relocated or cancelled if staffing, weather, site conditions or any other factor makes the session unsafe.

Session rhythm

- Welcome, group check-in and reminders of boundaries
- Exploration, child-led activity and/or a planned skill or challenge
- Reflection, sharing and review of learning
- Headcount, equipment check and safe return to school

03 Our vision and Catholic ethos

Our mission is to promote Gospel values and help each child develop their spiritual, academic and social abilities with confidence. Forest School supports this by creating opportunities for wonder, belonging, service, reflection and care for our common home.

Inspired by Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*, children are encouraged to recognise the value of the natural world and our shared responsibility to protect it. Care for creation is demonstrated through everyday choices: respecting living things, reducing waste, reusing materials and leaving places as we found them.

We want children to experience:

- Wonder and gratitude for the natural world
- Respect for themselves, other people and all living things
- A sense of belonging, contribution and shared responsibility
- Courage to try, patience to persevere and confidence to reflect
- Opportunities to care for others and for our common home

Our approach is inclusive and relational. Every child is valued, and success is understood in terms of individual progress as well as shared achievement.

04 What is Forest School?

Forest School is a long-term, child-centred approach to learning that takes place through regular experiences in a natural environment. It is more than occasional outdoor lessons or a collection of activities: relationships, familiarity, continuity and reflection are central to the approach.

At St Anne's, this means:

- Regular sessions that allow children to build confidence in a familiar outdoor setting
- Learning shaped by children's interests, questions and ideas, alongside carefully planned experiences
- Skilled adults who observe, encourage, model and scaffold rather than direct every moment
- Open-ended tasks with different ways to participate and succeed
- Supported challenge and managed risk, with clear boundaries and proportionate controls
- Time to revisit skills, notice change, reflect and build on previous experiences

The adult's role is to create the conditions for safe, purposeful learning. Children are given meaningful choices while adults retain responsibility for supervision, safeguarding and safety.

05 Forest School as a targeted intervention

At St Anne's, Forest School is used both as a valuable form of outdoor learning and as a targeted intervention for pupils who may benefit from additional support with emotional health and wellbeing (EHWB), social development or engagement in school.

Targeted Forest School is a planned, purposeful intervention. It is not a replacement for specialist mental health care, clinical assessment or other provision a child may need. It should complement the child's wider support plan and be coordinated with relevant school staff and, where appropriate, parents or carers.

Pupils who may benefit

- Children experiencing EHWB or social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs
- Children who may be anxious, withdrawn, dysregulated or lacking confidence
- Children who need support with self-esteem, resilience or self-regulation
- Children experiencing friendship, communication or relationship difficulties
- Children who may benefit from support with attendance, engagement or a sense of belonging
- Children with additional communication, sensory or social interaction needs

Identification and planning

- Referrals may be considered through staff discussion, SEND review, pastoral support, attendance monitoring, safeguarding discussion, pupil voice or parent/carer concerns.
- The purpose of the intervention and intended outcomes should be agreed with the appropriate school staff.
- A baseline picture is recorded using relevant existing information and observations; individual targets should be realistic, specific and meaningful.
- Parents/carers are informed as appropriate, and the child's views are sought in a way that suits their age and communication needs.
- The group, session structure, staffing, environment and activities are adapted to the child's needs and reviewed regularly.

The focus is on relationships, emotional safety, belonging and achievable success. Children are not labelled or expected to disclose personal experiences in order to take part.

06 Benefits for children

Forest School offers opportunities to develop the whole child. Benefits are not guaranteed or identical for every pupil; progress is considered individually and in the context of each child's wider circumstances.

Social and relational development

- Communication, listening, cooperation and turn-taking
- Friendship, empathy, teamwork and shared responsibility
- Positive relationships with trusted adults and peers

Emotional development and wellbeing

- Confidence, self-esteem and a sense of achievement
- Self-awareness, emotional regulation and strategies for managing challenge
- Resilience, perseverance and willingness to try again

Physical and cognitive development

- Balance, coordination, stamina and fine/gross motor skills
- Curiosity, creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking
- Independence, planning, decision-making and practical skills

Connection with nature

- Knowledge of seasons, habitats, wildlife and the local environment
- Wonder, calm, enjoyment and appreciation of outdoor spaces
- Responsibility for caring for the natural world

07 Inclusion and SEND

Forest School should be accessible and meaningful for every child. Inclusion is considered from the outset, not added as an afterthought. Reasonable adjustments are made so pupils can participate safely, experience success and contribute in ways that work for them.

Planning considers:

- SEND information, pupil profiles and individual support plans
- Medical needs, allergies, medication and emergency arrangements
- Sensory preferences, mobility, communication and processing needs
- Emotional regulation, transitions, relationships and known triggers
- Cultural, faith, dietary and personal needs
- The child's strengths, interests, wishes and preferred ways of participating

Adjustments may include a quieter activity, visual supports, a predictable session structure, shorter tasks, additional adult support, adapted tools or equipment, a different route or a suitable alternative activity.

The Forest School Leader should liaise with the class teacher, SENDCo and relevant staff before sessions where additional planning is needed. Parents/carers should be consulted where appropriate. A child should not be excluded simply because they have SEND; any restriction must be based on an individual assessment of need and safety, with an appropriate alternative considered.

08 Safeguarding

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. The welfare of the child is paramount. All Forest School activity must follow the current St Anne's and Trust safeguarding and child protection procedures, including the current statutory guidance for schools.

Before and during sessions

- All staff and volunteers must have the checks, induction, training and authorisation required for their role. Volunteers must never be left in sole charge of children unless expressly authorised under school procedures.
- The Forest School Leader confirms the adults' roles, group boundaries, headcount arrangements, communication method and emergency plan before the session.
- Maintain appropriate supervision and visibility. Avoid situations where an adult is isolated with a child; follow school procedures for one-to-one support and record any approved arrangements.
- Use agreed boundaries and regular headcounts, particularly when moving between areas. Children must know where they may go and which adult to approach.
- Toileting and changing support must follow school safeguarding procedures, protect dignity and privacy, and avoid adults being alone with a child. Any intimate care must follow the relevant care plan and policy.
- Photography, video and sharing of information must follow school consent, data protection and online safety procedures. Personal devices must not be used to photograph children.

If a child makes a disclosure or a concern arises

- Listen calmly, take the child seriously and allow them to speak in their own words. Do not promise secrecy, investigate, ask leading questions or confront anyone.
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling you. Explain that you must share the information with the people who can help keep them safe.
- Report the concern to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or deputy immediately, following school procedures. If a child is in immediate danger, call 999 and alert the DSL/senior leader as soon as possible.
- Record the child's words and relevant facts promptly, accurately and securely using the school's approved recording system (currently CPOMS), in line with school procedure. Do not keep separate informal records.
- Concerns or allegations about an adult, including low-level concerns, must be reported through the school's staff-conduct and safeguarding procedures.

Never assume that another adult has passed on a concern. Do not delay reporting. Information must be shared on a need-to-know basis, but data protection is not a reason to withhold information needed to safeguard a child.

Staff must know who the current DSL and deputies are before every programme or visit. Names and contact arrangements are maintained by the school and are not duplicated in this handbook.

09 Health, safety and the risk-benefit approach

Forest School uses a proportionate risk-benefit approach. Children benefit from appropriate challenge and opportunities to learn how to recognise and manage risk. Adults remain responsible for deciding which risks are acceptable and what controls are needed.

Planning and checks

- A current site assessment is maintained for each regular location and reviewed when conditions, access or use changes.
- Activity-specific assessments are completed for higher-risk activities, including tool use, fire and cooking.
- A pre-session site check identifies hazards such as damaged trees or branches, water, uneven ground, litter, animal waste, hazardous plants, weather impacts and access issues.
- A dynamic assessment is carried out throughout the session. Stop, change or relocate an activity if conditions or behaviour make it unsafe.
- Staffing and supervision are set according to the activity, group size, age, needs, location and assessed risks. There is no single ratio suitable for every activity.
- Equipment is checked before use, maintained, stored securely and removed from use if damaged.

Children are taught clear boundaries and safe behaviours in a gradual, age-appropriate way. They are encouraged to notice hazards, communicate concerns and make sensible choices.

The Leader may stop an activity or cancel a session where safety cannot be maintained. Reasons may include insufficient staffing, severe weather, unsafe site conditions, equipment failure or an emerging concern about a child or group.

10 First aid and emergency arrangements

First aid provision must be appropriate to the location, group and activities. A suitably qualified and current first aider must be available in accordance with the school's arrangements and the activity risk assessment. A stocked, accessible first aid kit and a means of contacting emergency services must be taken on off-site sessions.

Before leaving school

- Confirm the group list, emergency contacts, relevant medical information and any individual healthcare plans are available to the responsible staff.
- Check that required medication is available, in date and accessible, and that staff understand any agreed support arrangements.
- Confirm the route, site location, access point for emergency services, school contact and contingency plan.
- Brief all adults on roles, first aid arrangements, communication and what to do if the group becomes separated.

If an incident occurs

- Make the scene safe and assess the situation. Do not put yourself or others at unnecessary risk.
- Protect and supervise the rest of the group while a competent adult attends to the casualty.
- Call 999 where required. Give the exact location, access details, nature of the incident and any relevant hazards.
- Contact the school as soon as practicable. The school will coordinate parent/carer contact and any wider notifications.
- Record accidents, injuries, near misses and significant incidents using the school's reporting arrangements. Preserve relevant details and follow any required reporting or escalation procedure.

Do not administer medication unless this is authorised under the child's healthcare plan and the school's medication procedures. Staff must follow the school's first aid, medical needs and emergency procedures.

11 Weather, clothing and seasonal safety

Sessions take place outdoors throughout the year where conditions are suitable. The programme is adapted to the weather and season. Very high winds, thunderstorms, extreme temperatures, flooding, poor visibility or other hazardous conditions may require relocation or cancellation. The Leader makes and communicates this decision.

Children should arrive prepared for the forecast:

- Waterproof coat and trousers where needed
- Suitable sturdy, closed-toe footwear; wellingtons or walking boots for muddy or wet ground
- Warm layers, hat and gloves in cold weather
- Lightweight long sleeves, sun hat and suitable sun protection in sunny weather
- A spare change of clothes where requested

Sun and heat

- Use shade and schedule breaks; avoid prolonged exposure during the hottest part of the day.
- Encourage regular drinking of water and suitable clothing, including a hat.
- Parents/carers should apply appropriate sunscreen before school. Any further use must follow school policy, allergy information and consent arrangements.
- Watch for signs of heat stress or sunburn and adapt or stop activities as needed.

Cold and wet conditions

- Use layers and keep children moving without overexertion.
- Monitor for cold stress, wet clothing and fatigue; provide warm-up breaks and access to shelter.
- Do not continue if a child cannot remain comfortably warm, dry or safe.

12 Tools, fire and campfire cooking

Tools, fire and cooking can provide valuable practical learning, but they are higher-risk activities. They only take place when specifically planned, risk assessed, authorised and led by adults with appropriate training and competence. The activity may be withheld where a child, group, site or weather conditions are not ready.

Tool use

- Children must first become familiar with the environment, boundaries and expectations. Tool skills are introduced progressively and only when the Leader judges the child is ready.
- Use tools suitable for the task and child. Check condition before and after use; store securely and control access.
- Set a clear working area and safety distance. Provide appropriate PPE and direct supervision as identified in the risk assessment.
- Count tools in and out. Carry tools safely, walk rather than run, keep cutting edges covered during transport and pass tools handle-first.
- Stop use immediately if instructions are not followed or the activity becomes unsafe.

Fire

- Fire is lit and managed only by a trained, authorised adult, with permission for the site and a specific risk assessment.
- Check wind, ground and overhead hazards. Do not light fires in unsuitable weather, during dry conditions or where smoke, vegetation or site conditions create unacceptable risk.
- Establish a clearly marked fire area, safe access and exit, and a safe seating arrangement. Children must be taught and practise fire-circle behaviour before a fire is lit.
- Keep water and suitable fire-control equipment, first aid and a clear escape route immediately available.
- Never leave a fire unattended. The adult extinguishes it fully before the group leaves.

Campfire cooking

- Complete food, allergy, dietary and hygiene checks in advance. Follow school food safety procedures.
- Children wash or sanitise hands before food handling. Tie back long hair and secure loose clothing.
- Children only approach the cooking area when invited and under the close supervision specified in the risk assessment.
- Adults handle hot equipment, boiling water and hot containers. Allow food to cool and check temperature before serving.
- Take account of medical, religious and cultural dietary needs. Do not use food where ingredients or allergy risks are uncertain.

13 Environmental stewardship

Care for the environment is part of every Forest School session. Adults model respect for the natural world and help children understand that outdoor spaces are shared habitats, not simply resources for activities.

- Follow site permissions, access arrangements and any local restrictions.
- Leave plants, fungi, wildlife and habitats undisturbed wherever possible; observe rather than collect living things.
- Use fallen natural materials responsibly and avoid damaging trees, plants, nests or habitats.
- Take litter home, minimise waste and reuse materials where safe and appropriate.
- Use established paths where possible and avoid unnecessary erosion or disturbance.
- Wash hands after outdoor activity and before eating; manage contact with soil, plants and wildlife sensibly.
- Teach children to notice seasonal change and understand their role in caring for our common home.

Children should be encouraged to ask questions, observe carefully and develop a sense of stewardship through practical action and reflection.

14 Parent and carer information

Parents and carers will be told when their child is taking part in Forest School and given information about the programme, clothing and any off-site arrangements. Written consent and medical information will be obtained where required by school procedures and the nature of the activity or visit.

Please help your child to come prepared:

- Wear comfortable clothes that can get wet, muddy or marked. Avoid valuable or new clothing.
- Wear suitable closed-toe footwear; sandals and open-toed shoes are not suitable.
- Bring waterproofs, warm layers, gloves or a sun hat according to the weather.
- Apply sunscreen before school when appropriate and ensure the school has up-to-date information about allergies, medical needs and medication.
- Encourage your child to follow adult instructions, stay within boundaries and respect the environment.

Parents/carers should tell school about changes to medical needs, medication, emergency contacts or other information that may affect safe participation. For off-site visits, the school will provide the relevant details and seek consent in line with its educational visits procedures.

Children may return muddy, wet or smelling of smoke after an authorised fire session. Please provide spare clothing where requested.

15 Operational procedures

The following arrangements apply to all sessions and should be read alongside the relevant school procedures.

Before each session

- Confirm approval, staffing, supervision arrangements and the session plan.
- Review pupil information, consent, medical needs and any individual adjustments.
- Check the weather, site conditions, equipment and emergency arrangements.
- Complete and communicate the relevant site, activity and dynamic risk assessments.

During each session

- Take and maintain an accurate register and carry out headcounts at agreed points.
- Keep children within agreed boundaries and maintain appropriate supervision.
- Ensure children know how to summon help and report hazards or concerns.
- Maintain safe transitions between activities and locations; do not leave a group unsupervised.
- Use school-approved communication methods and keep the school contact route available.

Off-site travel

- Obtain approval and follow the school's educational visits procedures.
- Check routes in advance where practicable. Use pavements and designated crossings; adults control road crossings and the group remains together.
- Use only approved transport and drivers. Seat belts and age/size-appropriate child restraints must be used in accordance with current requirements.
- Private vehicles may only be used where expressly authorised and all school checks, permissions and appropriate business-use insurance requirements have been met.

Toileting and personal care

- Use available toilet facilities wherever possible. Explain arrangements to children before departure.
- Supervision must follow safeguarding and intimate care procedures, protect privacy and dignity, and be appropriate to the child's needs.
- Do not improvise toileting arrangements that create safeguarding, hygiene or environmental risks. Seek the Leader's direction and follow the school's agreed plan.

16 Monitoring impact

Forest School is continually reviewed to ensure that it remains safe, purposeful and responsive to children's needs. Evaluation should inform future planning rather than become an additional burden or a measure of a child's worth.

For targeted EHWB intervention, impact may be considered through:

- A starting point and review against agreed individual targets
- Pupil voice, reflection and the child's own account of what helps
- Staff observations of confidence, engagement, relationships and self-regulation
- Relevant attendance, behaviour or pastoral information, interpreted in context
- Feedback from parents/carers and staff where appropriate
- Review with the class teacher, SENDCo or pastoral lead to agree next steps

Session evaluation

- What went well and what did children engage with?
- Were the activities, environment and support appropriate?
- Were there incidents, near misses or emerging risks to address?
- What should be adapted for the next session?

Information about children must be recorded, stored and shared in line with school data protection, safeguarding and record-keeping procedures.

17 Insurance and key policies

Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA)

St Anne's participates in the Department for Education's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA). Forest School activities must be planned and delivered in accordance with the school's current RPA membership, applicable membership rules, Trust requirements and approved risk-management arrangements. The Headteacher or delegated senior leader must confirm that the proposed activity and any relevant conditions are within the school's arrangements before delivery. Staff should not assume that an activity is covered without this confirmation. Incidents and potential claims must be reported promptly through the school's established procedures.

This handbook is not a statement of insurance cover. The RPA membership rules and school/Trust arrangements take precedence.

Related school and Trust policies

Always consult the current versions of the relevant policies and procedures. This handbook intentionally summarises the Forest School arrangements rather than reproducing policy wording that may change.

- Safeguarding and Child Protection, including staff conduct, low-level concerns and whistleblowing
- Health and Safety, accident reporting and first aid
- Educational Visits and off-site activities
- SEND, inclusion and supporting pupils with medical needs
- Supporting pupils with medical conditions and administering medication
- Behaviour, positive handling and individual support plans
- Attendance, data protection, information sharing and online safety
- Food safety, allergies and emergency planning

Current statutory guidance

Staff must follow the current statutory guidance and school procedures, including Keeping Children Safe in Education (2026) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026), as applicable. Staff should always check the latest published versions rather than relying on a printed reference in this handbook.

Document control

School	St Anne's RC Primary School, Greenacres
Document	Forest School Handbook
Version	Updated November 2026
Review	Annually and whenever relevant school/Trust procedures or statutory guidance change
Owner	School leadership / Forest School Lead

A final reminder

If you are unsure about a safeguarding, medical, safety, supervision or insurance matter, pause the activity and seek advice from the Forest School Leader or a senior leader before proceeding.