



FOREST SCHOOL POLICY & HANDBOOK

Rydes Hill Preparatory School & Nursery

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RYDES HILL PREPARATORY SCHOOL & NURSERY

P40 FOREST SCHOOL HANDBOOK & PROCEDURES



RYDES HILL

PREPARATORY SCHOOL & NURSERY

MISSION STATEMENT

- ❖ Rydes Hill Preparatory School and Nursery is a Catholic school where children learn how to live in loving relationship with God and each other.
- ❖ Christian virtues of love and justice, faith and courage, hope and perseverance are fostered.
- ❖ Pupils and staff comprise individuals of different faiths and beliefs but the Rydes Hill community aspires to unity within the life of the school based on shared moral values.
- ❖ The importance placed on the development of individual talents is at the heart of what school stands for and all are encouraged and challenged to be the best they can be.

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Revision History

Revision	Paragraph Number	Revision
December 2017		New Document
September 2023		Updated – reformatted and Appendix A added
September 2024		Updated

Abbreviations, Acronyms and Definitions

Abbreviation / Acronym	Definition/Meaning
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
FSA	Forest School Association. The FSA is the professional body and UK wide voice for Forest School, promoting best practice, cohesion and quality.
FSL	Forest School Leader

Aim / Objective / Statement of Intent

This policy applies to the whole school including Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

1. The aim of this policy is to provide information relating to the Forest School programme run at Rydes Hill Preparatory School and Nursery. This information is for staff, pupils and parents.
2. A full risk assessment has been carried out in relation to the Forest School programme. A copy of this is available upon request from the School.

History of Forest School

3. In 1993 a group of nursery nurses at Bridgewater College, Somerset, visited Denmark to look at the pre-school system. The open-air culture ('frulitsliv') is seen as a way of life in Scandinavia and permeates early years education. The Bridgewater nursery nurses returned enthused by the largely outdoor, child-centred/play-based pedagogy employed by the Danish pre-school pedagogues. They started their own "Forest School" with children attending the college crèche. They observed children, watching their own creativity blossom and "scaffolded" skills and ideas. Their entire practice was impacted as a result.
4. In 1995 the college developed a BTech in Forest School and started to offer it to early years practitioners in particular. Many involved in outdoor learning saw this as something that built on the UK's outdoor learning heritage and soon Forest School was being offered

around the UK. On 7th July 2012, the Forest School Association (FSA) was launched as the new professional association for Forest School and the governing body for training.¹

Purpose of Forest School

5. Forest School sessions provide children with the opportunity to explore and experience the natural world through practical activities outdoors which will in turn help promote confidence, independence, self-esteem and resilience. Forest School at Rydes Hill facilitates Cross curricular and child led Learning through research and enquiry, improving creativity, teamwork, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, it boosts curiosity, promotes problem solving and engages children's critical thinking skills.
Most of the sessions are cross-curricular and by using the wonderful resources available in Rydes Hill's beautiful little woodland area, we hope to stimulate the children's interests and imagination while learning independence and developing their enquiring skills. We hope that this opportunity will widen their knowledge of, and empathy with, the natural world at the same time as seeing how nature enhances their experience of learning and wellbeing.
6. At Forest School all participants are viewed as:
 - Equal, unique and valuable
 - Competent to explore and discover
 - Entitled to experience appropriate risk and challenge
 - Entitled to choose, and to initiate and drive their own learning and development
 - Entitled to experience regular success
 - Entitled to develop positive relationships with themselves and other people
 - Entitled to develop a strong, positive relationship with their natural world

Forest School at Rydes Hill Preparatory School and Nursery

7. Rydes Hill Preparatory School and Nursery is fortunate to have access to a small area of woodland within its school grounds in the urban area of Guildford, Surrey. The area is perfectly suited to the development of our on-site Forest School. It already has natural cover from the trees above and a natural seating area is already in situ. We use this site on the School grounds for most of our sessions.



Seating area in Forest School at Rydes Hill Preparatory School & Nursery

¹ Per Forest School Association Website – History of Forest School (Excerpt)

8. We will on occasion visit Merrist Wood Common & Wood to look at habitats, seasonal walks and to look at the changes in nature. (The site is a 10-minute walk from School on public footpaths with the children being carefully supervised at all times). In the woodland there are abundant rabbits and also squirrels, badgers, bats and other small mammals. There is also evidence of deer, foxes and other woodland animals.
9. The site is predominantly broadleaved woodland (sweet chestnut, sycamore, oak, birch) with a mixture of flora including ferns, bramble, and nettles. There is no access for vehicles into the woodland area. The Forest School site itself has no running, still or boggy water sections although there are wet areas elsewhere in the wood. The site has fence and trees and tree branches marking the borders around the common. There is a public footpath through the common and dogs are frequently exercised in the wood/common area. The children are taught to stand still and firmly cross their arms, not to run away from or scream around dogs or other animals. They are taught not to pet any animal and remember “stranger danger” policy.
10. Children in Nursery, Kindergarten and Lower Prep have Forest School lessons once per week. Lower Trans, and Upper Transition Forest School is held every other week. We aim for pupils in Key Stage 2 (Middle Prep, Higher Prep and Form One) to have a day in the woods each term but this is dependent on progress in other academic areas.
11. Activities are very practical and child led, usually with one structured adult inspired activity at the core of the session (more so in the warmer months). KS2 sessions are more structured, teacher led, cross-curricular and aimed at environmental education. Pupils will have the opportunity to play in and study the natural environment. Forest School leaders and teachers will work together to provide cross-curricular links between academic learning and experiences at Forest School. For example, classroom-based learning from Science classes for Middle Preparatory (Year 4) on invertebrates will be translated into the practical observation of snails and worms. Materials gathered in Forest School can be used in Art to create collages for Nursery and Kindergarten or for observational drawings in the Preparatory classes. Mathematical patterns can be seen in pine cones, which have seed pods that are arranged in a spiral pattern. They consist of a pair of spirals, each one twisting upwards in opposing directions. The number of steps will almost always match a pair of Fibonacci numbers!
12. As Forest School has become an embedded part of our curriculum we have been enhancing the Rydes Hill Forest School area by building an outdoor classroom, bridge, minibeast hotels, hedgehog hotel, shelters and dens, we have a fire pit, provided a tarpaulin so the area can still be used in wet weather and have created a user-friendly outdoor kitchen.

² Per Forest School Association website – what is forest school (Excerpt)



Benefits of Forest School

13. Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than a one-off or infrequent visits. The cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review, links each session. The Forest School programme aims to develop the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and spiritual aspects of the pupil.
14. Further cross-curricular learning exists when the opportunity to use tools such as small saws, axes and knives is given. This provides the chance to participate in building shelters and dens, creating 3-dimensional art and gain an understanding of how people lived many years ago.
15. Pupils can experience time outside in a safe environment. We aim to foster a relationship with nature to develop long-term, environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices for staff, pupils, and their families.
16. Forest school offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves. For example, older pupils will be taught how to be safe around fires, to create a fire pit, to start a fire, keep it alight and how to extinguish it.
17. Pupils have an opportunity to build relationships and experience teamwork. Children who are not natural leaders in classroom-based activities or sporting events have an opportunity to succeed in a different environment.
18. Forest School activities can be pupil or teacher led. There are opportunities for quiet reflective time where pupils can enjoy the sensory experiences of the outdoors and where getting mud and dirt on hands and faces is all part of the experience.

Staff Training

19. The School has nominated a Forest School Leader, Mrs Diane Morris, to head our Forest School programme. Mrs Morris has completed the Level 3 Forest School accredited training programme.
20. Additional staff members have been trained in supporting Forest School activities and it has become a permanent fixture of the Rydes Hill Preparatory School and Nursery curriculum. It is intended that the Prep department will be given more time for Forest School activities in the future.

Health & Safety

21. The initial sessions of our Forest School programme will establish both physical and behavioural boundaries. Instructions to pupils will be age appropriate. The activities undertaken will be suitable for the age and ability of the group.
22. For Nursery and Kindergarten classes, the staff to pupil ratio will be 1:8, other classes will have a staff to pupil ratio of 1:10.
23. All classes will be run by a staff member who has received Level 3 Accreditation from the Forest Schools Association and will be supported by class teachers and teaching assistants as applicable.
24. All Forest School activities are supported by a full Risk Assessment which will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, but at least annually.
25. Forest School activities will be led by a member of staff who holds an up to date first aid qualification which includes pediatric first aid.



A child making a
Christmas Wreath



Rope and knot tying

26. Access to tools and activities relating to fire will only be undertaken once full instructions have been given and understood by the pupils. Any failure to follow instructions will lead to immediate removal of the tool or cessation of the activity for the relevant pupil until staff can be sure that the activity can recommence safely.
27. Pupils will be required to wear suitable clothing when attending Forest School. This will ensure that they can fully participate in all the activities without damaging the school uniform or PE kits. Suitable clothing may include waterproof trousers and coats, gloves, woolly hats, scarves, and wellington boots; alternatively, sunhats, sunglasses, trainers, and loose long trousers may be more suitable during summer. Pupils and/or parents are advised at the beginning of the school year on what the appropriate clothing is and the children will be advised on a lesson by lesson basis what will be required for the week ahead.
28. Simple Forest School rules are explained to the children in a way which is age appropriate and easy for them to remember. For example, “No picking, no licking!” song, watch out for “slipping and tripping” chant. All children are reminded to stay within the boundaries marked, to look above and below for hazards (mind the hidden rabbit holes, tripping roots and grabbing creepers). Call an adult if you find anything dangerous or strange – ask a friend to stand beside it so we don’t forget where it is and do not touch it. We also have a special Forest School (FS) Clap which the children know means to return to “base camp” immediately.

Clothing requirements



“There is no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing!”

Alfred Wainwright MBE, A Coast to Coast Walk

29. Clothing is obviously weather dependent therefore parents are asked to provide their children with a bag of Forest School clothes which are old; they are likely to become grubby! At all times of the year the children should have their legs and arms covered to protect them from scratches and ticks (trousers and long-sleeved tops). Children should also wear wellies or walking boots for older girls (never ‘Croc’ or beach type shoes or open toed shoes/sandals). In winter (or wet weather) Children will need to wear waterproof dungarees/trousers and lightweight jackets. Children will need to have their own jumper and/or fleece to wear underneath. They will also need hats and gloves. In summer they may need a sunhat and sun cream. It is only in very windy weather or if a thunderstorm is forecast that Forest School is cancelled.

Appendices

Appendix A – Forest School Procedures for Rydes Hill Staff

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This information is for staff and should be read in conjunction with the rest of the Forest School Handbook. Staff should also refer to P38 Health & Safety Policy.

Roles & Responsibilities

1. It is the **Forest School Lead (FSL)** responsibility to:
 - ensure the safety of children and adults as they travel to and from the site
 - ensure that animals are kept away from group, as far as is possible
 - ensure the safety of children and adults whilst at the site
 - to provide clear guidance and expectations to children and adults
 - to carry out a safety check of the site prior to visiting
 - to assess the site at the start of each term (at least)
 - to carry out a basic check before each session
 - to review the risk assessment associated with Forest School at least annually and always after any incident
 - to check that children are dressed appropriately for the activities to be undertaken and to refuse participation if they are not
 - to check weather forecasts on the days when Forest School is planned and to determine if it is safe to hold the session

2. It is the **Class Teacher or Teaching Assistant's** responsibility to:
 - ensure the safety of children and adults as they travel to and from the site
 - to join in all Forest School activities
 - to ask open ended questions and follow the lead of children (rather than directing them to activities/telling them what to do)
 - provide observations and/or take photographs on the school camera as supporting evidence for school reports etc
 - to dress appropriately and sensibly for Forest School sessions, bearing in mind that they are role models for the children (i.e. follow the same clothing guidelines as given for pupils)
 - to be encouraging and supportive of the activities and the session.
 - to look for opportunities to continually enhance cross-curricular learning between Forest School and other subjects

Forest School Routines

3. Before each session, a risk assessment is undertaken by the FSL to check for litter, glass, animal faeces etc. Such items will be collected (disposable gloves and/or protective gloves where necessary) and removed. This includes along the route to the wood. Trees are checked for any broken or dead branches which might fall, and pathways are trimmed back (brambles and nettles) where appropriate. Weather conditions are checked. If it is very windy or a thunderstorm is forecast, then the session will be cancelled.

4. Session Outline – Nursery & Key Stage 1 :

- Class teachers will register their children and advise the FSL of the number present. The FSL will double count. Class teachers will make sure all children have been to the toilet before the session and get them to change into appropriate 'Forest School Clothes' brought from home. (See main policy document, paragraph 29). Class teachers and teaching assistants will also change into their Forest School Clothes (if not already wearing suitable items).
- We require a ratio of 1 adult: 5 children (Nursery) and 1:8 (Kindergarten) before a session can begin. We require the FSL plus 1 other adult for any of the Prep-Department sessions.
- The FSL will lead the party with another member of staff at the rear. Additional members of staff should place themselves evenly dispersed in the group. Children are expected to walk sensibly to the site, lining up in the Staff Car Park (which is not used during teaching times) or outside Lower Transition classroom as directed by the FSL or Class Teacher.
- As each child lines up before they enter the woods, they are expected to knock on the woodland door and ask permission from the woods to enter. As they go into the area they are to say "Welcome to the wood (name)" to the child behind them and to walk quietly to the base camp/owl tree. Once sitting on the benches, the children are expected to be quiet and to listen to the FSL and to each other during welcoming activities (usually an activity which involves them using their senses).
- Children are expected to take turns in talking but are not forced if they do not wish to participate. If there is an adult-led activity, then children will work individually or in groups with the FSL. Accompanying adults are available to support the remaining children, facilitating their play without directing it.
- At the end of each session the FSL will clap, and the children return to the base camp for a closing talk. Children then walk back to class quietly thanking the woodlands area for having them, for welcoming them in and thank one another for being so kind and helpful.
- No toilets are available in the woods. If a child should need the toilet, a member of staff will support them and if we are in the Merrist College area, will ensure as much privacy as possible so they can do a 'wild wee'. If we are at School then a member of staff will escort the child back into School to use the toilet facilities.

5. Session Outline – KS2

- Pupils will either arrive at School in their Forest School clothes or will change into them.
- A longer 4 period session with the outline completed by teachers. KS2 children use the woods as a resource for environmental education and as such tend to use a wider area, under supervision and in groups.
- Sessions usually include a range of activities in the morning, e.g. tree identification, food webs, mapping – often inspired by class topics and linked to the curriculum.
- Weather permitting, the children may also bring a picnic lunch. Hand-washing facilities are set up by staff before children and staff eat and throughout the session.

- After lunch there is an opportunity for 'free play'. Children are supported by staff but not directed. Children can play individually or in groups but must always stay within the Forest School area so staff can see and/or hear them at all times.
- If a fire is to be lit, the portable fire-pit is used. Pupils will be provided with additional safety instructions and the steps outlined in the Forest School risk assessment relating to fire safety will be followed.

Equipment

6. An Emergency Bag must be taken for all **off-site** visits. This should contain: emergency protocol, First Aid kit (including plasters, water, saline pack, cold pack, bandages, sterile gloves), First Aid booklet, Fleece blanket, Heat blanket, emergency shelter, copy of risk assessment, hand sanitiser gel, protective gloves, disposable gloves, carrier bags, scissors, children's individual medical requirements (i.e. inhalers etc.) and at least 2 fully charged mobile telephones. Whilst on-site, full medical support is available from the School Office.
7. Pupils and staff should bring water bottles with them to Forest School and ensure that supplies are sufficient, particularly if going off-site in hot weather.
8. Forest School Leader and/or other adults will also carry any tools necessary for the session and/or tools necessary for clearing pathways etc.
9. Additional equipment and tools which may be used for some sessions include: trowels and forks, magnifying glasses, buckets, string, bow saw, peelers, penknives, tarpaulins, identification charts/books, specimen jars, clipboards, pencils, scissors, fire pit and water, wind break and spade (day sessions only).

Guidelines for using tools

10. Risk assessments have been carried out for all the tools used in Forest School. All staff should read these risk assessments before using any tools and before instructing children in their use.
11. All tools are stored safely in a locked cupboard in the School by the FSL and must only be carried to/from the site by adults – never by children. At the site, tools are stored safely and children understand that they may not use them without an adult. There is a designated area for tool use (usually base camp) and we do not walk around holding tools. Tools are kept clean and sharp. Children may only use tools when supervised by an adult – usually the FSL, but occasionally by a member of staff who has been trained and designated by the FSL to supervise. A First aid kit is close by.
12. **Potato peeler:** Must be used with the FSL supervising (or other trained designated adult). Always sit down. Make sure you are at least 1 ½ arm's length from your nearest neighbour. No glove needed on hand using tool, glove on the other hand. Always move

the peeler away from the body when it is in contact with the wood. Initially the ratio should be 1:1 but as children demonstrate competence this can be increased to 1:4.

13. **Penknife:** Must be with the FSL. Always sit down. Ensure the penknife is closed and locked when not in use. No glove needed on hand using tool, glove on the other hand. Make sure you are at least 1 ½ arms' length from your nearest neighbour. Open the penknife away from you. Always move the penknife away from the body when it is in contact with the wood. Initially the ration should be 1:1 but as children demonstrate competence this can be increased to 1:2.
14. **Long screws (used with elder):** Must be with the FSL (or other trained designated adult). Always sit down. Wear gloves on both hands as screws can be sharp at the top and can slip. Initially the ratio should be 1:1 but as children demonstrate competence this can be increased to 1:4.
15. **Bow saw:** Only FSL to carry to/from site. Ensure guard is in place when not in use. Must only be used with FSL. Gloves to be worn on hand that is not holding the saw. (KS1) children should kneel up securely on both knees and be in a stable position. FSL to support children to hold the saw and to hold the wood. Explain what to do and why. Always maintain ratio of 1:1.
16. **Hand drill:** Must be with FSL (or other trained designated adult). Always sit down. Wear gloves on both hands as the drill handle cogs can catch the skin and the bit can slip. Maintain ration of 1:1 with adult supporting the drill and/or wood to ensure the drill does not slip.

Health & Safety and Emergency Procedures

17. In addition to the information contained in P38 Health & Safety Policy, the following measures apply to Forest School:
 - The person in charge is always the FSL
 - There must be at least one other additional member of staff in the group (with other accompanying adults to the required ratio)
 - The FSL will ensure that the Risk Assessments are kept up to date and are reviewed at least annually. The Risk Assessment must be also be reviewed after any incident.
 - The site and route must be checked on the day of the session.
 - When sharp or heavy tools are used there must always be adult supervision.
 - Gloves are worn when peelers, screws, saws, or knives are used.
 - The staff will carry the Emergency bag and at least 2 charged mobile phones
 - In the event of an emergency, there is a protocol. One copy is in the emergency bag, the other copy is in the school office. The FSL will make a judgement as to whether to alert the emergency services, the parents or the School Office first; usually it would be the School so that the other phone calls while the FSL manages the situation and keeps the other children safe.
 - In the case of needing to split the party, the FSL will remain with the casualty and other members of school staff and adults will accompany the other children back to

School. If necessary, other members of School staff will come from School and help to accompany the main party back to school.

- The FSL (or other designated adult) will accompany the child to hospital.
- The FSL and other adults will provide a full written report of the accident as soon as possible. School procedures will be followed and no-one is allowed to speak to the media without the permission of the Headmistress.
- **Missing Child** - If a child is found to be missing, make immediate search of the vicinity and call the pupils name repeatedly. Assemble the rest of the children and ensure they are safe. Call School to alert them. School will then contact police and parents. Staff to follow P35 Major Incident Procedures.
- **Horses in the field** – The horses are friendly and inquisitive but are sometimes quite frisky, particularly in spring. They are not dangerous, but they are large. The children may want to stroke the horses – this is not permitted. Children are reminded to walk and keep quiet. They are not to approach the horses or walk behind them. FSL will be responsible for discouraging the horses from coming close to the children and may delegate another adult to assist. Remaining adults to escort the children as requested by the FSL with the understanding that they walk between the horses and the children.
- **Irregular occurrence, uninvited person/stranger:** The intruder will be challenged and asked politely to leave. If a child is involved, then it may be necessary to call the Police and the child removed from the situation and helped to feel safe. Staff to follow P35 Major Incident Procedures. Parents to be briefed by the FSL / Headmistress as soon as possible.