



AQUINAS Church of England Education Trust

"Life - Transforming - Learning"

Policy Title:	Forest School Policy
Responsibility:	Primary Education Director
Review Body:	Education Scrutiny Committee
Date:	September 2021
Review:	September 2023

The Trust has a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and young people and to keep them safe. Children who are and feel safe make more effective learners. We endeavour to provide a safe and welcoming environment where children are respected and valued. The Trust is committed to practising in a way that protects them. Each academy will ensure that the welfare of learners is given paramount consideration when developing and delivering all academy activities. The Trust acknowledges that in an evolving social environment, abuse can come from many sources and take many forms, particularly in relation to peer on peer abuse of which sexual violence and harassment between children is an element. Staff challenge inappropriate behaviours and do not dismiss, tolerate or normalise sexual violence, or sexual harassment. The Trust endeavours to promote a child centric approach to safeguarding which acts in the best interests of the child taking their views into account where possible.

Introduction

Forest School provides valuable and unique learning opportunities for children in the natural environment. Forest School gives children the opportunity to explore the outdoors in a safe environment. It provides them with the chance to develop their independent skills and in turn helps increase their self-esteem and confidence. It allows children to have fun outdoors. Learning is not only focussed on exploring the natural environment but is also linked with the National Curriculum and Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum and is used to reinforce the children's understanding and learning of specific topics and PSHEC.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Trust/Academy policies:

- Health and Safety
- Safeguarding Children
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Policy
- Equality Policy

Aims

The aim of this policy is to provide an insight into the ethos of Forest School as operated with the Aquinas Trust. Forest School caters for and incorporates all learning styles, as it places an emphasis on child-initiated and child-centred learning. It encourages the children to explore the environment and take responsibility for and extend their own learning as well as taking calculated risks.



Our Forest School learning environments provide opportunities for children to:

Develop self-esteem

Develop self-confidence

Form positive relationships with others

Develop a growing awareness of their emotional needs and the needs of others

Learn to cooperate and work with their peers and adults

Develop strategies in order to take risks within the boundaries of safety.

Learn specific skills which link into the curriculum

Develop knowledge and appreciation of the natural world and a forest environment

The Aquinas Trust Forest Schools are about exploring and experiencing the natural world through practical activities. The children go out in all weathers, all year round, exploring and learning from the seasons and changes in the environment. During high winds or lightening it will be considered unsafe to go into the forest school area.

The children's interests along with the varied natural resources in our Forest Schools are used to stimulate creative thinking, problem solving and skill development, all under the premise of 'play.' One of the principles of our Forest Schools is to promote environmental awareness and encourage sustainability. The children are taught respect and responsibility for the world around them. Both children and adults are encouraged to respect their environment and to be aware of conservation issues of the woodland/area around them. We aim to promote respect for wildlife and our woodland environment.

Health and Safety Considerations

Forest School sessions will be led by a qualified Forest School Leader. The Forest School Leaders hold Level 3 Practitioners qualification; have an enhanced DBS and first aid qualifications.

Forest School sessions will be adequately staffed following the Trusts guidelines on ratios for onsite and offsite activities.

The health and safety of the adults and children is paramount at all times throughout any Forest School activity and session. Safe practice is reinforced through regular reminders. The Forest School programme provides children with opportunities to develop independence and to take responsibility for their own learning. Whilst being independent in their learning, they will develop early risk assessment strategies and understand that their actions have consequences.

The Forest School Leaders will carry out risk assessments at the beginning of each term which will take account of seasonal changes and will review this before each session in the form of a Safety Sweep.

The Forest School Leaders and other practitioners regard their duty of care when working with pupils as extremely important. For the safety and protection of all individuals – children, staff and volunteers - we ensure that everyone involved in Forest School is briefed on health and safety and risk assessment of the site.



Suitable clothing and appropriate footwear and clothing must be worn at all times. During winter months pupils are expected to wear sturdy footwear or wellington boots, hats scarves, gloves and waterproof outerwear. Generally, arms and legs should be covered but this depends upon the type of forest school and activity.

The Aquinas Trust believe that Forest School provides opportunities for children to undertake a range of activities which contain a theoretical degree of risk which they may not necessarily be exposed to in other situations.

Through careful supervision, full training and good practice, we aim to ensure that accidents are avoided and that risks are reduced to manageable and acceptable levels. We fully risk assess all activities completed during Forest School sessions.

Fire at Forest School

If a fire is lit at our Forest School, it is always supervised by a Forest School Leader. Fires will never be left unattended. Safe fire practice is always adhered to. There will always be a water bucket next to the fire.

Children are taught and reminded of the fire circle rules from their first visit to Forest School.

Forest School Leaders and other adults are aware of the following when cooking and eating at Forest School:

- Open fire cooking is only permissible in the designated areas.
- Everyone should wash/sanitize their hands before handling food and drink.
- All food is stored in appropriate containers.
- Any dietary requirements are noted and catered for.
- Food will be cooked correctly.

Tools

The safety of all participants is of paramount importance. Participants ensure that tools are used safely by adopting the following:

- Tools are stored correctly in school and checked after each session.
- Rules are set out clearly at the beginning of the tool use session.
- Leaders ensure that tool talks are given before any tools are used.
- Children are supervised at all times whilst using tools of any description.
- Inappropriate use of tools will not be tolerated and will result in immediate withdrawal from the task.

Dealing with strangers, members of the public and dogs

All of the Aquinas Trust Forest School sites are surrounded by a boundary line and are in a secure area. However, there is always the possibility of these measures being breached. The following procedures will be adopted:

Children will be informed to never approach any person or animal (living or dead) within the forest or school grounds.



Staff will look for dog/animal owner and ask for its removal. If the dog is stray, the situation will be risk assessed and it may be determined by staff that children should be taken indoors until the dog is under control.

Children will be told to inform a member of staff who will challenge any stranger on the site.

First Aid

Forest School Leaders are trained in First Aid. A First Aid Kit is always available on the Forest School site. In cases of minor injury, such as cuts and grazes the Forest School Leader will administer first aid and will record this according to their own Academy's procedures.

Emergency Procedures

It is vital that emergency procedures are adhered to. These are in place to safeguard pupils and adults alike. Each Forest School leader follows their own Academy's Emergency Procedures

Insurance

Insurance for activities within Forest School are included within the school's insurance policy.