



## FOREST SCHOOL POLICIES & PROCEDURES

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Forest School is an integral part of Cuan na Gaillimhe CNS and Forest School activities must be in line with the school's Health & Safety Policy in addition to the following policies and procedures specific to our Forest School activities:

### 2 POLICY FOR FOREST SCHOOL VOLUNTEERS

- All Forest School volunteers must be Garda vetted.
- All volunteers must have some experience of working with children.
- All volunteers must read and become familiar with all procedures and policies relating to Forest Schools.
- Volunteers will work under the supervision and guidance of the Forest School Leader and will not be given responsibilities beyond their capabilities or role.

### 3 DAILY OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

Seasonal risk assessments will be conducted and due consideration of any changes or risks that the site has undergone will be noted. A daily assessment will be undertaken on the day each week that the site will be in use.

#### BEFORE A SESSION BEGINS:

- A site risk assessment will be carried out by the forest school leader.
- A toileting area will be set up.
- Rucksacks collected from school

#### DURING A SESSION:

- Children reminded of boundaries (boundaries games and markings as necessary)
- Low ropes & tarps set up by adults.
- Adults supervise children free play session.
- Regular head counts will be taken by all adults.
- When necessary, dynamic risk assessments will be done by forest school leader.

#### AT THE END OF A SESSION:

- Tarps and ropes be taken down.
- Toileting area dismantled and ensure any waste removed or buried.

#### 4 WEATHER POLICY

We want children's first experiences of nature to be positive experiences. Given the fact that the children spend 2-3 hours in the forest, if sub-zero temperatures are forecast beyond 11am for our forest school day, Forest School will be cancelled. Forest school will also be cancelled when MET Eireann issues a weather warning.

With the above exceptions, Forest school will take place in all weathers except where weather poses a risk to safety. If there are thunder and lightning storms or high winds where there is a high risk of falling trees or branches the session will be cancelled.

Also, trips will be cancelled when more than 5mm of rain is forecasted in a 3-hour period along with a real feel temperature of less than 3 degrees.

- A rule of thumb is to check the site and consider safety if winds reach 25 mph, cancel session if winds reach 40 mph.
- Be aware that it is possible for tree limbs and branches to drop on any day.
- Check children's clothing before going out on cold days.
- Monitor children for wet clothes and change as necessary
- Carry bibi bag as part of first aid kit, can be used for warmth, protection if the need arises.
- If the children are getting too cold either warm them up through exercise or adding warm clothes

#### 5 CLOTHING POLICY

"There is no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing." Alfred Wainwright

Considering Forest School sessions will take place year round regardless of the weather (except in those occasions as stated in the weather policy) suitable clothing is necessary.

- Woolly hat/ Sun hat
- Gloves
- Jacket/ waterproof coat
- Fleece/Jumper
- Waterproof trousers/ Long trousers
- Spare socks
- Sturdy Footwear- Trainers/Wellies/Boots
- An emergency change of clothes and a carrier bag for dirty/wet clothing

*(This will be kept in the school and transported to Cappagh Park to be carried to our Forest School Site by children. If clothes were changed then parents/guardians will wash and return fresh set to school, otherwise, the teachers will bring clothes backs to school afterwards).*

- Due to the current concern about ticks in Ireland long sleeves and long legs are required for all.

## **6 ADULT CHILD RATIOS**

For Junior Infants, there must be a ratio of 1:6 for a Forest School session.

For Senior Infants, there must be a ratio of 1:8 for a Forest School session.

When children are using knives/saws the ratio is 1:3.

For 1<sup>st</sup> Class up, there must be a ratio of 1:12 for a Forest School session.

## **7 DAILY ROUTINE FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS**

A full list of materials packed is listed in school and packed on the day before or morning of the walk. Additionally other resources/materials will be carried depending on planned activities/games.

Sessions contain a mix of free play, exploration and a structured activity. The interests of the children and the dynamic of the group may lead to a change in plan for that day but appropriate risk assessments for the site and the activities are in place for any eventuality.

A cuckoo call is used to bring all children back to our central point- cuckoo's nest. Leader will make the call and children will respond while making their way back to the nest.

## **8 TOILETING PROCEDURE**

The toilet area is just on the edge of the boundaries near the cuckoo nest and a tarp will be constructed for the purposes of privacy. The Forest School Leader will discuss 'wild toilets.'

Toilet paper will be provided and as part of our Leave No Trace policy all waste will be removed from the site and any human waste will be buried. Water and soap will be provided for handwashing.

## **9 LUNCH PROCEDURE**

Food may only be eaten at snack time while sitting in our central nest, children are never allowed to bring food with them as we roam, for their own safety. Children will wash their hands before eating snack/lunch.

## **10 PROCEDURE FOR USE OF TOOLS & EQUIPMENT**

Tools should be checked for wear and tear before and after each session. The forest school leader will explain how to use individual tools. The forest school leader and/or volunteers adults will supervise their use. A specific area will be designated for the use of tools. Children will be seated in a circle at a safe distance from one another. The forest school leader will explain this distance as a 'knife space, saw space etc'. To prevent injury we maintain a safe distance from one another when using tools. If a person is

walking near you they announce this clearly so that you can stop using your tool temporarily. A walking zone will be established around this area and children will be asked not to walk through but around the circle.

When using tools the children direct all movement away from the body and face the blade down. When passing tools: say the person's name, engage eye contact and say 'I am passing the secateurs.' The tool is placed on the ground in front of the child receiving the tool ready to be picked up safely.

Whittling knives (Opinel) have a locking mechanism which will be opened and closed by an adult. Children are shown how to pass the knife appropriately from a sitting position to the adult. They do not move from the stone with their knife in hand. They do not pass to another child. Whittling is always done to the side and never in the middle of open leg position.

Tools: secateurs, bow saw, knives, mallets, loppers or hand drills.

Introducing a new tool: Explain safety features and emphasise that all movements should be made in the direction away from the body.

## 11 HEALTH AND SAFETY

Forest School sessions offer learning opportunities for children. Part of their purpose is to encourage participants to face new challenges and learn to take reasonable risks. In order to do that safely, the adults involved must know their role and ensure that the necessary risk assessments are carried out regularly and thoroughly. The following guidance for adults and children must be clearly understood by all concerned.

- No matter how many adults accompany Forest School sessions the person in charge is always the trained Forest School Leader. Teachers may also take charge of sessions.
- The Forest School Leader has overall duty of care for the participants in his/her charge, but all adults are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure participant are safe.
- The Forest School Leader is competent to lead the activity and is familiar with the site.
- All adult helpers must sign and date a form to show they have read this handbook and appropriate risk assessments and understand and agree to comply with the general operating procedures for Forest School.
- The Forest School Leader or Volunteer will carry the Emergency Bag, with: a. First-aid Kit; b. Essential survival equipment; c. A contact list for each participant undertaking the activities; d. The schools' telephone number; e. Site Emergency Plan.
- The Forest School Leader will always carry a mobile phone.
- In the event of an emergency, the Forest School Leader or other adult will contact the emergency services.
- The Forest School Leader is responsible to ensure that all risk assessments have been completed and appropriate safety measures are in place.
- The Forest School Leader will review the risk assessments before every session.
- The adult: child ratio's in Section 6 must be adhered to.
- Adequate child protection procedures are in place.

- Parents have signed consent forms.
- Arrangements have been made for the medical and special educational needs of children attending.
- All volunteers will be made aware of children with specific allergies (bee, wasp, food or penicillin).
- There is adequate and relevant insurance cover.
- The Forest School leader and volunteers have a copy of the emergency procedures, the names of everyone in the group and contact details for the next of kin.

## 12 FIRST AID

The Forest School Leader has achieved competence in Remote Emergency Care (Level 2)

A First Aid Kit is carried at all times. The Forest School Leader has undertaken training in Outdoor First Aid (Level 2) and is responsible for first aid at Forest Schools. An emergency first aid bag that contains first aid supplies is carried to all Forest School sessions. The forest school leader is responsible for carrying any medication that must be taken by a child. Those children with asthma or diabetes will carry their own medication at all times in line with school policy. The first aid bag is regularly checked and restocked. Included in the emergency ruck sack:

Emergency contact details and relevant medical notes

Accident Book and pen

Toilet Paper in plastic bag

Emergency Fire Blanket

First Aid Kit: sterile gauze (wound) pads, crepe bandages (1 large/ 1 small), alcohol swabs, standard plasters, vinyl gloves, adhesive dressings, plaster roll, cotton wool, triangular bandages, ice pack, inhaler (blue), foil blanket, paramedic shears, Sam splint, cpr face mask, baby wipes, disinfectant hand gel, whistle, torch, spare water bottle, chocolate, glucose gel.

A mobile phone is carried by the Forest School Leader at all times, in the case of contacting the emergency services or the parent/guardian of a child.

In an emergency, first response is for one adult to call 999/112 while the Forest School Leader treats the person with First Aid.

See Site Emergency Plan for numbers, grid reference and location.

All accidents and incidents will be recorded in the appropriate book.

### 13 EMERGENCY & SERIOUS INCIDENT PROCEDURE

In the unlikely event of a serious incident at the Forest School, we have the following procedure in place.

- Have the first aider assess the situation and treat the patient as needed.
- Gather the rest of the group out of harm's way and have them waiting in a safe place supervised by adult volunteers.
- Phone the emergency services if needed. Dial 112 or 999. Always have a charged a mobile phone at the sessions, ensuring that there is signal on site and make sure there is easy access of ambulances if needed.

**Location: Cappagh Park, Cappagh Road, Knocknacarra**

- Leader stays with the patient if they need to go to the hospital while 2 adult volunteers stay with the rest of the group

**Local Medical Facilities: Cappagh Road Surgery, Knocknacarra, Galway, Tel: 091-591133**

- Phone parent/guardian and inform them of the situation.
- Retain any tool, implement or rope etc. that was involved in the incident, to be left untouched and evaluated later.
- Incident must be reported in the incident book and any incident that may need 24 hours or more hospital stay may need to be reported to the HSE.
- First aid kits must be replenished.

### 14 MISSING CHILD PROCEDURE

Safety measures should be put into place to ensure this does not happen, such as:

- Every child knows a call and response and when they hear the call then they know to respond and return to the circle (cuckoo call).
- Each child knows the boundaries, all participants are aware of the area and are familiar with it.
- Adults can see the boundaries at all times, or areas are designated for this purpose.
- Low ratio of children to adult and each adult will be aware of the presence of their group.
- However, in the event of a child found to be missing after a head count all children will be called and gathered together.
- At least one adult will remain with the children while the other adults will begin a search of the immediate area calling for a response.
- Once this has been completed if the child is still missing the Gardaí will be called and the parents notified.
- The remaining children will be escorted back to Cappagh Park by at least two adult volunteers.

- The forest school leader will remain on site and await the Gardaí.

Additionally, children will have an information card attached with the contact of the school mobile/landline.

In front of first aid kit, there will be a photo of each child in their typical outdoor clothing to assist with search.

## 15 BEHAVIOUR POLICY

The Forest School Behaviour will be distributed to parents. Parents/ guardians will be required to complete the consent form prior to the first forest school session. The completed form will include the child's medical information as well as consent for the child to participate in the Forest School activities.

## 16 BENEFIT RISK ASSESSMENT

Cuan na Gaillimhe CNS Forest School in Barna Woods aims to support the child's self-esteem, sense of adventure and independence in their exploration of a natural environment.

To enable this, the Forest School Leader will apply a five-step approach to risk assessment for all Forest School activities:

1. Look for hazards.
2. Decide who may be harmed and how.
3. Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing controls are adequate or whether more should be put in place.
4. Record findings, including daily amendments to existing risk assessments based on site visits or observations
5. Review assessments on a regular basis and revise if necessary.

### Before each session the Forest School Leader will undertake

- Pre-visit checks of the Forest School site
- An Activity Risk/Benefit Assessment will be completed for Forest School activities.
- All staff and volunteers will receive and have read the relevant site and activity risk assessments prior to each session.
- Ensure legal guidelines regarding off-site activities, such as adequate insurance and parental consent forms are met.
- Weather conditions will be checked, and Forest School sessions will be cancelled if weather conditions are deemed hazardous.

### At the site:

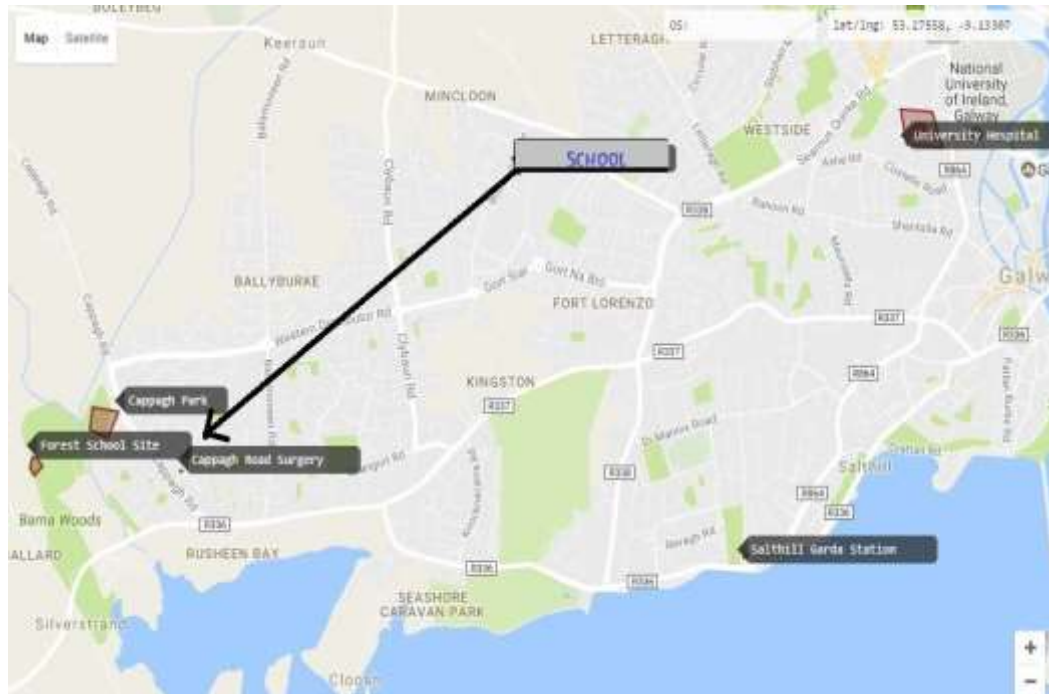
- Make staff, volunteers and children aware of potential hazards. Involve all parties in risk assessment when appropriate or as part of learning.
- Ensure that all staff, volunteers and children are aware of the emergency procedures for the Forest School site.
- Teach children relevant skills and safety protocol when using hand tools

## Climbing Trees

Children will be allowed to climb trees, adhering to the following safety points:

- **‘Wrist rule’.** Adult will let children know that it is only safe to bear weight on branches that are wider than their wrist
- **Big enough to get up...** Adult will let children know that it is only safe to climb as high as they are comfortable to climb back down. “Big enough to get up, big enough to get back down”.
- **Help-** Adult will let children know to call for adult help if needed. Adults will ensure they are supervising children who are climbing trees. Adults may assign an area for climbing if they are unable to keep an eye on all children climbing.
- **No Hoods/Scarfs-** Children will not be allowed to climb tree with hanging hoods or loose scarves
- **Wet Moss-** On days when climbing trees represents a hazard due to wet moss, trees will be out of bounds.

The Forest School Leader will carry out a site risk management assessment, daily site risk assessment, activity risk assessment and generic risk assessments regarding the use of tools and climbing trees. These are available with the written plans for each session. Risk assessments will identify the benefits of the activity/site, the hazard, the likelihood of that occurring and then put in place control measures to lower the likelihood of that happening. Any activity with a risk factor of 8 or higher, once control measures have been put in place, will be stopped immediately.



Emergency Services Locations



Site Specific Emergency Plan:

<b>Location</b>	Barna Woods, Galway
<b>Grid Reference</b>	M 24256 24147
<b>Lat/Long</b>	53.262270, -9.135220 53°15'44.2"N 9°08'06.8"W
<b>Entrance/Exit</b>	Cappagh Park, Cappagh Road, Galway
<b>Access</b>	Can drive to within 517 metres of forest school site (see below)
<b>Nearest Doctor</b>	Cappagh Road Surgery, Knocknacarra, Tel: 091-591133
<b>Nearest A &amp; E</b>	UCHG, Newcastle Road, Galway 091 544763 (Open 24hours) 5.7km (12 minutes)
<b>Phone Coverage</b>	In all areas
<b>Heli Landing Point</b>	University Hospital Galway, Seamus Quirke Road 5km (9 minutes)
<b>Garda Síochána</b>	Local Garda Station: Salthill Dalysfort Road, Salthill, Galway Phone (091) 514720 3.8km (7 minutes) Open 24hours



- Shortest Walking Route from Forest Site to Car Park

#### 16.1.1 DAILY CHECKLIST

- Pre-visit checks of the Forest School site to check for changes/ damage to site
- An Activity Risk/Benefit Assessment completed, checked and reviewed for Forest School activities. It has been read by leaders and volunteers
- Weather conditions will be checked, and Forest School sessions will be cancelled if weather conditions are deemed hazardous as per section 4
- Check that all equipment is clean and in good working order
- All equipment must be packed and checked off against activity plans

### 17 OUTDOOR EDUCATION/NATURE WALKS

Pupils in Junior and Senior Infant classes take part in outdoor education and nature walks which is different to Forest School.

Trips to the forest/playground involve a walk to their destination and a walk back to the school. The morning rhythm can contain a mix of free play, exploration and a structured activity such as circle/drama/story time in the forest. The interests of the children and the dynamic of the group may lead to a change in plan for that day but appropriate risk assessments for the site are in place.

The tools: secateurs, bow saw, knives, mallets, loppers or hand drills as mentioned in section 10 will not be used by Junior and Senior Infant classes during outdoor education/nature walks.

In all other areas, the Forest school policy will apply to the outdoor education walks/nature walks of Junior & Senior Infants but will be led by the class teacher and not a Forest School Leader and all references to Forest School Leader in the above policy can be replaced by classroom teacher in relation to the outdoor education walks/nature walks of Junior & Senior Infants.

### 18 OUTDOOR ACTIVITY STATEMENT

In Cuan na Gaillimhe CNS the outdoor component plays a strong role in the everyday delivery of the curriculum. Each day time is spent outside, either as part of a planned learning activity or outdoor play.

In the infant classes the child's play is not directly lead or organised by an adult in order to foster creative imagination. Time in the garden and forest gives the children access to natural resources (sticks, pine cones, sea shells, rocks, water, sand, tree bark, etc.) that have no defined play purpose and are open to investigation, creation, interpretation and imagination. For both older and younger children, being outside during forest school and/or play, gives opportunity to breathe fresh air, witness the marvels of the natural world, increases the child's power of observation, gives them an opportunity to run off extra energy and has a calming effect. The children elaborate on existing natural macro-structures and creations as they engage in using gross-motor movements and muscles,

working hard and generally in collaboration with classmates, which fosters communication, creativity, teamwork and problem-solving. Other benefits of this type of hard work are that it builds “will-forces” and resilience when faced with challenges; a skill that serves the children for the rest of their lives. Other times the children might engage in building tiny gnome homes or gnome villages at the base of trees. Building small structures utilises fine motor skills and provides opportunities for the children to imagine more intently by pretending that they are entering a fairy world and a magical realm.

Prior to and during outdoor activities the school and teaching staff are continuously considering the correct level of supervision. There is no simple answer as to what the ‘correct’ level of supervision is. But as a school we guide ourselves and our judgement by taking the following influencing factors into account: age, maturity and number of children as well as the topography of the area that requires supervision. Supported by Rules for National Schools and The Education Act 1998 we lean on guiding rules that; the degree of supervision by a teacher should be that of ‘reasonable care’ i.e. equate to the supervision levels of a careful parent.

The teachers, interns and volunteers take all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of pupils and supervise the children during school time and school activities. It is important to distinguish between a ‘risk’ and a ‘hazard’:

A risk is something you can judge, how high can you go and still safely jump off the swing and fly through the air. This is a ‘good risk’ where children learn ‘physical literacy’.

A hazard is something you cannot judge, is the swing pivot almost worn right through and about to give way unexpectedly? This is ‘bad’ and must be avoided by good management practices.

*London Play Briefing, November 2007 (updated October 2010) Risk in Play*

While teachers, interns and volunteers keep a close and caring eye on all children and their safety, we also allow for manageable obstacles getting in their way. While (still closely supervising and ready to help if needed) we are walking to the forest, playing or engaging in activities, children may trip, stumble, fall, and hurt themselves. As a school we categorise this as ‘Good risks’. Good risks in play provision are those that engage and challenge children, and support their growth, learning and development. We trust the children’s ability to manage themselves in our presence and that it helps them strengthen their focus, build up strength and resilience, and develop self-confidence.

To make these outdoor experiences the richest possible, it is important that the children are prepared and properly dressed for the weather.

- In the Infants classes the class teacher and interns ensure that all children are wearing appropriate outdoor clothes provided from home. The class teacher will inform parents/guardians in case the child does not have appropriate clothing available for outdoor school activities.
- From 1st to 6th class, the class teacher will remind children to look at the weather before they go out and to dress accordingly. Parents are responsible for their children having appropriate outdoor clothes available in school for activities during the week – including forest school.

If parents/guardians feel their child cannot participate in the daily outdoor activity, we ask parents to evaluate whether or not your child is healthy enough to come to school that day. If children are well enough to come to school she/he should be well enough to participate in all of the daily activities.

We observe National weather warnings as well as follow our school Forest School Weather policy for any planned outdoor trips.

## 19 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

Cuan na Gaillimhe CNS will take all reasonable steps to implement this policy and procedures. This policy shall be reviewed every two years or when the occurrence of a severe accident or a new law induces the need for a review.

## 20 RATIFICATION

This policy will be communicated to staff and the school community as appropriate and will be subjected to regular review. In accordance with the systematic cycle of review of policies adopted in Cuan na Gaillimhe NS, it will be reviewed initially after one year and then every two years, unless there is a compelling reason to review it earlier.

This policy was reviewed by the Board of Management of Cuan na Gaillimhe CNS on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Chairperson of the Board of Management



**To be reviewed: June 2022**