



# New Forest Small School

## PLAY POLICY

Member of Staff Responsible	Head Teacher
Regularity of Review	Annual
This Version Dated	27/09/22
Next Review Due	27/09/23

### RATIONALE

The NFSS recognises the importance of play within our setting. Children enjoy extended periods of outdoor time in order to explore the varied environments and resources in which we provide.

As play is one of the most valuable aspects of a child's life, we are dedicated to protecting that right. Play is the cornerstone for effective learning. It promotes positively towards children's health, wellbeing, happiness and education. This is why The New Forest Small school is dedicated to maintaining a child's right to play in a creative environment, where the risk/reward balance provides the best opportunity for a valuable and enriched learning experience.

Our school recognises that children will naturally create and/or seek out challenging situations; while making the most of their play some children may have accidents, get dirty or wet or upset. Safeguarding is crucial, but concern about minor risk should not outweigh the enormous benefits that independent play brings for children's education, empowerment, mental health and wellbeing. We are dedicated to ensure that the balance of risk/reward runs in line with our safety policies at all times.

Good practice is modelled by adults at all times, showing children that the world in which we live should be cared for. Involving children in site checks and risk assessment, off site litter picking, play equipment/garden design and maintenance help support this sense of ownership, care and personal/group safety throughout the school.

We believe that we can make a positive contribution to children's lives by valuing their inherent desire to learn through play. We provide a broad range of opportunities within the school's garden as well as the surrounding off site forest areas during the school day.

The 'Forest Play and independent exploration' aspect of our setting is an integral part of the school curriculum and it's contribution to the development of 'the whole child' is highly valued. This approach enables children to be independent, self-motivated, courageous and considerate. It helps

them to develop all the skills in Part 1 of our Learning for Life Framework, including self-awareness and mental wellbeing, confidence, social skills, motivation and free thinking, as well as physical skills (Part 2).

Outdoor play and exploration provides a valuable opportunity for the children to explore and experience the world around them through free play, independent learning and practical activities. Our outdoor space includes a wide range of open-ended resources and 'loose parts' provision in order to facilitate and extend children's exploration. These resources are carefully selected to provide opportunities for exploration as well as promoting creative thinking and developing problem solving skills.

We are an 'all weather' school. Children go out in all weathers, except in extreme circumstances, such as stormy conditions, high wind or lightning. Our time in the forest as well as our garden spaces makes use of open-ended resources to stimulate creative thinking and develop problem solving skills.

Environmental Considerations are of high priority to us and environmental awareness is at the heart of our ethos. Wherever possible, environmentally friendly products and recycled materials should be used when appropriate.

### Safeguarding Children During Play

We as a school ensure that we do our very best to avoid children coming to any physical or emotional harm by carefully managing the play opportunities that we provide.

As a body of staff we believe that an adult's attitude towards, and understanding of, children's play behaviour will have a significant effect on the quality of the play opportunities offered within the school. The New Forest Small school will therefore seek out training opportunities and support research among its staff so that they are confident to facilitate children's freely chosen, self-directed play as well as ensuring a high ratio of first aid training amongst the staff.

A specific off site first aid/emergency kit is taken each session. Included in our 'safety backpack' is a comprehensive range of items for ensuring the safety/welfare of the group as well as the contact details for each child who is taking part in the session.

Emergency procedures are in place and are practiced regularly.

(See Procedures)

We strive to support pupils in developing responsibility for themselves and others. This encourages early risk management strategies that ensure that pupils start to consider the impact of their actions on themselves and on others.

Everyone involved in outdoor activities should familiarise themselves with relevant policies, including health and safety, risk assessment of sites and activities and adhere to the guidance

contained in them. We regard safety and good practice as extremely important and it is the responsibility of individual staff and volunteers to ensure general safety during working. Our Forest School sessions are either within our onsite garden area or in the New Forest National Park within a specified distance and area surrounding the school.

The staff to child ratio is subject to NFSS discretion, as well as being based on age/ability of children to include a qualified First Aid trained lead member of staff. All sessions and activities will adhere to the recommendations in the NFSS risk assessments. Lead members of staff involved with on site/off site activities must plan their activities with the consideration of all individual's needs and behaviours in mind.

## **LEGAL CONTEXT**

The NFSS take full responsibility to ensure safety procedures are followed during school time in accordance with the Health and Safety Policy and Safeguarding Policy.

If things go wrong?

Key message: 'Accidents happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.' The NFSSs deal with risk responsibly, sensibly and proportionately. In practice, serious accidents of any kind are very unlikely. On the rare occasions when things go wrong, we as a school will respond to the incident properly and conduct a balanced, transparent review.

While maintaining compliance with health and safety law and safeguarding children's welfare is of paramount importance, this does not mean that we will eliminate even the most trivial of risks. We will ensure that sensible and proportionate steps are taken and that all decisions taken in relation to outdoor play are discussed with the staff and recorded in writing.

## **PRINCIPLES**

The NFSS strives to provide an enriched and inspiring outdoor environment for our children within the school, as well as during off site activities. All equipment within the school grounds has been created or provided mindfully to allow the students an independent and creative outlet for investigation and learning.

The resources and equipment provided are built/resourced/selected within our guidelines for health and safety, whilst at the same time balancing the crucial need for risk/reward within children's play.

## **PROCEDURES**

All equipment is continually assessed by staff. Children are also encouraged to report any possible risks as part of their self-awareness/regulation skills.

All safety/maintenance issues are reported using the correct H&S form. (stored in the kitchen )  
The members of staff responsible for outdoor maintenance/provision (Nicholas Alp & Alex James) are alerted to any issue immediately. Equipment which may require lengthy maintenance will become 'off limits' to all students until the problem is rectified.

*Break times/outdoor playtime:*

Secondary: All secondary pupils must sign out at the back door when going off site for Break/Play times.

Boundaries:

Lower Secondary: Have agreed forest boundaries in which they are authorised to play within.

Designated area: Forest area parallel with the rear school boundary. Between Stream and Golf Course site.

Upper/Year 11: Are authorised to walk a 'self-regulated' distance from the school.

Designated area: Boundaries have been agreed and noted by children/staff. This includes independent access to the village (Lyndhurst)

Upper/Lower/Middle Primary: Are to be signed in/out by a member of staff at the forest gate. Head counts are required as well as constant supervision.

Designated area: All Primary children are required to play within 'normal boundaries' unless specified otherwise. This area has been defined and agreed on by staff. The children are asked to 'walk the boundaries' with an adult, so they are clear on the rules. All child based access to the stream/wet areas must be carried out under close and constant adult supervision.

Kindergarten: To remain within boundaries set by marker cones at all times - unless specified otherwise by the lead member of staff.

(See forest play/break/lunchtime risk assessment)

**FIRE ALARM:** Should the alarm sound whilst in the forest (near the school) all children will be called to the gate and signed/counted back on to school grounds.

Children in the garden when the alarm sounds will be called to the designated fire assembly point.  
(5 - a - side pitch)

All children will be checked off on the attendance registers.

Staff numbers within the garden or off site to include a qualified First Aid trained lead member of staff. All sessions and activities will adhere to the recommendations in the NFSS risk assessments. Lead members of staff involved with on-site/off site activities must plan their activities with the consideration of all individual's needs and behaviours in mind.

Trees and outdoor areas whilst off site are checked and assessed on a 'rolling basis' by the lead member of staff. Climbing tree suitability and height allowed for climbing, will depend on

age/stage/ability of children participating. NFSS guidelines state that a child should be no more than 1x their own height at any point (standing on their own head). Whenever required all children must be able to climb up/down structures/trees unaided. No child will be encouraged to climb beyond their own ability.

No child should be lifted/carried down from trees/structures.

Water play/exploration under close supervision. Children are encouraged to check for depth - if you cannot see the bottom, you don't go in.

New Forest wildlife/livestock and dogs are to be observed but not approached. Under circumstances where fast moving livestock may occur, the lead member of staff will blow the whistle twice which signifies the children to hide behind a tree/obstacle for cover.

The NFSS promotes the respect of all living beings. We work with the children to negotiate our unique forest environment with care and understanding for all it's inhabitants. We are mindful to follow and maintain the conservation/preservation/standards of conduct of the Forestry Commission/New Forest District Council/Lyndhurst County Council.

Crossing of roads must be carried out as a whole group wave, with several members of supporting staff in the case of Primary children.

Children are encouraged to check the road before crossing.

No member of staff should halt the flow of traffic - The road should be clear on crossing and carried out as a whole group only.

Fire: fires are lit on site during observation festivals/celebrations.

(See Risk assessment)

Off site equipment:

Carried by Lead member of staff:

First Aid kit/Grab Rope/Mobile Phone/water/eye wash/anti-bac wipes/student contact details/class register (on phone)/Personalised student medication (eg auto injector ) if required/OS Map/Map with grid reference ( duplicated copy in office for emergency reference )/whistle.

Map: This shows the area/distance in which the school may cover during local outings/walks. These outings do not include vehicle transport.

The grid reference and duplicate maps, allow staff at school/off site to identify an area in which the walking group might be in should an accident/emergency occur.

The designated walking boundary from the school is a 1-mile radius.

This is clearly marked on the OS map included in our off site equipment, as well as on our corresponding emergency/accident grid reference maps.

Lead staff are encouraged to have access to 'what3words' on their phone for exact location pinpointing if required.

Striking the right balance DOES mean:

- Weighing up risks and benefits when designing and providing play opportunities and activities

- Focussing on and controlling the most serious risks, and those that are not beneficial to the play activity or foreseeable by the user
- Recognising that the introduction of risk might form part of play opportunities and activity
- Understanding that the purpose of risk control is not the elimination of all risk, and so accepting that the possibility of even serious or life-threatening injuries cannot be eliminated, though it should be managed
- Ensuring that the benefits of play are experienced to the full

Striking the right balance DOES NOT mean:

- All risks must be eliminated or continually reduced  
Every aspect of play provision must be set out in copious paperwork as part of a misguided security blanket
- Detailed assessments aimed at high-risk play activities are used for low-risk activities  
Ignoring risks that are not beneficial or integral to the play activity, such as those introduced through poor maintenance of equipment
- Mistakes and accidents will not happen

### **MONITORING AND REVIEW**

This policy is subject to review annually.

All outdoor equipment, which covers our continuous provision on site is subject to weekly checks by all members of staff. The large structural pieces of equipment, including climbing trees are checked for damage/wear and tear/maintenance requirements each term. Any and all Health and safety concerns surrounding equipment, fixtures and landscaping within the school grounds should be reported via filling out the correct H&S form. This can be found in the office.

In line with the ethos and curriculum overview of the NFSS, outdoor activity/equipment is subject to change at any time in order to meet the needs of the children. The inclusion of changes in activities or outdoor equipment must be informally reviewed and assessed for safety by the lead member of staff at the time of change. This includes suitability of climbing of trees or playing in shallow water etc whilst on off site excursions.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the NFSS Health and Safety Policy

See all on/off site Risk assessment documents in office.