

# PLAY AND ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING POLICY



Play is a central part of young children's learning. Through play children explore ideas, feelings and relationships. Play can push out the limits of what is possible and help children to be creative, flexible and imaginative. Rich play promotes control, mastery, confidence and well-being.

*Learning for Life: Early Education, 2002*

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## **Rationale for Play**

In Pond Park Primary School we recognise the importance of Activity and Play Based Learning as a fundamental part of the process of learning in Foundation Stage and Key Stage One.

One of the most important aims of Education is to help each child to achieve his/her fullest potential in all areas of life, not solely academically. Play Based Learning can be a very useful tool in the fulfilment of this aim.

The principles below underpin our Early Years Curriculum and guide our planning. Well planned and well resourced play activities which allow for progression in a child's thinking and understanding can provide the context in which these principles become the reality for all of our children.

## **10 Common Principles of Early Years Education**

1. The best way to prepare children for their adult life is to give them what they need as children.
2. Children are whole people who have feelings, ideas and relationships with others, and who need to be physically, mentally, morally and spiritually healthy.
3. Subjects such as mathematics and art cannot be separated; young children learn in an integrated way and not in neat, tidy compartments.
4. Children learn best when they are given appropriate responsibility, allowed to make errors, decisions and choices, and respected as autonomous learners.
5. Self-discipline is emphasised. Indeed, this is the only kind of discipline worth having. Reward systems are very short-term and do not work in the long-term. Children need their efforts to be valued.
6. There are times when children are especially able to learn particular things.
7. What children can do (rather than what they cannot do), is the starting point of a child's education.
8. Imagination, creativity and all kinds of symbolic behaviour (reading, writing, drawing, dancing, music, mathematical numbers, algebra, role play and talking), develop and emerge when conditions are favourable.
9. Relationships with other people (both adults and children), are of central importance in a child's life.
10. Quality education is about three things; the child, the context in which learning takes place, and the knowledge and understanding which the child develops and learns.

*Tina Bruce*  
*"Early Childhood Education"*

The Northern Ireland Curriculum states that:-

“Children learn best when learning is interactive, practical and enjoyable”.

“It is important that children have opportunities to be actively involved in practical, challenging Play Based Learning in a stimulating environment.”

“Have opportunities to initiate play which capitalises on intrinsic motivates and natural curiosity.”

“Are actively involved in planning, carrying out and reflecting their work.”

Therefore, our aims are as follows:

### **FOUNDATION STAGE**

- To promote the generic skills framework as recommended by the NI Curriculum Review.
- To promote play as a pleasurable, worthwhile activity.
- To develop self-esteem, self confidence, independence and a positive attitude to learning.
- To encourage creativity, self expression and imaginative thinking.
- To develop motor skills.
- To enhance language development.
- To foster social and emotional skills necessary for integration within the classroom and beyond.
- To stimulate curiosity and foster skills of observation, investigation, problem solving and planning in all areas of the curriculum.
- To allow teachers to observe children and record differing needs and attitudes.
- To increase social awareness through role play and co-operative play.
- To give children the opportunity to investigate the differing properties of varying materials.
- To reinforce or introduce topics from across the curriculum.
- To promote children’s thinking skills and personal capabilities.
- To enable children to develop physical confidence and competence.
- To develop partnerships and community links.

## **ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING AT KEY STAGE ONE**

Activity Based Learning at Key Stage One builds on the active, hands-on learning that has taken place in the Foundation Stage. It is linked to topic/theme and allows children to engage in a variety of focused play activities AND independent child initiated games and activities, eg role play, construction, table top, art and design. Primary 4 have a greater emphasis on focused activities.

The aims for Foundation Stage still remain and in addition, the points below:-

- To provide opportunities for adults and children to plan learning together.
- To enable children to develop their own ideas and interests.
- To create opportunities for children to make choices and decisions.
- To develop thinking skills and personal capabilities.
- To encourage children to plan, do and review for themselves and reflect on practice.
- To develop a language for learning.
- To provide opportunities for sharing and demonstrating learning.
- To facilitate teacher observations to inform future planning.

## **THINKING SKILLS AND PERSONAL CAPABILITIES**

“At the heart of the NI Curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of pupils’ skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society. By engaging pupils in active learning contexts across all areas of the Curriculum, your teachers can develop pupils’ personal and interpersonal skills, capabilities and dispositions, and their ability to think both creatively and critically.”

*(ref: Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities in Key Stages 1 and 2 – CCEA 2007)*

Play provides a wide variety of experiences which will help to develop the children’s knowledge, skills and understanding. During play children will be given opportunities to:

- Manage information
- Think, solve problems and make decisions
- Be creative
- Work with others
- Self manage

Furthermore, Learning through Play at Key Stage 1 states that play:-

1. Develops:

- The dispositions to learn
- Self-esteem
- Self-confidence
- Positive attitudes to learning
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Motivation
- Concentration
- Reflection

2. Encourages children to:

- Make informed and responsible decisions
- Self-evaluate
- Manage their learning
- Transfer learning to real-life situations

## **LINKS WITH AREAS OF LEARNING**

Children learn best when learning is connected. Our children will experience all areas of learning during play – arts, language and literacy, mathematics and numeracy, PDMU, PE, WAU and ICT.

We plan play through a topic-based approach because it provides opportunities to develop learning across the Curriculum. All topics will meet Curriculum requirements to ensure continuity and progression.

## **THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Our classrooms are situated around a shared resource area. Both are used for Play and Activity Based Learning. We believe a well organised, stimulating and secure environment enables children to become confident, active learners.

We strive to ensure that materials and equipment are readily available so that children can select what is needed for their activity. This enables adults to spend more time interacting during play. Clear labelling allows the children to select and return equipment, further promoting independent learning.

Our learning environment reflects the learning taking place within the classrooms.

We consider:

1. The Physical Environment:
  - Bright, stimulating
  - Mixture of teachers'/children's work
  - Print rich environment
  - Flexibility with space and equipment
2. The Cognitive Environment:
  - Active involvement and enjoyment
  - Shared awareness of learning intentions and success criteria
  - Thinking and problem solving
3. Social/Emotional Environment:
  - Children feel happy, safe and secure
  - Positive relationships and attitudes
  - Successes celebrated and shared
  - Everyone's efforts valued

4. Learning/Teaching Environment:

- Variety of strategies used
- Stimulating and challenging activities
- Activities linked to children's interests and experiences

The children have access to the following areas:

**Foundation Stage**

- Role play
- Creative
- Construction
- Sand
- Water
- Writing
- Small world
- Table top
- Play dough
- Book corner
- ICT
- Covered area (outdoor play)

**Key Stage One**

- ICT
- Library area
- Writing materials
- Joining materials
- Writing/drawing aids
- Recyclable materials
- Construction
- Table top games, eg Literacy/Numeracy activities
- Role play
- Water/sand if required
- Art and Design materials
- Small world

## **ROLE OF THE ADULT**

The quality of adult intervention is a critical factor in the quality of learning which is experienced by the child. The adult's role is that of a: -

- Provider
- Facilitator
- Participant
- Observer
- Evaluator

Foundation and Key Stage One teachers and classroom assistants therefore strive to:-

- Plan for and provide appropriate activities/experiences
- Organise and provide a stimulating environment and be aware of the potential learning
- Be a participant who initiates, encourages, questions, models, joins in, stimulates and extends the learning
- Observe children carefully, assess their progress, evaluate the learning taking place and use information to inform future planning.

## **PLANNING**

Planning underpins effective learning and teaching and takes account of the developmental stage of the children as well as their previous experiences. Our planners are flexible and can be changed or added to as the children's responses and outcomes of activities are observed. Planners are evaluated to ensure effective assessment.

As children progress through Foundation Stage and Key Stage One they are involved in the planning process. We have adopted the Plan-Do-Review process which fosters good thinking habits and develops more independent learners. Children's planning ideas are recorded. These ideas inform the teachers 4-6 week play/topic planner.

Planners are outlined below.

### **Foundation Stage**

Teachers use a topic based 4-6 weekly planner indicating learning intentions and activities/experiences for each learning area. Teachers also consider the adult role, any action required for specific children, spontaneous responses worth noting and an evaluation.

### **Key Stage One**

Teachers use a topic based planner with activities and learning intentions clearly explained. Suggested resources are listed with room for free choice within activity. The adult role with key questions is outlined to ensure the staff involved can easily identify the learning potential within each activity. Action can be noted for any child or group of children to be taken, including differentiation within activity.

The children's spontaneous responses are noted on a separate observation and evaluation sheet during each session to inform future planning or further learning potential. The activities are evaluated and success criteria discussed and noted.

## **MANAGEMENT OF ACTIVITY/PLAY BASED LEARNING**

### **Foundation Stage**

- Whole class introduction and planning time with adults.
- Freedom of choice: children choose where they want to play.
- There may be one or two focus activities the teacher will want every child to experience.
- Children may change places during play sessions.
- Children are informed when they have only five minutes left.
- When possible, children are allowed to keep unfinished pieces of work to the following day.
- Before or after tidying up, children are brought together to review their play.
- Records are kept of play activities, eg photographs, wall displays etc.
- Children tidy up the play areas with assistance when needed.

### **Key Stage One**

- Bring class together, ie. beginning of topic, to plan, explain activities on offer and potential learning.
- Identify one or two focus activities for some children and have a selection of independent play based tasks for remainder of the class.
- Involve children with the setting up of activities.
- Children are informed when they have only five minutes left.
- Children tidy up materials with assistance when required.
- Children demonstrate/discuss the learning (plenary).
- Children display their learning.

### **Time Allocated to Play/Activity Based Learning in the resource areas:**

#### **Foundation Stage**

The children in Foundation Stage are engaged in a sustained period of play each day.

#### **Key Stage One**

Year 3 teachers have dedicated time on their timetable of two sessions per week.  
Year 4 teachers have one session.

## **MANAGING SPACE AND RESOURCES**

The organisation will encourage independence. By giving children this responsibility adults can spend longer periods of time interacting with children during their play session. The following points are considered.

1. Clearly defined areas are created using a variety of moveable storage units and furniture.
2. Clear labelling enables children to select and return their own equipment.
3. The resource area, classroom and outdoor covered area will be used, maximising the use of available space.
4. Continual audit of resources and the involvement of children and parents contributing to our resources (“real life” resources).
5. The resources reflect the needs of the learners and change to accommodate progression.

## **OBSERVATION, ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION AND RECORDING**

### **Foundation Stage**

Observations will be a regular feature of classroom practice. They provide much information about the children and the quality of play provision. Careful observations help teachers to:-

- Assess the development of the child's physical, social and cognitive skills
- Monitor the child's progress
- Plan to meet the needs, interests and ability of the child
- Assess the appropriateness of the activities provided and the learning that is taking place
- Ensure that the child is experiencing a wide variety of experiences and not confining his/her play to a limited number of areas
- Know when extra materials are required to supplement or extend the play
- Assess the suitability of the equipment and materials being used
- Provide information for parents and other agencies involved in meeting a child's needs

A flexible approach will be adopted which allows for both planned and spontaneous observations. Observations are used to inform planning.

Observations should include information about the child's:-

- Physical, social, emotional and cognitive development
- Thinking skills and Personal Capabilities
- Use of language in a range of situations
- Level of involvement and concentration
- Desire to plan his/her activities

### **Key Stage 1**

Learning is assessed during play in a variety of ways:-

- The teacher and classroom assistant
- Peers
- Self-assessment
- Observation
- Discussion and reflection

Assessment is an integral part of the learning process. It enables teachers to:-

- Monitor progress
- Plan future work
- Set tasks to use certain skills
- Assess the appropriateness of the activities provided and the learning that is taking place
- Know when extra materials are required to supplement or extend the play
- Assess the suitability of the equipment and materials being used
- Self-assessment
- Self-evaluation

### OBSERVATION AT KS1

This is primarily based on:-

- The learning intentions
- The agreed success criteria
- Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

Observations should take account of the child's:-

- Cognitive, social and emotional development

They can be planned or spontaneous.

### **Providing Equality of Opportunity and Access for all Children**

We are aware that pupils have different experiences, interests and strengths, which will influence the way in which they learn. In planning Play/Activity Based Learning, we are aware of the requirements of the Equal Opportunities legislation and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order. We endeavour to have high expectations for all pupils and will aim to provide suitably challenging opportunities for them to participate in activities fully and effectively.

This is the Play and Activity Based Learning Policy  
as agreed by the Foundation and Key Stage One staff.

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