

# Learning through Play Policy



Ballyhenry Primary School

"Achieving Success in a Caring Environment"

Agree Date	Review Date	Person Responsible
2017	2020	Mrs Knocker Miss Collins

## ***Teaching and Learning through Play***

Play is a central part of young children's learning. Through play, children explore ideas, feelings and relationships. They take risks, make mistakes and try things without fear of failure. Play can push out the limits of what is possible and help children to be creative, flexible and imaginative for sustained periods. Rich play promotes control, mastery, confidence and wellbeing.

Learning for life: Early Education 2002

### **Policy Statement**

In Ballyhenry Primary School, we believe that play based activities or activity based learning is essential to the development of the whole child.

One of the most important aims of Education is to help each child fulfil his/her potential in all areas of life, not just academically. Learning Through Play can be a useful tool in the fulfilment of this aim. Through play activities, children are encouraged to use their initiative, develop self-esteem and confidence, explore, be imaginative and creative, socialise with peers and other adults and through experiencing success develop positive attitudes towards school and learning.

In Ballyhenry Primary School, opportunities will be provided for both free and teacher directed play, taking account of the requirements of N.I. Curriculum and developing good practice.

### ***Rationale for Play***

- Children learn and develop through Play.
- Play is a motivating factor for learning.
- Adult help and participation are necessary for learning to progress.

Play provides an opportunity for children to come to terms with themselves, their culture and language, with other people and the world, and to make sense of real life situations. Play provides opportunities for exploration, investigation and problem solving and for children to practice their developing skills. It also provides opportunities for them to represent their experiences and use what they have learned in different ways – through music, language, imaginative and creative activities. The role of the adult is crucial in supporting and extending children's play.

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 our children.

Progression in play reflects the observation and assessment of children's knowledge, skills and attitudes. Through our observations, assessment and professional judgement we gain valuable insights into how each child learns best. This information informs our planning to meet the needs of each individual. Progression comes as a result of understanding the interests, needs and experiences of the child. As Practitioners we must provide progression in the activities to meet the developmental needs of children.

*"Childhood play is the context for children's development and is fundamental to their growth and learning from infancy through adolescence, contributing to their physical, cognitive, social and emotional development."*

*(Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002)*

Janet Moyles states that:

*"Anyone who has observed play for any length of time will recognise that, for young children, play is a tool for learning and practitioners who acknowledge and appreciate this can, through provision, interaction and intervention in children's play ensure progression, differentiation and relevance in the curriculum. The sense of children actively seeking to construct this own view of the world and the contribution of quality interactions with other, both adults and children, is now widely accepted as a suitable approach to early years' curriculum."*

### **Aims of Play Based Learning**

"Play is the highest level of development. It is the spontaneous expression of thought and feeling. Play is never trivial - it is serious and clearly significant".

Froebel 1785 - 1852

Children learn to express their thoughts and feelings through play. They satisfy their natural curiosity, they explore, experiment and develop skills which will help them to come to terms with the 'real world'.

Play is a tool for finding out about the world and for acquiring the many skills which are expected from the child when he becomes an adult in our society.

Through well planned meaningful Purposeful Play in the Foundation/KS1 classroom children can increase their opportunities for language acquisition, and the appropriate social and cognitive behaviours.

Most young children readily engage in play and enjoy playing. At the same time play makes a major contribution to all aspects of children's development and learning.

## **Play is an effective and valuable approach to learning.**

Play provides opportunities for children to learn in a broad variety of ways -

- encourages them to listen and observe, to talk
- to explore, investigate
- experiment, increase and to draw and test their conclusions
- to foster curiosity of the world around them
- make decisions and express their ideas and feelings in many different ways
- to express their feelings and imaginations through drama
- to act out and come to term with experiences at home or with their friends or other adults
- to be solitary of play with others and develop their relationships
- to consolidate previous learning
- to be intensely involved and challenged in new learning

*What children are trying to do, through their play, is to make sense of the world around them.*

## ***Learning Environment***

When planning purposeful play, we aim to take account of each child's individual needs, interests and abilities by providing a pleasant, secure and stimulating environment.

Activities and resources which are both appropriate and challenging will develop individual abilities. Staff recognise the importance of praise, encouragement and guidance in the development of learning. We will take into account aspects of safety and the incorporation of basic safety guidelines in the learning environment. The children will be encouraged to play co-operatively and appropriately with the equipment.

## **Aims In The Foundation Stage**

At Ballyhenry Primary School, we recognise the importance of Play Based Learning as a fundamental process of learning in the Foundation Stage. Therefore we aim to:-

- Provide quality Play in a stimulating environment, which allows the children to develop and learn.
- To develop self-esteem, self-confidence, independence and a positive attitude to learning.
- Provide adequate planning, time and space for Play.
- To encourage creativity, self-expression and imaginative thinking.
- To foster social and emotional skills necessary for integration within the classroom and beyond.
- To stimulate curiosity and foster skills of observation, investigation and problem solving in all areas of the curriculum.
- To promote children's thinking skills and personal capabilities.
- Help children accept the teacher can take an active role in furthering the learning situation and promote physical, social and emotional development.
- Provide a holistic learning experience, covering a variety of skills giving first hand experiences and setting new challenges.
- Allow time for careful observation of children's Play to facilitate assessment and planning for progression and continuity, recognising differing needs and attitudes.

### **Aims at Key Stage One**

Activity Based Learning at Key Stage One builds on the practical, hands on learning which has taken place in the Foundation Stage. Primary Four place a greater emphasis on focused activities which are closely linked to topics. Activity Based Learning allows the children to be engaged in a range of teacher and child initiated activities, for example, role play, table top activities, art and design and Maths investigations.

The aims for play in the Foundation Stage still remain, but in addition to these, for Activity Based Learning we aim to :-

- Encourage children to learn in the company of others and provide opportunities for adults and children to plan and learn together.
- To encourage independence by giving children a degree of control over their learning and create opportunities for children to make choices and decisions.
- To enable children to develop their own ideas and interests.
- To develop thinking skills and personal capabilities.
- To provide opportunities for sharing and demonstrating learning.
- To encourage children to be inquisitive about their learning and be involved in the planning, performance and evaluation of an activity.

### **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.”

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

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

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

At Ballyhenry Primary School, through play, we aim to provide opportunities for:

- Language development through experiences.
- Transfer learning to real-life situations
- Social skills
- Making informed and responsible decisions
- Involvement in group play or observation
- Developing curiosity and creativity
- Emotional development
- Promotion of self-esteem and confidence
- Self-motivation
- Developing the dispositions to learn
- Dealing with feelings
- Imaginative and imitative play
- Learning to listen to others and follow direction
- Reflection and self-evaluation of work
- Innovation using equipment

To enhance proper progression in learning we will promote the acquisition and development of skills, concepts and attitudes associated with all areas of the curriculum. Regular monitoring and evaluation of these areas is essential as it enables the teacher to discover the children’s level of knowledge and understanding, ways of thinking, attitudes, language and communication skills and ability to play in a group.

## **Roles of Responsibility**

### **The role of the School Governors**

To ensure the Play policy is fully implemented throughout Foundation Stage and Key Stage One.

### **The role of the Principal**

To provide the funding for adequate resources and to ensure all staff are provided with suitable training.

### **The role of the Play Co-ordinator**

To ensure all members of the teaching staff have a copy of the Play policy, and understand its purpose. To provide adequate monitoring of Play and to report findings to the principal and staff. The co-ordinator also has direct responsibility to report to the Principal when resources need replacing and updating.

### **The role of the Teacher/Classroom Assistant**

The quality of adult intervention is crucial to the quality of learning which is experienced by the child. Therefore Foundation and Key Stage One staff strive to:-

- Support children's learning through planned play activities and spontaneous play.
- To plan and resource a challenging and stimulating environment which facilitates high quality play and to be aware of potential learning.
- To ensure that play provision and practice reflect the differing needs, interests and cultural backgrounds of individuals.
- To extend and develop children's language and communication in their play.
- To be a participant who initiates, encourages, models, joins in, stimulates and extends learning.
- To observe children carefully, assess their progress, evaluate the learning taking place and use information to inform future planning.

## **Planning**

Planning is key to effective learning and teaching and takes account of the developmental stage of the children as well as previous experiences. Our planners are flexible and can be adapted as children's learning is observed. Planners are evaluated to ensure progression throughout Foundation and Key Stage One.

As children progress through the school they are involved in the planning process. Their ideas are recorded and contribute to the teachers 6 week planner.

### **Foundation Stage**

Teachers use a topic based 6 week planner which indicates learning intentions and activities for areas of learning. Teachers also consider resources which are required, any opportunities which arise for outdoor learning, and an evaluation of previous learning.

### **Key Stage One**

Teachers use a topic based 6 week planner with activities and learning intentions explained. Suggested resources are listed, any key questions are outlined and tasks which require differentiation.

## **Staff Involvement and Development**

As a staff we feel the encouragement and support of an adult at purposeful play is necessary to improve cognitive, social and emotional development. Through their involvement / interaction with the adult at purposeful play the children will be encouraged and helped to learn how to learn.

We as a school believe in the importance of staff development and discussion with regards to purposeful play. We will work together to ensure all staff are provided with adequate opportunities to establish a common understanding of all aspects of play. We will encourage and support training days, liaison with Early Years Support staff and contact with others working in this field. We recognise that awareness and feedback are vital to progression.

## **The Role of the Adult**

***"The quality of adult / child interaction is the key which unlocks much of the potential for developing play"***

**(Play in the lower primary school - Department of Education)**

Staff are encouraged to offer sensitive adult support and appropriate intervention, so extending rather than domination purposeful play activities. In Ballyhenry Primary School

we accept that successful teacher / adult involvement comes from careful observation of the play so that children's needs, interests and understanding can be assessed.

We recognise that the role of the adult is vital to the quality of play as.....

#### *Providers*

The adults will create space for play / activity based learning. Equipment and materials will be provided to accommodate varying ages and abilities. The learning environment should be stimulating and aims to promote independence and autonomy. The teacher will provide opportunities for adults and children to plan learning together.

#### *Participants*

The teacher/classroom assistant will become involved in the activities, and will encourage the children to share experiences to interact with each other and extend their experiences to other learning areas. The adult will contribute to the child's abstract thinking by asking open ended questions and posing exciting challenges. The teacher will help foster a positive attitude towards learning and create a happy and enjoyable atmosphere.

#### *Observers*

The teacher, assisted by the classroom assistant will take the opportunities afforded by play to observe, evaluate and record progress. He/She will identify individual needs or behaviour problems and attempt to understand and help by providing appropriate activities.

### **Management and Organisation**

*The Foundation/Key Stage One team will plan Purposeful Play / Activity based Learning Themes linked to topics. They will meet when relevant to exchange ideas and review planning.*

Learning outcomes, activities, resources will be carefully chosen to ensure progression from P1 to P4.

Teachers will plan themes indicating expected learning potential, activities, resources and curricular links.

The Scheme of Work will indicate learning experiences linked to the School Policy. However every teacher will be encouraged to personalise her / his teaching using her / his own creativity and innovations. There will be forward planning for individual, group and class work.

## *Space*

Space for children to engage in play will be provided by:

- re-arranging the furniture in the classroom;
- removing unnecessary equipment;
- providing smaller containers for sand and water experiences;
- rotating imaginative play experiences;
- using space outside the classroom e.g. corridors or shared play areas

In planning for purposeful play staff will provide a structure or process which will enable progression and quality and will implement this by frequent monitoring and changing of resources. We will provide a variety of learning experiences which will link where possible, and as resources permit, with other curriculum areas.

Planning will provide opportunities for assessment and review of development, thus ensuring that the needs of individual children are met. Planning will provide opportunities for staff consultation and progression.

### *Time Allocated to Play/Activity Based Learning*

Foundation Stage – Primary One are engaged in a sustained period of play every day. Primary Two dedicate four times a week to play.

Key Stage One – Primary Three dedicate two sessions a week to play. Primary Four have one session.

## **Observation, Assessment, Evaluation and Recording**

### **Foundation Stage**

Observations are a regular feature of classroom practice. They provide information about the children and help teachers to review the play provided. Observations help the teachers to:-

- Assess the development of the children's physical, social and cognitive skills.
- Monitor the child's progress.
- Plan to meet the needs, interests and abilities of the children.
- Assess the appropriateness of the activities provided and ensure that learning is taking place.
- Ensure that the children have experience at a wide variety of activities.
- Know when extra materials are required to extend or supplement play.
- Observations are used to inform planning and should include information on:-
- The social, emotional and cognitive development of the child.

- Thinking skills and personal capabilities.
- The child's use of language.
- The level of concentration and involvement.

### **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. Through on-going integrated assessment, teachers build up a comprehensive picture of the progress as well as the learning needs of each child. This knowledge assists the teacher to ultimately improve learning. It enables teachers to:-

- Monitor progress
- Plan future work
- Give the children tasks which require them to use certain skills
- Assess if the tasks provided are appropriate and if learning is taking place
- Know what materials are required

### **Observation at Key Stage One**

Observations in Key Stage One should take account of the emotional, social and cognitive ability of the child. Assessment in Key Stage One is based upon :-

- The Learning Intentions
- The success criteria
- Thinking skills and personal capabilities.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation of play can be measured according to:

- (a) How children enjoy play?

At the end of each play session - review time is a good time to report back and evaluate.

- (b) Were the expected learning outcomes achieved?

## Developing the Curriculum Through Play

Play is seen as a vehicle for learning providing the opportunity to reinforce and develop learning throughout the curriculum.

### Communication and Literacy

The programmes of study for reading and writing both suggest that part of children/s experiences of literacy should be embedded in play activities. Play may provide opportunities for children to work together and to co-operate in learning about literacy and by the provision of relevant print within play settings; children will be able to experience literacy in meaningful and purposeful ways. Literacy should be promoted and developed through play.

**Talking and Listening** should be promoted through activities which enable the children to talk to peers, teachers, talking and small / large groups. They will be encouraged to talk about themselves and their family, their pets, home, environment, activities, experiences, pictures, stories, drawings and paintings. They should be given dramatised stories and develop language through role play - e.g. Hospital, Post Office, Café, Airport.

The Listening centre provides opportunities for children to listen to stories, songs, rhymes, follow instructions and make their own tapes.

**Reading** --Relevant print within the play settings will encourage children to 'read'. Children will have a print - enriched environment e.g. signs, books, magazines, comics poster, instructions, labels, dictionaries, catalogues etc. They will be encouraged to make choices for themselves by browsing in the Book Area.

**Writing** - opportunities to write should emerge from play activities. The writing centre should provide a wide range of tools and materials. Some of these may include a notice board, post-box, dictionaries, magnetic letters, etc. Children should be encouraged to write menus, bills, price lists, design posters fill in forms, write cards and letters etc. through role play activities in hospital, café, post office, shop etc.

### Using Mathematics

Children should have opportunities to develop and apply much of their early mathematical skills and understanding during purposeful play. This will involve children in activities such as imaginative play e.g. house, hospital and shop play. The exploration of natural materials, e.g. sand and water, creative experiencing and construction. They should be encouraged to talk and listen, ask questions and use the appropriate mathematical language during their play, e.g. language associated with shape, space, time, size.

- Ordering - creating patterns, threading beads, dressing dolls etc.
- Comparing - shop play - bigger, taller, shorter etc.

- Counting - shop/house - play, bricks, number games animal

Children should be given opportunities to recognise and explore simple 2D and 3D shapes to develop an awareness of space e.g. printing, construction with boxes.

### **Using ICT**

Children should have opportunities to develop and apply much of their early ICT skills and understanding during purposeful play. They should have the opportunity to handle and communicate information, solve problems and be creative through the use of technology. This will involve children engaged in purposeful activities on the classroom computer, interactive whiteboard and ipads. They will also use programmable devices such as beebots.

### **The Arts**

**Art & Design**--Children should be encouraged to explore and experiment with ideas, images and materials. They will have opportunities to explore their natural curiosity, to experience a sense of enjoyment and to communicate their ideas and feelings. Sensory experiences and artistic awareness will be developed using different media - paint, crayons, chalk, dough, clay, finger paints and a variety of brushes, papers, fabrics and printing items.

Through creative activities children will develop a sense of achievement and self confidence. Also the skills of observation, imagining, designing, recording, creating, communication and appreciating.

**Music**--During play, Children may be encouraged to build upon their musical experiences. They should have opportunities to listen to and explore music, individually and in groups.

**Drama**--Opportunities shall be given for children to communicate through drama. By using a range of stimuli i.e. Imaginative, dramatic play, use of puppets, children may express their ideas, feelings and concerns by acting out scenarios and stories.

### **The World Around Us**

Children should be given opportunities, during purposeful play to explore, make observations and use a range of materials to build and construct. They may develop scientific concepts by direct exploration using all the senses and hand on experience. They will work with a range of materials such as water, sand, dough, clay, paper, cloth, wood, rubber and plastics. Children should be encouraged to take a certain amount of control of their exploratory play interjected by suggestions or questions which will enrich the activity and stimulate things.

In the context of classroom and outdoor play activities children may also experience natural and manufactured forces which push, pull, make things move, stop things and change the shape of things.

They may have opportunities to explore the effect of warming and cooling on everyday materials e.g. melting chocolate to make buns for baking, freezing orange juice to make ice lollies.

They should be encouraged to describe and communicate their observations, ask questions, identify simple differences and select and use instruments and equipment to enhance observations e.g. magnifying glasses, mirrors, magnets etc. and learn how to use tools e.g. scissors, hammers, adhesives, brushes etc. in construction play.

Children should have opportunities to develop an awareness of the past and of the ways in which it differs from the present through role play and working with artefacts from the past. Themes may include in Granny's time, Victorian Christmas, Guy Fawkes. Hospital play/baby clinic will help children understand and relate the passage of time to their own growth and life experiences. Activity based learning topics for P3 and P4 may include Life in the past, Houses and Homes, transportation.

Children start primary school with different experiences of their immediate environment and of their wider world. Through varied play activities, geographical experience will be planned to extend children's awareness, knowledge and understanding. Through play children should learn the layout and associated vocabulary of the classroom environment, therefore become familiar with geographical vocabulary through practical experiences e.g. small world play, sand play to make roads, fences, runaways etc. Farms, zoo and town play mats. They may make representations of real or imaginary places using junk materials e.g. houses, space stations, animal homes etc. and will have opportunities to change the house corner to represent homes from other lands. They can learn about other countries by setting up a travel agents and airport. Through role play children can have opportunities to explore some of the jobs people do and by the provision of dressing up clothes, - discuss weather conditions.

They should have opportunities to learn about the natural environment through play with sand, soil, water, shells, leaves and plants and explore animals and other lands through small world play.

By using computer programmes, children will produce data for use in e.g. Hospital admission cards, airport passports, write notes, letters, make signs, badges etc. Keeping records

The roamer/Bee Bot will be used to enhance learning opportunities e.g. Turned into the wolf to visit The Three Little pigs, a Pirate searching for treasure.

## **Personal Development & Mutual Understanding**

Health and Safety can be developed through play activities e.g. hospital play - importance of keeping clean, healthy eating, looking after ourselves, dental care. Children will be encouraged to share and communicate. During play activities children will develop socially and emotionally - learning to appreciate other points of view, co-operating, sharing.

Purposeful play can help children to develop their own self awareness, a recognition of their feelings and emotions and those of others.

## **Physical Development & Movement**

Much activity will be exploratory play in which a partner, respond to the suggestions of the teacher or to stimuli and challenges provided by music, space or apparatus. Indoors and outdoors opportunities should be provided for the children to play with a range of resources that will enhance their gross and fine motor skills. To develop their fine motor skills, children should be given opportunities to use a range of stimuli, e.g. Scissors, pens, jigsaws, pegs and other equipment that encourages pouring, twisting, threading, squeezing, twisting etc.

## **Equal Opportunities**

It is the policy to provide opportunities for children to explore resources and situations from the point of view of both sexes, and this challenge stereotypes.

All equipment is available to all children and both boys and girls are encouraged to work together, taking on leadership roles in all areas of play.

The adults ensure that girls are given the opportunity to use practical and constructional toys as this will develop their spatial awareness and technical understanding. At the same time, boys are encouraged to take part in role-play, imaginative situations and to voice their opinions. These factors will help guarantee that boys and girls are not confined to exposure of the traditional roles, which may still be reinforced in the home, and come to have a better understanding of other people thoughts, feelings, abilities and needs.

**It is also important that the staff provide good role models to the children through their actions, use of language and encouragement.**