



Ballyoran Primary School

Play/Activity Based Learning Policy

Reviewed November 2021

Introduction

In Ballyoran Primary School, we recognise the importance of Play and Activity Based Learning as a fundamental part of the process of learning in the early years. We believe that play provides opportunities for children to experience learning in a meaningful and purposeful way. It is a means by which children can develop the skills and capabilities to be effective learners. Play provides a context to access the content of the curriculum and opportunities are given to the children to build on previous experiences and make connections in their learning in an enjoyable way.

We as a staff provide opportunities for the children to engage in effective learning within a safe and secure environment. Opportunities will be provided in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 for both child-initiated and teacher led play. Learning will be planned for primarily through existing topics.

Mission Statement of the School

Excellence, Creativity, Integrity

Vision of the School

As an Inclusive School we aim to provide a happy, caring, safe and stimulating learning environment which will enable each child to develop his or her full potential - academically, personally, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually, in preparation for becoming responsible citizens. This will be achieved by giving all pupils equal opportunities to a broad and balanced curriculum which is tailored to meet their individual needs and abilities, coupled with access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

We aim to foster in all pupils respect for themselves, respect for other people and respect for the environment in which they live and raise each child's self esteem and confidence to help children realise that they are valued members of our school community. The development of each child's potential is reflected in the strong relationships which we attempt to foster within school and, indeed, those with our parents and other bodies that support the work of the school.

These values are inherent in all areas of school life and provide the basis for, and are implicit in, all school policies. All members of staff in Ballyoran Primary School share these ideals, values and beliefs and value the contribution made to school life by each individual child.

Aims of the School

- 1) To fulfil the school vision by developing each child as:
 - An individual
 - A contributor to society
 - A contributor to the economy and environment.

- 2) To develop in each child the following skills –
 - Communication
 - Using Mathematics
 - Using ICT
 - Thinking skills
 - Managing information, problem solving and decision-making
 - Being creative, working with others and self management.

- 3) To foster the following attitudes and values –
 - Personal responsibility
 - Self-confidence
 - Tolerance and respect for others
 - Commitment, determination and resourcefulness
 - Community spirit
 - Integrity
 - Independence
 - Openness to new ideas.

- 4) Ultimately to provide stimulating, relevant and enriching learning experiences with equality of access for each child so as they may develop an enthusiasm for learning as a lifelong process.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum

Play and Activity Based Learning is central to learning and teaching in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. We as a staff believe that Activity Based Learning will help to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.

At the heart of the Northern Ireland Curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of pupils' thinking skills and personal capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society. By engaging pupils in active learning contexts across all areas of the curriculum, pupils' personal and interpersonal skills and capabilities and their ability to think both creatively and critically are developed.

(Ref: Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities for Key Stages 1 & 2 CCEA, 2007)

“Children learn best when learning is interactive, practical and enjoyable. Self-initiated play helps children to understand and learn about themselves and their surroundings. Motivation can be increased when children have opportunities to make choices and decisions about their learning, particularly when their own ideas and interests are used, either as starting points for learning activities or for pursuing a topic in more depth.”

NI Curriculum Primary 2007

Links with Areas of Learning

The experiences provided for our children during Play and Activity Based Learning encompass the six areas of learning. The learning is integrated through a topic based approach and enables children to make appropriate connections. Play is the primary means of learning in all areas of the Early Years Curriculum and is a fundamental teaching methodology of the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum at Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

Language and Literacy

Play will provide opportunities for the children to work together and cooperate in learning about Literacy. Talking and listening will be promoted through activities that enable children to talk to peers, staff and in small and large groups. Relevant print within the play settings will encourage children to develop reading skills. Books will be displayed in play contexts and children will be encouraged to make choices for themselves by browsing in the book area. The writing area will be equipped with a wide range of tools and materials.

Mathematics and Numeracy

Children will have opportunities to develop and apply their early mathematical skills and understanding during purposeful play. This will be provided through role play opportunities, exploration of natural materials, creativity, construction and table top play such as peg boards

and threading. They will be encouraged to use appropriate mathematical language during their play.

Personal Development

During play activities children will develop socially and emotionally. They will learn to appreciate other points of view, co-operating, collaborating and sharing. Staff will seek to develop children's self-esteem, self-confidence, concentration, independence and a positive attitude towards learning. Children will be encouraged to become independent and to take responsibility for their own actions.

Physical Development

Physical development skills including balance, co-ordination, fine, gross and loco motor skills can be enhanced and developed through play. Opportunities will be provided for the children to work with a range of equipment indoors and outdoors.

The World Around Us

Through varied play activities children's awareness, knowledge and understanding of their environment will be extended e.g. awareness of classroom and school environment, people who help us, positional language and direction. Children will be given opportunities through play to explore, make observations and use materials to build and construct.

The Arts

Children will have opportunities to experience a sense of enjoyment and to communicate and express their ideas and feelings through a range of tools. Through musical experiences children will be encouraged to explore ways of making sounds and create tunes using a variety of tuned and untuned instruments and to engage in exploration of pitch, rhythm and rhyme. Children will have the opportunity to take on a variety of roles and express their feelings and opinions in role play and small world play.

ICT

ICT will be used appropriately throughout all areas of the curriculum during play. Children will have access to computers with appropriate software as well as interactive panels, printers, bee-bots, iPads and listening centres.

The Development of Skills, Attitudes and Dispositions

As children engage in Activity and Play Based Learning, they are developing skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society. Children have opportunities to develop skills in Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision Making, Self Management, Working with Others, Managing Information and Being Creative. We believe that the learning environment and learning opportunities we provide promote opportunities for our children to develop Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TS&PC) as well as positive attitudes and dispositions to learning.

It is hoped that as children engage during Play and Activity Based Learning, positive attitudes and dispositions will be fostered and they will become:

- More independent
- Willing to share
- Able to take responsibility for themselves
- More co-operative
- Willing to 'have-a-go'
- Able to cope with making mistakes
- Better at making decisions
- Better problem solvers
- Enthusiastic about school and learning
- More confident
- Better communicators
- Able to take control of their learning

Ref: The Beginning (Enriched Curriculum), BELB, page 3

The Learning Environment

“Children need to have access to a stimulating environment which will encourage them to explore, investigate and learn through first-hand experience”

A Place to Learn: Lewisham Early Years Advice and Research Network

Foundation Stage

We believe that indoor and outdoor play is central to young children’s learning. Children’s independence is fostered by well organised and structured physical environments and both the indoor and outdoor classroom offers children the opportunity to utilise effective modes of learning. We aim to provide children with versatile indoor and outdoor play equipment and environments.

Inside the classroom children have access daily to the following areas:

- Role play
- Creative
- Construction (including recyclable materials)
- Sand
- Water
- Drawing and writing
- Small World
- Table Top
- Play dough
- Library area
- iPads and Bee Bot

Outside the classroom children have access daily to the following areas:

- Imaginative Area (Large wooden playhouse)
- Creative Area (Creative trolley supplying a range of writing materials, large wall mounted chalkboards, painting easels, music station etc.)
- Horticulture Areas (Digging area, growing allotment, mud kitchen and willow tree cafe)
- Large-Scale Construction Area (Planks, milk crates, pallets, guttering, cable spools etc.)
- Sand and Water Areas (Buckets, funnels, spades, moulds, guttering, watering cans etc.)
- Quiet Reading Area (A reading shed, benches and cable spool tables and chairs)
- Large-Movement Area (Football nets, running area and PE trolley equipment)
- Small-Equipment Area (Washing line for ordering numbers, PE trolley with hoops, beanbags, skipping ropes etc.)
- Climbing Area (New castle themed climbing frame with steps, cargo nets, rock wall and slide)
- Wheeled Vehicle Area (Scooters, traffic signals and road sign area)

Key Stage 1

We try to ensure that the classroom environment promotes independence and that the skills fostered in the Foundation Stage continue to be developed in Key Stage 1. In order to promote independence and support active learning, the following resources are easily accessible to pupils:

- ICT
- Library area
- Writing and drawing materials – e.g. paper (variety of sizes and type), pens, felt-tips, pencils, rubbers, stapler, paperclips, cello tape, scissors, hole punch etc.
- Art and Design materials e.g. paint, coloured paper, tissue paper, glue, card, pipe cleaners etc.
- Recyclable materials

Role of the Adult

Foundation Stage

The teacher must adopt the roles of provider, facilitator, participant, observer and evaluator in order to promote quality play. The Foundation teachers, along with the classroom assistant strive to:

- Provide appropriate activities from the resources and materials available and match these to the interests and experiences of the children.
- Plan activities which will foster the children's own interests, encourage them to use their initiative, acquire concepts, develop confidence in handling materials, communicate and make decisions.
- 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 the information gained to inform future planning.
- Be consistent and have a positive approach to behaviour management
- Be sensitive to the uniqueness of each child

Key Stage 1

As pupils engage in Activity Based Learning, the adult's role is often that of facilitator, supporting pupils as they learn and develop skills. We seek to encourage pupils to:

- Be active and reflective learners

- Ask questions
- Work collaboratively
- Connect their learning

Planning

Planning underpins effective learning and teaching and takes account of the developmental stage of the children as well as their previous experiences. Teachers will plan relevant experiences to support, extend and challenge learning appropriate to the child's abilities and experiences. Planning will be linked to the seven areas of learning set out in the curriculum. We try to help pupils make appropriate connections between the areas of learning by teaching in a topic based approach. Children will be given an opportunity to be involved in the planning process.

Through our Play and Activity Based Learning, we aim to ensure that:

- Teaching builds on where the children are
- Children's needs and interests lead the learning
- Appropriate support is given to those children who require it
- Children are motivated and their learning challenged
- Children have high expectations of themselves

The Year 1 and Year 2 teachers plan together in order to ensure progression. The format for planning is in accordance with the recommendations given in 'Understanding the Foundation Stage' (pages 12,13). Through our observations, assessment and professional judgement we gain valuable insights into how children learn best. This information informs our planning as we seek to meet the needs of each child.

Management of Play and Activity Based Learning

Foundation Stage

- Whole class introduction and planning time with adults.
- Freedom of choice: children choose where they want to play.
- 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. Photographs are used to record what children have done.
- Before tidying up, children are brought together to review their play. Children share their pieces of writing, drawings and work they have created during play.
- Children tidy up the play areas themselves.

Key Stage 1

Children in Key Stage 1 will have access to a range of tasks and materials determined by their topics. Activity Based Learning (ABL) needs further development in KS1.

Time Allocated to Play and Activity Based Learning

Foundation Stage

Children in Year 1 and 2 play for a minimum of one hour each day.

Key Stage 1

Where possible, Activity Based Learning is an integral part of all learning and teaching within the classroom.

Observation, Assessment, Evaluation and Recording

Foundation Stage

Adults will observe individuals and groups during sessions so as to identify needs, assess skills and knowledge, to monitor progress and to evaluate the play sessions. These observations are both planned and spontaneous and will inform future planning. Through observation and assessment we will understand more about the ability and attainment of the children and ensure that individual needs are met. Children's responses and teachers evaluations will inform future planning. Children will be observed working individually and as part of a group. A variety of methods of recording will be used and relevant information will be discussed with other adults as appropriate. Planned observations will be recorded on children's forms and spontaneous observations will also be recorded if relevant. Observations will be a regular feature of classroom practice. They provide detailed 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

Observations should include information about the child's

- Physical, social, emotional and cognitive development
- Use of language in a range of situations
- Ability to problem-solve and make decisions or demonstrate thinking skills
- Level of involvement and concentration
- Willingness to investigate and be creative
- Use of resources in an imaginative way
- Desire to plan his/her activities

Key Stage 1

The teacher uses a variety of methods for assessment including observations and oral feedback. These observations are used to guide planning. Increasingly we will be taking further account of Assessment for Learning strategies as the implementation of the Northern Ireland Curriculum progresses.

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 activities, 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.

Play and Activity Based Learning Policy Review

This Policy will be kept under constant review.