



**PLAY & ACTIVITY  
BASED LEARNING.**

**POLICY STATEMENT**

# **PLAY BASED LEARNING**

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

In Woodlawn our teachers are committed to Play based and Activity based learning as a key method to deliver the Northern Ireland Curriculum at the Foundation level and throughout Key Stage One. We believe that it is the best vehicle for the development of the 'whole' child, socially, emotionally, physically, aesthetically, intellectually and culturally. Children learn best when they are having fun and feel safe and what better way than through their own natural means of discovery.

Through play children can be encouraged to use their initiative, problem solve, make decisions, develop their confidence, explore, be imaginative, creative, socialise with peers and adults, experience success and develop positive attitudes to learning.

Opportunities are provided for free play and structured activities that are both flexible to meet the needs and interests of the children and well planned to challenge and further the children's thinking and learning across all the learning areas.

## AIMS

Our children arrive to school from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds. Play in the classroom provides ideal opportunities for children to learn and grow. It allows for the teacher to observe, evaluate and foster each child's development, building on their previous experiences. Through play we aim to develop the whole child through stimulating and enjoyable play experiences. We realise that the curriculum should be carefully structured to be effective, allowing for flexibility to meet the needs and interests of the children.

It should include:

- Providing for the children's needs based on their previous experiences
- Relevant and appropriate content to match the different levels of the children's needs and interests as well as curriculum based topics
- Planned and purposeful activities for teaching and learning
- Opportunities for child initiated activities

To achieve this, the learning environment should be well planned and organised, allowing for the children to access resources easily and safely.

As staff we aim to:

- Promote play as a pleasurable activity
- Offer a broad and balanced curriculum
- Offer a variety of activities, both planned and those which offer free choice
- Run a carefully planned programme of themes/topics throughout the year to ensure children are given a wide range of active, real and everyday experiences to enhance their learning about their world
- Develop a range of skills that support and enhance the curriculum e.g. thinking and problem solving skills
- Develop curiosity, creativity, decision making skills, problem solving techniques and processes
- Develop self-esteem, self-confidence, independence and a positive attitude towards learning
- Promote positive relationships with peers and adults
- Encourage co-operation, taking turns, sharing and self-control
- Develop communication skills
- Enable children to express their thoughts, needs, feelings and experiences
- Encourage the child to observe, appreciate and care for the local and wider environment
- Provide opportunities to develop and use the skills necessary for talking, listening, reading and writing, as well as those relevant to all areas of the curriculum
- Encourage children to show respect for themselves, others, the classroom and school property
- Observe and monitor progress

## **PLANNING**

Staff accept that quality play involves:

- **Planning appropriate activities** from the resources available and matching these to the interests and experiences of the children in the class
- **Planning an adequate amount of time** for play based learning so that children can engage in worthwhile activities
- **Providing choice and opportunities** for play that are new as well as play that is repetitive
- **Planning activities which will foster the children's own interests**, encourage them to use their own initiative, acquire concepts, develop confidence in handling materials, in communication and decision making
- **Keeping appropriate records that inform staff** about individual children and their abilities. The records should give information about continuity, progression though out the year as well as details about specific links with other curriculum areas

Staff meet together to carefully plan for play & activity based learning. We plan in order that activities are:

- Stimulating
- Enjoyable and fun
- Relevant to children's interests
- Purposeful
- Develop independence
- Balanced with a variety of choice
- Aimed at stimulating children's imagination and concentration

We feel that careful planning is crucial for children's development. We try to ensure that the children are provided with a wide variety of play experiences using the layout and resources available to us, both indoor and outdoor. Our planning enables progression and quality learning which we observe and monitor regularly, adapting resources and activities where necessary. Play Based Learning experiences develop many skills vital for the foundation stage and link, where appropriate, to activity based learning in Key Stage 1 and to learning throughout Key Stage 2. Planning provides opportunities for assessment and review of development, ensuring individual needs are met as well as ensuring staff development and progression. All staff are encouraged to interact in a meaningful and appropriate way, extending children's thinking, while being aware not to dominate the learning situation.

## **THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Many aspects make up a successful learning environment from the children and adults to the classroom and resources/activities. We promote a learning environment which is welcoming with child friendly displays and resources. Planning is undertaken with the aim to provide a safe and happy environment into which each child is valued as an individual with maximum opportunity to reach their full potential.

We aim to create a classroom environment that is stimulating and inviting to ensure children are keen to explore all learning experiences. Activities and resources are both age appropriate and challenging to develop individual abilities, taking into account any special needs. We will initiate new play experiences as well as developing existing ones to maintain motivation. The children will be encouraged to play alongside others in pairs, small groups and as individuals. They will be given increased independence and responsibility to ensure the play activity is tidied away safely. Encouragement to play fairly and share is encouraged.

Each classroom is arranged with the children's safety in mind, with resources clearly labelled and accessible. Each area is defined and clearly labelled with a variety of learning areas, including a quiet space and writing area.

We believe encouragement and support from adults during play based learning is vital to a child's development. Through their involvement children are encouraged and helped to learn how to learn. Staff are encouraged to value children's ideas and promote positive self-esteem. The key is sensitive adult support and appropriate intervention to extend but not dominate the play situation. This comes from careful observation to understand children's needs, interests and understanding. Teachers are aware of the importance of praise and encouragement.

### **The adult's role is important during play:**

- To provide materials and make them accessible
- To initiate and be part of the play session
- To help resolve conflict (develop self-management skills)
- To extend language
- To extend thinking
- To ensure progression
- To provide space and time for play
- To provide follow up activities

## **OBSERVATION**

As teachers, we value the importance of observing the children at play. Through our observations we aim to build an overall picture of each individual child. This will provide us with information on all aspects of the child's development from social, emotional, physical and intellectual. It will be used to evaluate, review and shape future planning. Staff will observe children playing as individuals, in pairs or in groups. It will show not only children's understanding, knowledge and skills but those resources and activities which are effective as well as successful approaches.

### **Why we assess through play?**

- It is a natural means of expression for most children
- It provides a natural and appealing setting for learning
- It allows children to experience a wide number of emotions and situations
- It is child initiated and is a child maintained activity
- It is a key tool for learning as it is natural to children
- It is flexible and should not be intrusive to the child's pre-school experience
- It helps adults to understand how children approach tasks thereby offering ways of improving their learning

A variety of methods of recording can be used according to the teaching style and needs of each class. Observation notes will be made and may be focused, spontaneous or daily. This information is used to inform future planning.

## **ORGANISATION AND EVALUATION**

Given the developmental stage of young children entering school, a wide range of activities are on offer to them each day, promoting a variety and range of learning experiences. In the early stages of play the activities reflect the stage and development of the children, as well as their level of concentration. Throughout the year children will be encouraged to explore and engage in the full range of activities on offer to them. The teacher's main role is largely to facilitate learning aiming to make play based learning an enjoyable experience where adults and children play together. Effective questioning and observation provides information to help plan for further development and the individual needs of the children. Topics throughout the year provide stimuli for many of our play based learning areas. However, time is allowed to cater for the spontaneity, interests and needs of the children.

Teachers continually evaluate and make changes to improve learning. Staff attended training when available and share their expertise and knowledge with one another.

Play in each classroom is organised so as:

- Each area is catered for
- Resources are clearly labelled and accessible
- Each area is defined
- The classroom is clutter free
- There are quiet and 'noisy' areas
- To develop a range of skills
- It is safe
- A realistic time scale is allocated
- To allow for continuation

Play based learning is timetabled in:

Foundation Stage

Primary 1 (one hour every day) and Primary 2 (one hour four times a week)

Play is linked to the children's needs and topics being studied. It is planned for on a six weekly basis (using topic webs) and on a specific play planner which addresses play stations, resources and learning intentions for each area of play based learning.

Activity based learning is timetabled in:

Key Stage 1

Teachers are beginning to implement Activity Based Learning following their training. They are building on existing good practice and experiences.

## **KEY AREAS OF PLAY**

In the classroom the range of activities on offer promotes growth and development in a range of identified key areas. These are viewed as falling within the following categories:

- Imaginative play
- Table top activities
- Creative play
- Construction
- Pliable materials
- Floor play
- I.C.T
- Small world
- Library area
- Writing area

Through each of these areas of learning, we aim to provide a range of experiences linked to the children's development across the curriculum. In our planning we have taken full account of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and the 6 learning areas within the Foundation stage.

## **TEACHING STRATEGIES**

In the Foundation Stage we value the importance of play both indoors and outdoors and its vital role in educating and developing young minds. We therefore ensure it is an integral part of all our teaching and learning.

- **Adult planned activities** – children are encouraged to take part in a variety of activities during the week. During these activities the adult will demonstrate and teach the children new skills and techniques.
- **Child-initiated activities** – resources are set up and accessible to allow children time to independently explore, consolidate and build upon skills they already have either as individuals or as a group. Appropriate interventions are made to develop their play to extend their learning

## **KEY EXPERIENCES**

Children through play based learning have opportunities to:

- Explore and experiment
- Relate to their own world
- Acquire skills of problem solving and organisation
- Develop language
- Develop imagination
- Deal with success and failure
- Exercise choice
- Learn decision making skills
- Become relaxed, secure and confident
- Cope with pressure, worries and fears.



