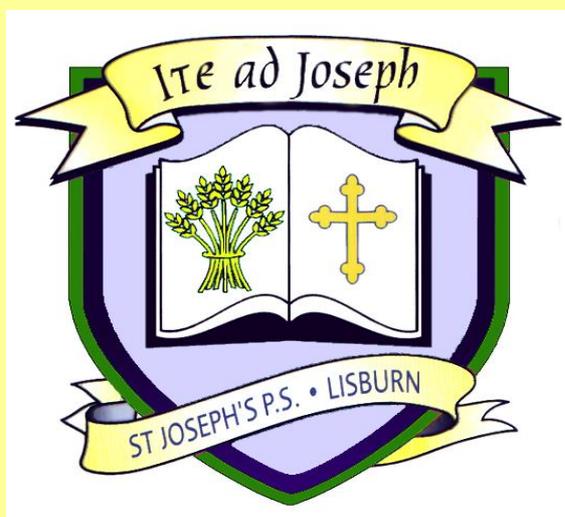


ST JOSEPH'S PRIMARY SCHOOL LISBURN

PLAY BASED LEARNING IN FOUNDATION STAGE

Play Policy



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Rationale for Play

In St Joseph's Primary School, we believe that play based activities are essential to the development of the whole child; socially, emotionally, physically, aesthetically, intellectually and culturally. We recognise the importance of play and activity based learning as a fundamental part of the learning process in the early years of a child's education.

“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

We as a staff believe that play based learning will help to *“empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.”*

The 'Big Picture' of the Primary Curriculum

In St Joseph's our teachers are committed to Play and Activity Based Learning as a key method to deliver the Northern Ireland Revised Curriculum at the Foundation level. 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.

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. Opportunities are provided for free play and structured, teacher led 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.

Opportunities are given for 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.

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Aims of Foundation Stage

Play Based Learning in Foundation Stage at St Joseph's Primary School aims to provide a learning programme which will:

- Provide quality Play in a stimulating environment, which allows the children to develop and learn;
- Enables children to develop their own ideas and interests;
- Develops self-esteem, self-confidence, independence and a positive attitude to learning;
- Stimulates curiosity and fosters skills of observation, investigation and problem solving in all areas of the curriculum;
- Provides adequate planning, time and space for play;
- Encourages creativity, self-expression and imaginative thinking;
- Fosters social and emotional skills necessary for integration within the classroom and beyond;
- Develops the fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy and oral communication;
- Promotes children's thinking skills and personal capabilities;
- Increases social awareness through role play and co-operative play;
- Enables children to develop physical confidence and competence and provides opportunities for developing movement and manipulative skills;
- Shares and demonstrates learning – allowing children to review and evaluate their own and others work and;
- Allows time for careful observation of children's play to facilitate assessment and planning for progression and continuity, recognising differing needs and attitudes.

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

The NI Curriculum emphasises the development of children's skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and participating in society. By engaging children in active learning contexts across all areas of the curriculum, teachers can,

'develop pupils' personal and interpersonal skills, capabilities and dispositions; and ability to think both creatively and critically.'

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities, CCEA

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 St Joseph's, through play, we aim to provide opportunities for:

- Developing curiosity and creativity
- Language development through experiences
- Social skills
- Involvement in group play or observation
- Learning to listen to others and follow direction
- Emotional development
- Promotion of self-esteem and confidence

- Self-motivation
- Making informed and responsible decisions
- Innovation using equipment
- Imaginative and imitative play
- Developing the dispositions to learn
- Transfer learning to real-life situations
- Reflection and self-evaluation of work

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.

Connected Learning

Children learn best when learning is connected. The experiences provided for our children during Play Based Learning encompasses the six areas of learning:

- Language and Literacy
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding
- The Arts
- The World Around Us
- Physical Education

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. Emphasis is placed on the development of skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society.

The Learning Environment

In St Joseph's 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:

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:

- ❖ Role Play
- ❖ Creative
- ❖ Writing
- ❖ Construction
- ❖ Small World
- ❖ Play Dough/ Malleable Activities
- ❖ ICT
- ❖ Sand
- ❖ Water
- ❖ Outdoor Play

The Physical Environment:

- Bright, stimulating
- Mixture of teachers'/children's work
- Print rich environment
- Flexibility with space and equipment
- Easily accessible resources and equipment

The Cognitive Environment:

- Active involvement and enjoyment
- Shared awareness of learning intentions and success criteria
- Thinking and problem solving

Social/Emotional Environment:

- Ensuring children feel happy, safe and secure
- Developing positive relationships and attitudes
- Successes celebrated and shared
- Everyone's efforts valued

Role of the Adult

'Learning is supported by adults when: Staff are committed, sensitive, enthusiastic and interact effectively to challenge children's thinking and learning.'

NI Curriculum Primary, 2007

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.

Primary 1 and 2 have full time classroom assistants who will support the class teacher. The adult during play will use a wide range of teaching strategies and effective questioning. They will encourage children to think, do and review for themselves. The adult during play will also closely observe children, assess their progress, evaluate the learning taking place and use information to inform future planning.

The adult's role is important during play:

- To provide space and time for 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 appropriate follow up activities and evaluate the next steps in learning

Teaching Strategies

In the Foundation Stage we value the importance of play both indoors and outdoors and its vital role in developing children's thinking. 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.

Planning

We feel that careful planning is crucial for children's holistic 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.

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. Planning will be linked to the six areas of learning set out in the curriculum. Children will also be given an opportunity to be involved in the planning process.

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.

Staff meet during *Healthy Planning Sessions* (twice monthly) to carefully plan for play. We plan to ensure that activities are:

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

An emphasis is placed on 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. Importance is placed on providing choice and opportunities for play that are new as well as play that is repetitive.

Planning provides opportunities for assessment and review of development, ensuring individual needs are met as well as ensuring development and progression. Keeping appropriate records forms a key part of evaluation and will inform staff about individual children and their abilities. The records aim to give information about continuity, progression throughout the year as well as details about specific links with other curriculum areas.

Management of Play Based Learning

Within the Foundation Stage, play will involve:

- Whole class introduction and planning time with adults - at the beginning of the week the teacher explains the activities at each station
- Children will choose where they want to play
- Mix of activities – freedom of choice where children choose where to go and focussed activities the teacher will encourage each child to complete
- Children may change places during play time
- Children are informed when they have 5/ 10 minutes left
- Children may avail of a '*Play and Display*' area in their classroom to showcase anything completed during play (writing, construction, junk art etc). This serves as a prompt for any follow up discussion
- Following each play session, children are brought together to review play and discuss any new learning
- Records are kept of play activities, e.g. observation records, photographs, wall displays, etc.
- Children tidy up the play areas with adult assistance when required

Time Allocated to Play Based Learning

A range of practical activities will be provided for the children throughout the curriculum. Dedicated play sessions are planned for as follows in each year group:

- Primary 1 – 4 x 1 hour sessions per week
- Primary 2 – 3 x 1 hour sessions per week

Observation, Recording Keeping and Assessment

In St Joseph's, we view learning, teaching and assessment as a continuous cycle, where assessment is not the end point but should feed back into the process to help to improve learning. Since the purpose of teaching and the main purpose of assessment are to help children to learn, teaching and assessment need to be planned together as complementary aspects of the one activity. In turn, the information obtained from Play Based Learning observations and assessments should be used to inform the planning process.

Through observation and assessment teachers will understand more about the ability and attainment of the children and ensure that individual needs are fully met. Children's responses and teacher's evaluations will inform future planning.

Observations should include information about the children'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

In St Joseph's, observations and assessment 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 children's progress

- Plan to meet the needs, interests and abilities of all children
- Assess the appropriateness of the activities provided and ensure that learning is taking place
- Ensure that children have experience at a wide variety of activities
- Know when extra materials are required to extend or supplement play
- Assess the appropriateness of the activities provided and the learning that is taking place

A flexible approach will be adopted which allows for both planned and spontaneous observations. These observations will be used to inform our target setting for individual children and to inform future planning.

Methods of Observation and Assessment

Children will be observed working individually and as part of a group. Play will be recorded in several ways:

- Agreed pro formas within Foundation Stage
- Focused Observation/ Assessment 'Sticky Notes' – observing Literacy, Numeracy and Other Areas (e.g. social/ emotional wellbeing and involvement, PDMU, WAU etc). This involves observing a targeted group of children, with the focus on a skill or specific curricular area identified for staff to observe. This is managed using a pre-printed sheet of white sticky labels with prompts for what to observe and these are dated and copied as an overall class record, then stickers are inserted in the appropriate section of each child's 'Play Based Learning Observation File'. The overall class record can be colour coded as follows for the targeted Literacy and Numeracy observations:

- Green – achieving the skill
- Amber – developing the skill
- Red – difficulty with the skill

Children can then be grouped accordingly for targeted development and extension activities. These observations are used to provide evidence to report to parents verbally at parent teacher consultations in October (Primary 2) and March and form the basis of comments for the Annual Report. During focussed activities and assessments, staff record progress in the targeted area. Children are encouraged to comment on their work and next steps are also discussed with pupils using appropriate language.

- By taking photographs to illustrate play and recording pupils' significant comments
- 'Learning Logs' in place across Primary 1 and 2
- By spontaneous observation - these observations 'capture the moment' e.g. during a short period of time while continuing with other classroom activities, staff observe what is happening in Play e.g. pupils' language/involvement/co-operation etc
- In Primary 1, the adventures Spencer Bear are compiled as each child takes the class bear home for the weekend and documents their activities. Each Monday they will have an opportunity to present to the rest of the pupil to develop talking and listening skills

THE WAY FORWARD.....

- An Action Plan will be set up to develop Outdoor Play
- Planners and Observation/ Assessment templates will be updated in relation to changes being implemented
- Foundation Stage co-ordinator alongside teachers will ensure there is progression of Play throughout Foundation Stage
- Teachers will continue to make and record observations during Play Based Learning sessions

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