



Botanic Primary School

Policy

for

The World Around Us

February 2022

Introduction

This policy is based on the requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum document (2007) which is the starting point for planning a school curriculum that meets the needs of individual children. With these requirements we at Botanic Primary School aim to provide a broad and balanced curriculum so as to prepare our children for a rapidly changing world. Botanic Primary School is a truly multicultural environment with around 26 countries represented amongst our children. This unique setting offers opportunities to expand learning and gain a greater awareness of the dynamic world around us. Our location places us right on the edge of Belfast Botanical Gardens and within walking distance of the Ulster Museum. We are an Eco School, recipients of the International School Award and stakeholders in the refurbishment of the Tropical Ravine in Botanic Park.

1. What is the World Around Us?

The World Around Us is one of the six Areas of Learning in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. It focuses on the development of knowledge, skills and understanding in Geography, History, Science and Technology. Botanic Primary School aims to retain the best of current practice within the three subjects while developing a topic based approach to this area of learning, and making relevant connections across all areas of learning, while ensuring breadth and balance.

The World Around Us is presented as four inter-related strands that connect learning.

- Interdependence
- Place
- Movement and Energy
- Change Over Time

2. Aims

- To develop knowledge, understanding and skills in the context of the World Around Us
- To promote understanding, respect and appreciation for the world in which they live and their immediate environment.
- To acknowledge and appreciate a sense of the past, changes which have occurred and how these affect the world today
- To develop an appreciation of the relevance and importance of Science and Technology in everyday life
- To develop in children, the skills of enquiry, investigation, analysis, evaluation and presentation.

3. Skills

“At the heart of the curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of skills and capabilities for life-long learning and for operating effectively in society. Through opportunities to engage in active learning contexts...children should develop Cross-Curricular Skills (in communication, using Mathematics and Using Mathematics and Using ICT) and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities,” (p.5 NIC)

At Botanic Primary School we develop Geography, History and Science skills through the World Around Us. Links with the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Framework have been highlighted to enable teachers to cross reference both. While many of the skills will be developed incidentally, we also plan for the development of subject specific skills when appropriate.

4. Planning approaches

The WAU programme will be implemented at a level appropriate to the needs of the children in the context of home, school, the local area and the wider world. All planning is based on the statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. We also use the Ideas for Connected Learning, Thematic Units and other guidance material from CCEA and the EA in our planning. Whilst initial planning is for the pupils, at all stages children will be encouraged to become active participants in the planning/learning process.

Planning for Progression and Continuity

Planning for the WAU builds on the earlier experiences of children and continues to help them to explore the world they live in. At Foundation Stage, skills and concepts are developed during play and other planned activities relevant to the children's interests and experiences. Careful observation informs the future planning of future learning experiences within the World Around Us.

We ensure that the overall programme of learning in any one-year group, and across the key stages, is broad and balanced and that there is continuity and progression in children's learning. We are adopting,

“a spiral approach to the World Around Us so that concepts, knowledge and skills are introduced without undue repetition or significant gaps and are reinforced in a variety of contexts.” (NIC p.85)

Connected Learning

Recognising the requirements of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, we have planned thematically. We emphasise the totality of the children's learning across the curriculum by making meaningful links across the learning areas. We encourage children to transfer understanding and skills from one context to another, allowing them to practise and apply the skills they have gained.

Our planning for WAU aims to promote:

- Good investigations and the development of children's enquiry skills
- Good use of ICT to support learning and teaching
- Effective use of the school and local environment, educational visits and visitors to the classroom
- Progression in key aspects of geography, history and science and technology.

5. Learning and Teaching (see Botanic P.S.'s Learning and Teaching policy)

In Botanic Primary School, Learning and Teaching approaches provide suitably challenging opportunities for all pupils to take part in lessons fully and effectively. Learning experiences are active, practical and enjoyable. We make use of a wide range of teaching methods balancing whole class, group and individual activities to engage children in effective learning. In the Foundation Stage children experience much of their learning through well planned and challenging play.

Children have opportunities to make choices and decisions, developing their own ideas and interests, either as starting points for learning activities or pursuing a topic in more depth. They are supported in taking risks in their efforts to succeed and are actively involved in planning, carrying out and reflecting on their work within the World Around Us learning area.

Equality in Science

The school believes that it is important that both sexes get equal opportunities to participate in the activities so that sex-stereotyped role models are not formed or perpetuated. The attitude of the teacher is also important so that the children understand that it is normal for males and females to participate in scientific activities. An attitude which is growing increasingly important as they move further up the education system towards a career.

6. Assessment (see Botanic P.S.'s Assessment Policy)

Assessment in WAU, as in all areas of learning, will be used to promote, enhance and deepen the children's learning. It involves all methods normally used to appraise the children's learning, either individually or in groups. The outcomes from these assessments can then be used to identify the progress which pupils make in relation to the processes, skills, understanding and knowledge outlined in the NI Curriculum. We take account of Assessment for Learning strategies and allow this formative assessment to help and guide planning. The key reasons for assessment within WAU will be:

- Enhance performance, self-esteem and self-confidence
- Promote greater resilience when faced with challenges
- Increase independence
- Develop a positive climate for learning

7. Inclusion

At our school the World Around Us forms part of the school curriculum policy to provide a broad and balanced education to all children. Through our teaching we provide learning opportunities that enable all pupils to make progress. We do this by setting learning challenges and responding to each child's different needs. The teachers are aware of the requirements of SENDO and plan pupil experiences accordingly. This also applies to the significant number of Newcomer children in the school. Having children from ethnic minorities also makes the learning experience within the school a very rich one as the children are open to other cultures and countries on a daily basis.

Children will be helped to access this Learning Area using a range of learning styles, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. They are able to record and demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways according to their learning needs and preferences. Gifted and Talented children will have access to more demanding aspects of the WAU and increased resources may be required.

8. Learning in the Outdoors

The outdoor area provides children with one of the best environments in which to learn. As Margaret McMillan (c1925) says, “the best kept classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky.”

Our pupils have opportunities to develop skills and concepts in an outdoor learning environment where they will:

- Become more aware of, more observant in and responsive to their surroundings
- Develop an approach to careful observation, accurate and analysis
- Encourage an interest in environmental issues
- Foster a sense of wonder and discovery

Children should have the opportunity to study aspects of their own immediate world, including different features of town and countryside and make comparisons between local and wider world issues.

All educational visits will be undertaken in accordance with “EA Educational Visits: Guidance for Schools 2021”.

9. Health and Safety

We enable pupils to have access to the full range of World Around Us activities.

Where children are to participate in activities outside the classroom, we carry out a risk assessment prior to the activity, to ensure it is safe and appropriate for all pupils. There will always be elements of risk and uncertainty as children engage in active learning. The NI Curriculum document states:

“All activities must be taught within a safe environment and children must be made aware of safe practice at all times.” (page 84)

For WAU activities, we assess and manage risks with reference to the following documents as outlined in the whole school Health and Safety Policy.

- ASE: “Be Safe!” which provides detail on legislation, teacher responsibilities, risk assessment and curriculum activity
- EA Educational Visits guidance- October 2021 with added Covid guidance
- CLEAPSS: providing direct assistance to classroom teachers

10. Homework (see Botanic P.S.’s Homework Policy)

This may take the form of a written homework, or finding something out at home, or bringing something in for a lesson. WAU homework may be of infrequent nature and not a weekly task.

11. WAU Coordinator- Role and Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the World Around Us coordinator to:

- Draw up an action plan for the development of the World Around Us in our school
- Monitor the running of the World Around Us scheme to ensure continuity and progression throughout the school
- Negotiate, in accordance with the whole school Learning and Teaching policy, the place of WAU within the School Development Plan and be involved in Monitoring and Evaluating.
- Develop and disseminate knowledge and expertise of WAU in the context of the whole school policy on CPD.
- Advise and guide colleagues with regard to appropriate classroom practice.

- Formulate and disseminate the policy within school. Undertake monitoring to include lesson observations, examination of planning and carry out evaluations.
- Ensure that the area of learning is properly resourced in terms of acquisition, safe storage and access.
- Liaise with appropriate advisory services eg. CLEAPSS, ASE etc.
- Take into account the recommendations of ‘An evaluation of the Implementation of The World Around Us in Primary Schools’ by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

12. Monitoring and Review

The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of all teaching staff.

Monitoring of the standards of children’s work and of the quality of teaching in Geography, History and Science and Technology within the World Around Us is the responsibility of the coordinator.

The work of the WAU coordinator also involves supporting colleagues in the teaching of this Learning Area, being informed about current developments and providing a strategic lead and direction. There is time allocated for fulfilling the vital task of reviewing samples of children’s work and visiting classes to observe teaching in the subject. The WAU coordinator submits a half-termly report to the Curriculum Coordinator, in which she evaluates the strengths and weaknesses in this Learning Area and identifies areas of concern and notes action taken. Points from this report are then submitted for discussion to the Senior Leadership Team in the Curriculum Coordinator’s report.

The WAU policy and scheme are fluid in nature and as this Learning Area is monitored changes can be made to make them more effective documents.

13. Resources

Resources for all WAU topics in the school are sourced on an ongoing basis. We keep some essential equipment and practical materials in a central store. Class teachers will supplement these resources with their own materials. The library contains a good supply of topic and classroom books and iPad apps and the internet are also used to support children’s individual development and research.

14. Links and Partnerships

Teachers plan to ensure arrangements for visits and visitors add greatly to the quality and extent of the children’s learning. Each year group use the school locality as a focus during the year e.g. the Ulster Museum and Botanic Park.

15. Evaluation of provision

This policy was agreed and adopted in February 2022. It will be reviewed as part of the school’s development cycle by June 2025