



Play

And

Active Learning

Policy

May 2025

What is Play?

Play is a natural and universal drive, in childhood. It is an essential element and contributory factor to supporting children's physical and emotional well-being, growth, learning and development. Play can support children's creativity and cultural awareness. 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 for children to access content of the curriculum in a practical and innovative way.

The Importance of Play;

Play based activities or activity based learning are essential to the development of the whole child. Play provides a safe environment in which children can be creative, imaginative and innovative. Have opportunities to explore, experience, share and socialise with peers and adults, while building their confidence, self-esteem and developing a positive attitude towards learning and the challenges they may experience.

A Rationale for Play

“Play is the most natural way for children to learn. They discover, explore, create, imagine and experiment on a daily basis in a variety of ways. Through their play, they make sense of the world around them, explore cause and effect, discover how things work and find their place in the social dynamics of a group when playing with their peers. Play should allow children the freedom to follow their own interests and curiosities and take risks within a safe environment. They can self-direct their own learning and have some control, within reasonable limits, of what they will do and how they will do it. Facilitating learning through play allows children the benefits of learning in the ways that suit them best while ensuring ample opportunities for challenge, development and progression of skills and understanding.

A play-based approach to learning provides children with an abundance of learning opportunities to create, experiment, imagine and explore. At the same time, they develop negotiation skills, problem-solving skills, self-regulation strategies, social skills, and healthy relationships with their peers and adults. Through play, children can also be challenged and have opportunities to build resilience. Playing and discovering can require perseverance. At times children may experience some frustration or disappointment, for example when they do not win at a game or a construction, they are building keeps falling over. Engaging in regular, sustained periods of play can promote children's independence, exploration, creativity, imagination and critical skills.”

CEA Learning through Play in Pre-School and Foundation Stage
(2022)

Play:

- Provides a holistic and practical learning experience
- Promotes positive attitudes to school and creates a positive disposition to learn
- Connects learning, encouraging skills and knowledge to be transferred into real life experiences
- Is cross curricular, enabling concepts and skills from core areas such as Literacy, Numeracy and ICT to be developed in an exploratory, failure free environment
- Encourages children to develop Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities by stimulating curiosity, fostering skills of observation, investigation, recording, interpreting, problem solving, decision making and risk taking
- Promotes language development through social experience, group work and feedback
- Promotes imagination and creativity,
- Encourages emotional development and supports children in their exploration of feelings
- Provides opportunities for developing movement and manipulative skills
- Encourages reflection
- Encourages independence

Legislation

The child's right to play is enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989);

“1. State parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and arts.

2. State parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic and recreational and leisure activities.”

The (Indoor) Play Environment

“All settings are different and the environment for play will vary from setting to setting...there may be differences in the physical environments and the resources offered”

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In Botanic PS we strive to provide children with a learning environment in which effective play can take place, while creating a culture for growth and exploration; rather than focusing on the set-up of the physical ‘play’ environment.

Play environments should;

- Provide adequate space for multi-level play,
- Reflect the children within the environment and offer a diverse range of resources
- Be flexible
- host a variety of materials to encourage progression of play and play skills
- be organised; to encourage children independence, decision making and thinking skills

Outdoor Play

“The outdoor play area is one of the best possible learning environments. It provides children with an abundance of learning opportunities to develop negotiation skills, problem-solving, self-regulation strategies, social skills, and healthy relationships with their peers and adults, while creating a sense of adventure.

Outdoor learning environments can promote children's curiosity, exploration, creativity and critical skills, as well as independence and imaginative play.”

CEA Learning Outdoors in Pre-school and Foundation Stage (2022)

Indoors and outdoors need to be viewed as one combined and integrated learning environment.

Outdoors is an equal player to indoors and should receive; planning management, evaluation, resourcing, staffing and adult interaction on a par with indoors.

Outdoors is both a learning and a teaching environment. Outdoor design and layout should promote and develop the progression of skills.

Outdoor play is central to young children's learning.

The outdoors offers children different opportunities to utilise effective modes of learning, exploring play, movement and sensory experience in a way that is different from what is provided indoors, extending and enhancing the opportunities for learning.

Staff should engage effectively with the children during outdoor play.

Why develop Outdoor Play?

“Outdoors, children can experience freedom through risk–benefit assessed play, where they can play and socialise freely and use their own imagination and initiative. Progress in all the Areas of Learning can be achieved outside while the children's long-term social, emotional and mental health are being enhanced. Being physically active, spending time outdoors and connecting with nature can affect emotions and allow for relaxation, calmness and a heightened sense of wellbeing.”

CEA Learning Outdoors in Pre-school and Foundation Stage (2022)

At Botanic PS we acknowledge that time spent outdoors can lead to more energetic play with potential for larger movements and experiences.

“Playing outdoors gives children the opportunity to relive their experiences through their most natural channel: movement”.

CEA Learning Outdoors in Pre-school and Foundation Stage (2022)

Physical play opportunities are vital for children's development, as they:

- enhance the development of gross and fine motor skills;
- promote co-ordination, balance and body awareness;
- keep the body, heart and other organs healthy;
- develop a lifelong good habit of daily exercise;
- boost mental and physical wellbeing.

Organisation of the Classroom and Outdoor areas

Botanic PS is fortunate to have play resources in every classroom from Nursery to P3. We also have a room which has been designated as the Play room. This room is timetabled for use predominantly by P2 and provides an extra space for play for all classes.

Botanic PS has a large tarmacked playground and a smaller tarmacked Nursery playground. Both playgrounds house age-appropriate climbing frames. The Nursery playground is fitted with a sand house and role play shed, along with a large storage shed and bike shed. We are very fortunate to have a garden area; fitted with additional climbing equipment, mud kitchen, large roofed hut, stage and role play areas.

Resources

Botanic PS acknowledges the importance of play and continues to invest in renewing and increasing provision of play resources for both indoor and outdoor play.

Provision for children with Special Needs

Activities, resources and support are modified where necessary to allow all children access to play. Differentiation will be shown in the teachers' planning

Activity Based Learning

In Botanic PS we recognise that children learn best when they are actively involved. It is for this reason we have developed a programme of active learning for children in P4 and where possible including P5 - P7. This ensures continuation and progression of play in throughout the whole school.

Children will be more actively involved in their learning and so developing their thinking skills. These planned activities are focused around the class topics where possible with an emphasis on problem solving and other thinking skills.

Community Links

To support Botanic PS's play and activity based learning we have formed links with the Belfast City Play Centre, working collaboratively to offer our pupils a range of topical and seasonal themed play experiences.

Equipment and Safety

- All play apparatus and equipment are installed subject to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Risk assessments are carried out on all large equipment and play spaces and regular assessment of their condition is completed.
- Apparatus is only used by children of the appropriate age, skill and physical abilities.
- Equipment is checked and maintained before use
- Sun protection- Parents are expected to apply sun-cream and children should wear hats during the hot weather. See school Sun Policy.

“Risk–Benefit Analysis It is impossible to remove all risk before allowing children to engage in playful learning experiences, and to do so would also limit the potential learning opportunities. Play can only be made as safe as possible while still allowing enough risk for children to have sufficient challenge.”

CEA Learning Outdoors in Pre-school and Foundation Stage (2022)

Children will be given appropriate equipment, supervised at all times and taught how to use the equipment carefully so the benefits of the play can be enhanced, even though all the risks have not been removed.

At Botanic PS we cannot remove risk entirely, only minimise it. Children will fall over and have accidents, and parents and carers must agree that this is a natural part of children exploring the environment and their own limitations.

Adult Interaction

“Through keen observation, sensitive interaction, timely guidance and careful evaluation, every adult can make a positive response to children’s movement, not just by setting up an environment and letting things happen, but by seeking opportunities to extend the experience of children.”

The Contribution of Physical Activity in the Early Years

At Botanic PS adults seek to sensitively interact with children during their play, adapting to the needs of the individual children; modelling or becoming a co-player as necessary.

Playing with the children

- enhances learning
- increases the quality of the play
- raises the status of the play and activity
- raises the self-esteem of those involved
- allows staff to support unsure children
- reduces stereotypical play
- gives opportunities to model new and reinforce language

The Role of the Teacher;

- To provide quality play in a stimulating and challenging learning environment, through which children can develop and learn
- To plan for and provide a range of appropriate activities/ real life experiences
- To be aware of the potential learning in all areas of the curriculum
- To enjoy the experience and become a co-player
- To facilitate learning and scaffold support
- To observe, assess, record play enabling progressive planning and differentiation
- To realise when/when not to intervene - sensitively interact
- To work alongside children, modelling language, skills and attitudes
- To evaluate and extend the provision
- To pose exciting challenges
- To interact with children
- To ask open-ended questions, make suggestions
- Provide children with opportunities to share and demonstrate their learning
- To encourage children to become involved in planning and evaluating activities

The Teachers' and Classroom assistants' roles are to;

- Observe/ assess and record children's play development and use this information (visual, auditory, photographs, video clips, recordings gathered on Seesaw app, along with samples of children's drawings/artwork and writing) to plan as a team to extend and differentiate the play according to pupil needs
- Record children's comments e.g. When they tell the adult about their drawing/painting/ writing, what they have discovered during play
- Display/ celebrate children's creativity
- Stimulate discussions and encourage children to predict what will happen next and think of conclusions
- Provide different resources to extend play and bring out possibilities in an existing situation
- Build on the children's spontaneous play and take his/her cues from the children
- Provide space, adequate time and materials
- Ensure materials and play areas are prepared, safe, clean, attractive and stimulating
- Become involved through participation, initiation and intervention when appropriate

Planning

When planning for play teachers should seek to build on children's earlier learning, to ensure that the overall programme of learning in any one year group is broad and balanced; and ensure that there is continuity and progression of the learning experience and resources.

The children in Botanic Primary School are involved with the planning of the play activities ~~and their planning ideas are recorded.~~ Learning should take account of the children's interests and experiences.

Indoor and Outdoor play will be planned for.

Planning should be cross curricular and link in with the three core curricular areas, while enhancing learning experiences of the class topic. Play experiences can be used to target skills, such as fine motor development, alongside specific curricular skills.

Planning will be submitted and reviewed by the play coordinator. It is noted that planning is adaptable and must fit the needs of the children at any given time.

Assessment

Through ongoing integrated assessment teachers build up a comprehensive picture of the progress and learning needs of each child which will in turn inform future planning.

Assessments will be made through observations, individual and group. Pupil observations may be made in written or electronic format.

What is assessed during the play?:

- Active involvement of children
- Enjoyment
- Social Interactions
- Appropriateness of task and resources
- The process used in the completion of the task
- Teaching strategies
- Language dispositions
- Language development
- The learning environment
- Agreed and shared learning intentions and success criteria
- Identified Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities from planner

Observations

Observations are based on the learning intention, the agreed success criteria and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.

Observation is a continuous process...

Observations of learning, assessment and professional judgement provide valuable insights into how individual children learn best. These then inform the planned programme for play by providing developmentally appropriate experiences that meet the needs of each individual and support progression in knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes.

Reviewing

Progress and effectiveness of play experiences are evaluated throughout pupil's play experiences and observations. Improvements are made when necessary; instant or timed . The teacher, along with the supporting adults, reflect on the pupils' thinking and learning and the quality of the play experience.

Pupils will also be encouraged reflect on their own experiences of the play session through targeted adult questioning and question prompts;

- what really made me think?
- the most important think I learnt was...
- what I enjoyed most...
- what I want to find out more about...
- what I found difficult...
- how would I do it differently the next time?

Pupils will be encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas of their

play experience. Adult well seek to include the pupil voice in their reflective practice, informing future planning.

Equality of opportunity

- **Gender issues**

- It is important that activities and resources are not used in a sex- stereotyped way, allowing children access to all activities

- **Respect for cultural issues**

- some children may need to remain fully clothed e.g. water activities
- respect cultures in resources selected

Evaluation of provision

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's development cycle by June 2028

