

# Learning Through Play Policy



March 2024

## **Carrick Primary School**

### **Vision Statement**

Forward Together: Ar aghaidh le chéile.

### **Mission Statement**

In Carrick Primary School we aim to provide a safe, caring and stimulating environment, in order to realise and celebrate the academic and non-academic potential of all our pupils. We expect our pupils to work hard and encourage parents to assist us in helping children to learn and to become lifelong learners.

We have a responsibility for the safeguarding and child protection of the children in our care. All staff, teaching and non-teaching should be alert to the signs of possible abuse and should know the procedures to be followed. This Policy sets out guidance on the action, which is required where abuse or harm to a child is suspected and outlines referral procedures within our school.

### **School Aims**

We aim to:

- develop and strengthen each pupil's understanding and love of Catholic values by promoting the Catholic ethos throughout the school;
- create a safe, enjoyable learning environment, in which effective learning is facilitated and quality teaching is provided;
- implement all aspects of the Northern Ireland Curriculum;
- help our pupils to develop a positive attitude towards life and a love of learning;
- value, respect and nurture every child in our care;
- encourage pupils to respect themselves and others and to support and care for one another;
- equip our children with the necessary life skills to enable them to participate in a fast changing society;

- involve the parents, Board of Governors and wider community in the life of the school and in the holistic development of the children in our care.

### **Background**

Carrick Primary School is situated in the village of Burren, approximately 2 miles from Warrenpoint.

### **Learning Through Play**

"Play that is well planned and pleasurable helps children to think, to increase their understanding and to improve their language competence. It allows children to be creative, to explore and investigate materials, to experiment and to draw and test conclusions....such experience is important in catching and sustaining children's interests and motivating their learning as individuals and in co-operation with others" (Starting with Quality, The Rumbold Report, HMSO, 1990) .

"Play for young children is not recreation activity. It is not leisure-time activity, nor escape activity. Play is thinking time for young children. It is language time. Problem-solving time. It is memory time, planning time, investigating time. It is organisation-of-ideas time, when the young child uses his mind and body and his social skills and all his powers in response to the stimuli he has met" (*James L. Hymes, Jr., Child Development Specialist*).

### **The Role of Play in Carrick Primary School**

In Carrick we aim to provide a safe, secure and inviting learning environment where children feel valued and adults take time to listen to children's views and opinions and support their learning. We recognise the importance of play as a fundamentally important part of the process of learning in the early years at school. We recognise that children learn best when they feel happy and secure, in a stimulating environment.

### **The Northern Ireland Curriculum.**

Play/Activity Based Learning is central to learning and teaching in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. We believe that children learn best when learning is interactive and enjoyable. We also believe that it is vitally important that children have opportunities to be actively involved in practical, challenging play-based learning, in a stimulating environment.

### **Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.**

At the heart of the Northern Ireland Curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of pupils' skills and 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.

### **Links with Areas of Learning**

The experiences provided for our children during Play/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. Emphasis is placed on the development of skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society.

### **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**

The children's independence is fostered by well organised and structured physical environments. Resources are labelled clearly and stored so that the children can access and return them independently.

The children have access to the following areas:

- Role play
- Creative
- Construction (including recyclable materials)
- Sand
- Water
- Drawing / writing table
- Small world
- Table top
- Play dough
- Book corner
- Music
- ICT

### **The Development of Skills, Attitudes and Dispositions.**

As children engage in Play, they are developing skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society. During Activity/Play Based Learning, 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, facilitate the development of children's Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TS&PC), as well as positive attitudes and dispositions to learning.

It is envisaged that as children engage in Play, positive attitudes and dispositions will be fostered. Play will provide children with opportunities to:

- Improve concentration and listening skills;
- Increase self esteem and confidence;
- Show and develop leadership skills;
- Develop emotionally;
- Develop creativity and imagination;
- Experience success and failure and realise that they can learn from their mistakes;
- Enjoy their experiences;
- Feel in control/take ownership of their learning;
- Socialise with their peers;
- Feel that their opinions and contributions are valued.

#### **As they play children should become:**

- More independent;
- More willing to share;
- More cooperative;
- More willing to "have a go";
- Better problem solvers;
- Better communicators;
- Better at making decisions;
- Enthusiastic about learning because play should motivate and stimulate.

Our aim is that our play will provide opportunities to develop the above skills and attitudes, which are fundamental to future learning.

## **Role of the Adult**

The role of the adult is crucial to the success of the play activities.

The teacher/classroom assistant will:

- Ensure that the learning environment is safe, happy and secure;
- Actively promote quality play;
- Ensure that all children have equal access to play opportunities;
- Plan and provide a wide range of appropriate learning activities;
- Make optimum use of space and time;
- Ensure that there is progression in play;
- Monitor resources;
- Participate and extend play;
- Have a positive approach to behaviour management;
- Be sensitive to the uniqueness of each child.

In Carrick Primary School we recognise the contribution made by others including students and volunteers. Professional development opportunities will be provided, when required.

## **Classroom Management**

Primary One and Primary Two year groups have a shared play area. Each class also has its own resources for use within the classroom.

The teacher consults with the children for a whole class introduction to discuss the activities planned for the play session. Children can choose freely what they want to play with, however children will be encouraged to sample a range of activities to encourage quality play. Children may choose an alternative activity during the play session, provided that there is a free place where they wish to go and provided that, they have completed their initial task. During play the teacher and classroom assistant circulate among the children giving assistance where necessary, and encouraging the children to talk about what they are doing and to evaluate their own activities using careful questioning e.g. Who are you dressed up as? What are you making? Which holds more? Can you see through the bubbles? The adults help to extend children's experiences during play by interacting and facilitating the learning. They contribute to the development of abstract thinking by adding resources and props and by asking open-ended questions. Children will be informed when they have five minutes left and at the end of play all children and staff work together to tidy up the play area and the classroom. Pupils are encouraged to come together for a short "show and tell" session, to report back and to discuss the outcomes of the play session.

## **Planning**

Planning underpins effective learning and teaching and takes account of the developmental stage of the children, as well as their previous experiences. Planning documents are regarded as flexible and are amended as the children's responses and the outcomes of activities are observed.

As with all learning and teaching, planners are evaluated and it is recognized that good planning and effective assessment are closely related.

In Carrick Primary School, we try to help pupils to make appropriate connections between the areas of learning, using a topic based approach.

## **Foundation Stage**

The Foundation Stage teachers discuss and plan Play topics to ensure progression. The format for planning is in accordance with the recommendations given by EA. Through observations, assessments and professional judgments we gain valuable insights into how children learn best through their play and activity based learning. This information informs our future planning as we seek to meet the needs of each child.

## **Progression in Play**

What is progression?

" Progression in play reflects the observation and assessment of children's knowledge and attitudes, in order to provide developmentally appropriate experiences. Children come to school already skilled learners. Through observations, assessment and professional judgement we gain valuable insights into how each child learns best. This information informs our planning to meet the needs of each individual child. Progression in play comes about as a result of a real understanding of the interests, needs and experience of the child. "As practitioners we need to understand that there must be a progression in the provision of activities to meet the developmental needs of children" (Learning Through Play in the Early Years).

## **Time Allocated to Play**

### **Foundation Stage**

The children in Primary 1 and 2 play for approximately 45/60 minutes each day. They choose from a range of activities linked to particular learning intentions. In P1 and P2, pupils choose and initiate their own play, and are supported by staff members.

**The teachers will ensure progression through play by:**

- Addressing the needs of the children through careful planning, delivery and evaluation;
- Linking the play through planning to other areas of the curriculum;
- Providing suitable materials;
- Using appropriate and careful questioning to extend learning;
- Observing play and interacting appropriately;
- Liaising with colleagues.

**Skills to be developed through play**

- Observing
- Describing
- Questioning
- Comparing
- Investigating
- Predicting
- Problem solving
- Estimating
- Listening
- Communicating
- Discovering
- Identifying
- Concentrating

**Observation, Assessment, Evaluation and Recording**

**Foundation Stage**

Observations will be a regular feature of classroom practice. They provide much 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 abilities of the child;
- Assess the appropriateness of the activities provided and the learning that is taking place;
- Encourage the child to access a wide variety of play experiences;
- Identify 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.

A flexible approach will be adopted which allows for both planned and spontaneous observations. Observations are used to inform future planning.

### **Equal Opportunities**

We try to ensure that all children have equal access to all play activities, to allow them to explore situations and roles from different points of view. Boys and girls are not confined to traditional roles and both are equally encouraged to take on leadership roles in all areas of play.

### **Review of Policy**

This policy will be reviewed and updated every two years or sooner if required. This policy has been developed in consultation with pupils, parents, staff and governors.

Signed: **Mr G Murdock** Chairperson of the Board of Governors

Signed: **Mrs A Cassidy** Principal

Date: **March 2024**

Review Date: **March 2027**