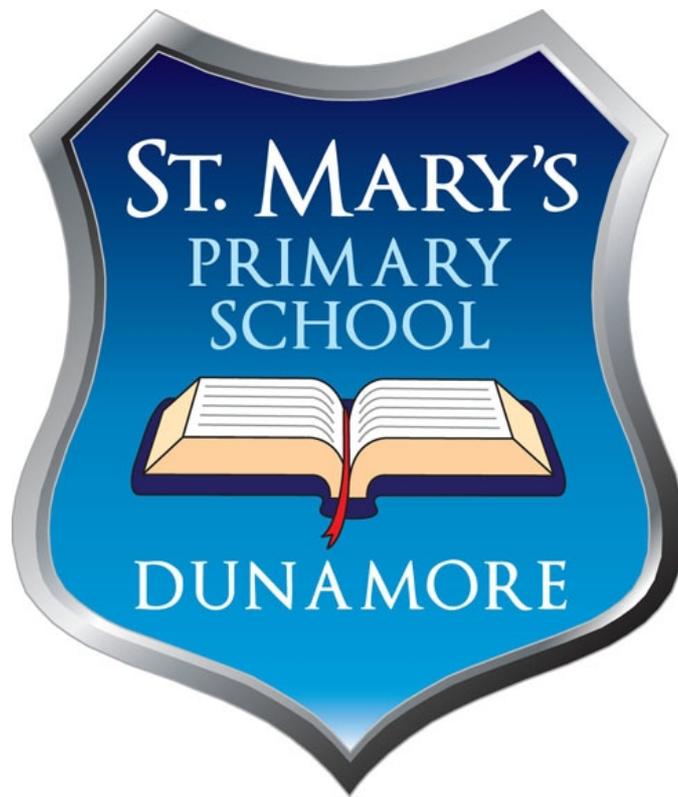


Play Policy



Introduction

In St. Mary's Primary School, we recognise the importance of activity and play-based learning as a fundamental part of the process of learning in the early years.

Play/activity based learning at Foundation builds on the active, hands on learning that has taken place in the Nursery/Pre-school setting. Key Stage 1 builds upon the good practice carried out at Foundation Stage. It may be linked to topic/theme and allows children to engage in a variety of focused play activities AND independent play based games/activities, for example, construction, role play, art/design and table top games but for the most part, experiences will be designed to focus on learning across the curriculum.

"Children are generally active learners, operating most effectively through first-hand experience. They make sense of the world by exploring objects, materials and emotions in situations which have meaning for them.

Starting with Quality, The Rumbold Report, 1990, para 56

"Play is an essential activity for all children. Not only is it enjoyable but it also makes an invaluable contribution to children's educational and social development."

Piaget

The Northern Ireland Curriculum

Active learning is central to learning and teaching in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Active learning is an umbrella term that encompasses both play and activity based learning.

"Children learn best when learning is interactive, practical and enjoyable. "

Learning at Key Stage 1 should:

- Provide children with opportunities to engage in exploration, problem-solving and decision making;
- Promote positive attitudes to learning and help children make informed and responsible choices and decisions
- Develop children's creativity
- Use a range of strategies including thematic approaches, in a wide range of contexts which are worthwhile, challenging, relevant and enjoyable.

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.

(Ref.: Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities for Key Stages 1 & 2 (CCEA, 2007))

Links with Areas of Learning

Children learn best when learning is connected. The experiences provided for our children during play/activity based learning encompass the six areas of learning. The learning may be integrated through a topic based approach and will enable 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 Development of Skills, Attitudes and Dispositions

As children engage in activity/play-based learning, 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 promote opportunities for our children to develop Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TS&PC) as well as positive attitudes and dispositions to learning.

Play develops:

- Self esteem
- Self confidence
- Independence
- Positive Attitudes to Learning
- Feelings and Relationships
- Creativity
- Self Expression
- Imaginative Thinking
- Co-ordination skills
- Language Development
- Communication Skills
- Curiosity
- Investigation
- Exploration
- Motivation
- Perseverance
- Concentration
- Reflection

Play encourages adults to:

- Make learning enjoyable
- Make learning relevant
- Build on previous knowledge and experiences
- Involve children in the planning process
- Be imaginative/creative
- Be active
- Observe and assess regularly to inform future plans
- Interact effectively
- Self-evaluate
- Consider the holistic development of the children
- Monitor progress

Play encourages children to:

- Enjoy learning
- Make informed and responsible decisions
- Reflect on previous experiences
- Make links in their learning
- Self-evaluate
- Manage their learning
- Take responsibility for their learning
- Transfer learning to real-life situations

The Learning Environment

At St. Mary's, we strive to ensure that the children 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 daily to the following areas:

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

Key Stage 1

A well organised, stimulating and secure environment enables children to become confident, active learners.

We try to ensure that the classroom environment promotes independence and that the skills fostered in the Foundation Stage continue to be developed in Key Stage 1. In order to promote independence and support active learning, the following resources are easily accessible to pupils:

- I.C.T
- Library area
- Writing materials – e.g. paper (variety of sizes and type), pens, felt-tips, pencils, rubbers, stapler, paperclips, cello tape, scissors, hole punch etc
- Drawing aids e.g. Art and Design materials e.g. paint, coloured paper, tissue paper, glue, card, pipe cleaners etc
- Recyclable materials
- Construction
- Table top and games
- Water/sand tray
- Imaginative Role-Play

Role of the Adult

Foundation Stage

The teacher must adopt the roles of provider, facilitator, participant, observer and evaluator in order to promote quality play.

The Foundation teachers, along with the classroom assistant strive to:

- Provide appropriate activities from the resources and materials available and match these to the interests and experiences of the children.
- Foster the children's own interests, encourage them to use their initiative, acquire concepts, develop confidence in handling materials, communicate and make decisions.
- Be a participant who initiates, encourages, questions, models, joins in, stimulates and extends the learning.
- Observe children carefully, assess their progress, evaluate the learning taking place and use the information gained to inform future planning.
- Be consistent and have a positive approach to behaviour management
- Be sensitive to the uniqueness of each child

Key Stage 1

As pupils engage in activity-based learning, the adult's role is often that of facilitator, supporting pupils as they learn and develop skills.

- Plan for and provide appropriate activities/experiences
- Organise and provide a stimulating learning environment
- Facilitate learning
- Be aware of the potential learning in all areas of the curriculum
- Observe/assess/record/play
- Realise when/when not to intervene
- Work alongside children, modelling skills and attitudes
- Evaluate and extend the provision
- Pose exciting challenges
- Interact with children
- Ask open-ended questions, make suggestions
- Enjoy the experience

Planning

Planning focuses on what the children know, understand and are able to do. 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 altered or added to as the children's responses and the outcomes of activities are observed.

As with all learning and teaching, planners are evaluated - good planning and effective assessment are closely related.

At St. Mary's Primary School, we try to help pupils make appropriate connections between the areas of learning by sometimes teaching in a topic based approach. We will also provide play opportunities that are directly linked to the curriculum and may not necessarily link to a topic. Through our play/activity based learning, we aim to ensure that:

- teaching builds on where the children are;
- children's needs and interests lead the learning;
- appropriate support is given to those children who require it;
- children are motivated and their learning challenged;
- children have high expectations of themselves

Planning for activity based learning is indicated in a formal way on Half-Termly/Monthly planners.

"The process of being consulted, having one's opinions seriously considered, feeling that one's contributions are valued and that they may well result in change for the better are all powerful builders of morale, confidence and commitment."

HMI, Effective Primary Schools, 1989

Children's planning ideas can be recorded:

- On a planning board
- On a notice board
- In a big book
- On a flipchart
- On a large KWL grid

This planning is a working document, owned by both the teacher and the children. Information can be added as the play progresses and the learning develops.

Management of Play Based Learning

Foundation Stage

- Whole class introduction and planning time with adults.
- Freedom of choice: children choose where they want to play.
- Children may change places during play sessions.
- Children are informed when they have only five minutes left.
- When possible, children are allowed to keep unfinished pieces of work to the following day.
- Before tidying up, children are brought together to review their play. Children are also involved in making class books about their play that include shared writing, drawings and photographs.
- Children tidy up the play areas themselves.
- Children can bring pieces of work home where appropriate.

Key Stage 1

- Bring whole class together, when required, i.e. beginning of week or topic, to explain activities on offer and potential learning
- From planning we may identify one or two focus activities for some children and have a selection of independent play based tasks for the remainder of the class
- We may choose to work with one or two focus groups for most of the session and may then interact with other groups for the time remaining
- Be flexible in how we organise our play session, consider our groupings, provide opportunities for free choice, when possible, and try not to be too prescriptive.
- Involve the children with the setting up of activities
- Children tidy up materials
- Class come together for plenary where the learning is discussed
- Achievements/learning will be displayed in a designated area

Time Allocated to Play/Activity Based Learning

Foundation Stage

The children in Primary 1 and 2 play for approximately one hour each day.

Key Stage 1

Year 3 and 4 teachers have dedicated time on their timetable of 2-3 hours per week

Observation, Assessment, Evaluation and Recording

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 ability of the child
- Assess the appropriateness of the activities provided and the learning that is taking place
- Ensure that the child is experiencing a wide variety of experiences and not confining his/her play to a limited number of areas
- Know 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 planning.

Observations should include information about the child'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

Providing Equality of Opportunity and Access for All Children

We are aware that pupils have different experiences, interests and strengths, which will influence the way in which they learn. In planning play/activity based learning, we are aware of the requirements of the equal opportunities legislation and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order.

We endeavour to have high expectations for all pupils and will aim to provide suitably challenging opportunities for them to participate in activities fully and effectively.