



# Kesh Primary School

## Activity and Play Based Learning Policy

**Ratified by Board of Governors in:  
October 2023**

**Signed:**

**Chairman of Board of Governors**

**Next Review:  
October 2025**

**Signed:**

**Principal**

### Kesh Primary School - Play and Activity Based Learning Policy

**“Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul.”**

**Friedrich Froebel**

#### **Introduction**

In Kesh Primary School and Community Nursery we recognise the importance and value of play and activity-based learning in the Curriculum. We believe that play and ABL has a part in the holistic development of each child.

Play and ABL builds on the active, hands-on learning that has taken place in the Nursery/Pre-school and Foundation Stage settings.

It is usually 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.

Many areas of the Curriculum can be enhanced through play, developing language and communication, interpersonal skills, creativity, mathematical skills and thinking skills and personal capabilities. It can build on previous experiences and make connections in their learning in a safe, secure and enjoyable way. It offers opportunities for children to ask questions and explore their world, their culture and their language.

Well planned and purposeful play helps the children to make connections with their learning and their own personal experiences. Planned play-based learning provides progression and develops the children's knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Play is a useful way to explore and celebrate diversity. We ensure that all play activities challenge gender, race or cultural stereotypes. Boys and girls are encouraged to participate and to cooperate.

**“Play is foundational for bonding relationships and fostering tolerance. It’s where we learn to trust and where we learn about the rules of the game. Play increases creativity and resilience, and it’s all about the generation of diversity—diversity of interactions, diversity of behaviours, diversity of connections.”**

**Isabel Behncke**

### **Our Aims for Play**

- To develop language and communication skills
- To encourage creativity
- To encourage personal, social and emotional development
- To stimulate curiosity and promote and challenge thinking
- To develop co-ordination, basic motor skills & spatial awareness
- To develop and consolidate mathematical language and skills
- To provide opportunities which develop the children’s ability to manage themselves and make decisions, to work with others, to be creative, to manage information and to solve problems
- To develop knowledge and understanding of various areas of the Curriculum through thematic play
- To promote a positive attitude and disposition to learning
- To allow children to plan, demonstrate, share and review their learning
- To provide play opportunities which do not discriminate against physical ability, race or gender
- To provide play situations which are appropriate to the age and ability of the children

## The Northern Ireland Curriculum

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

**In the Northern Ireland Curriculum (Primary) it states:**

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

*“It is important that children have opportunities to be actively involved in practical, challenging play-based learning in a stimulating environment.”*

(Approaches to Learning and Teaching p. 9)

**With reference to the Foundation Stage in the Northern Ireland Curriculum (Primary) it states:**

*“In the Foundation Stage children should experience much of their learning through well planned and challenging play.”*

*Learning at the Foundation Stage should foster the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual development of pupils by:*

- *using to the full opportunities provided by play for their development, both socially and academically.*

(Approaches to Learning and Teaching, p. 9)

The following quotations refer to Key Stage 1 and are taken from The Northern Ireland Curriculum Primary (Introduction to Key Stage 1, p. 48)

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

This is emphasised in our school Mission Statement which states that in Kesh Primary School our aim is:

‘Developing Life-long learners through achieving and caring’.

### 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. In Kesh Primary School we believe that providing well planned and engaging activities where children are encouraged to develop as individuals, by providing a supportive and caring atmosphere, will encourage the children to learn and develop their knowledge and understanding of their world. 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.

Learning through Play at Key Stage 1 (p. 14) states:

That play develops:

- The dispositions to learn
- Self-esteem
- Self-confidence
- Positive attitudes to learning
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Motivation
- Concentration
- Reflection

In Kesh Primary School we also believe 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

## **Organisation of Play**

The play activities throughout the school will be related to class topics, the World Around Us/ PDMU thematic learning and seasonal events including, but not limited to, Autumn, Spring, Christmas, Harvest and festivals. The organisation of indoor and outdoor play will be the responsibility of the class teacher.

**“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.”**  
**Plato**

The role of the adult is crucial to well organised, purposeful play, and teachers and classroom assistants will plan for and participate in the play to support the learning intentions for each activity. They will make observations during play which will inform future planning and provision, ensuring that there is progression and that the needs of the children as individuals are met. During play, the adult should model language, roles, turn taking and decision making. The adult should ask appropriate questions which encourage reflection and extend the children’s learning. He/ she should encourage participation and should check that learning intentions are being met. The adult will be a role model through their actions, use of language and encouragement.

Our school’s Positive Behaviour ethos will be reinforced throughout the activities, reinforcing the development of interpersonal skills and the ethos of respect in our school.

## **Foundation Stage**

The role of play in Foundation Stage cannot be underestimated as part of the holistic learning experiences we aim to provide. The children will engage in planned and purposeful play activities every day. They will have opportunities to contribute to the planning process, the setting up and tidying up of play activities. Children will choose their play activity and will be allowed to change activities during play sessions. They will have opportunities to take part in play activities which are creative (e.g. play dough, painting, construction) which develop ICT skills (e.g. BeeBots, iPads, Chromebooks, computers), which spark imagination (e.g. role play, small world), which develop maths and literacy skills (e.g. games, investigations, writing table, role play) and which promote and develop self-confidence, self-esteem and positive learning dispositions. Opportunities will also be given to respond to spontaneous play. Activities will promote and progress the children’s physical development and their understanding of their local and wider environments.

At the conclusion of play, the children will have opportunities to talk about their play or label and display objects and to share what they have done with the class. They will have opportunities to demonstrate, review and reflect upon their learning.

**“Play matters because people matter. It reminds us of our interdependence and gives us a chance to really see other people. And in turn, to be really and truly seen.”**

**Jill Violet**

## **Key Stage 1**

Children will have opportunities for planned play sessions each week. Children will be encouraged to spend more time at activities and become more independent.

Play activities will be planned, which keep both the learning process and learning potential in mind and which allow for progression in the children’s thinking, skills and understanding. The planning will take previous observations and individual need into account. The children will be given opportunities to be involved in the planning process and will be informed of the learning intentions.

Activities will provide a range of opportunities for children to work as individuals or in groups. Teachers and Classroom Assistants will work to encourage children through participation in activities, engaging the children in talking about their work and providing stimulating and interesting environments in which they can play.

They will ensure that children are involved in their tasks and that they are achieving the learning potential planned.

The children will be increasingly involved in the setting up of play activities and routines will be established for the setting out and tidying up of equipment. The children will be encouraged to take responsibility for tidying up their own activities.

At the conclusion of play, the children will have opportunities to talk about their play or label and display objects and to share what they have done with the class. They will have opportunities to demonstrate, review and reflect upon their learning.

*Activity based learning will also be a feature of work throughout Key Stage 2, when appropriate.*

## **Activities**

Children will be engaged in a variety of the following activities:

**Imaginative Play-** (e.g. *Cafe, House, Vet's Surgery, Doctor's Surgery, Hairdresser's, Dentist, Estate Agent's, Garden Centre*), developing interpersonal skills, encouraging independent learning, developing language & mathematical skills

**Wet/ Dry Sand-** capacity and volume, pouring and filling, imaginative play, language development, co-operative play

**Water-** capacity and volume, floating and sinking, pouring and filling, imaginative play, co-operative play, language development

**Games-** developing mathematical and language skills, co-operative play, turn taking

**Listening-** taped stories, rhymes, children reading their own work

**Maths activities-** games, sorting, matching, shape space, measures

**Creative activities-** painting, drawing, modelling with clay/ dough, collage, developing manipulative skills, talking about their work, expressing themselves, responding to experiences

**Puppet theatre-** developing oral language skills, co-operation, retelling stories, making up stories

**Writing-** labels, lists, menus, posters, stories, making books, developing fine motor skills, letter formation, attempting to spell words, developing independence

**Construction-** creating, planning and designing, exercising fine motor skills, developing hand/ eye co-ordination, talking about their work, working collaboratively, developing mathematical language

**ICT-**developing language and mathematical skills through modelling programmes and games, data handling, modelling, sorting, consolidating language or mathematical skills through i-Pad games & apps, work, researching, programming Beebots/ Probots, using mouse/ keyboard, typing text, saving and printing work

**Reading-** library books, comics, magazines, menus, catalogues, non-fiction books, instructions

**Exploring & Investigating/ Technology-** practical science & technology activities designed to stimulate curiosity and discussion, developing skills such as observing, predicting, planning, making, testing, recording results

**Small World-** stimulating imagination, developing manipulative skills, developing geographical skills, co-operation, negotiation



## Outdoor Play

We have extensive school grounds, including willow tunnels, flower beds. Nature trails, large physical apparatus, wheeled toys and an outdoor courtyard. We also have playground painted game areas. We believe outdoor play is vital for the physical and mental well-being of all the children. We believe outdoor learning compliments indoor play and we value it equally.

We aim to provide activities, equipment and environments which develop their physical skills, imagination, interpersonal and creative skills. We aim to develop mathematical and language skills through planned and purposeful outdoor play provision. We ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn about their environment, themselves and about each other. They will be able to experiment with natural resources, create a sense of wonder about the world around them and learn about looking after themselves and others.

The provision and planning for outdoor play, just as for indoor play, must reflect the diversity and richness of the experience and developing interests of the children.

The health and safety of the children is vital during outdoor play. Children are adequately supervised and activities are risk assessed. We encourage that children are provided with sun hats and sun creams during the summer period and that hands and equipment are washed regularly. Children are provided with helmets when using the bicycles and tricycles.

## Activities

Children will be engaged in a variety of the following activities:

**Imaginative Play-** *(Car wash, garden centre, ice cream stall, fire fighters etc.)- using a variety of equipment & tools, rearranging and creating environments to support imaginative play; acting out scenarios, playing co-operatively*

**Creative-** *painting, drawing, writing, dancing & singing games, listening to and recognising sounds in the environment, using outdoor play as a stimulus for music/ writing/ art activities*

**Gardening-** *digging, planting, using magnifying glasses to look at small things, recognising growth and change in the environment, learning to care and respect living things,*

**Sand/ water-** *capacity and volume, pouring and filling, imaginative play, language development, co-operative play*

**Movement/ Small Equipment/ Climbing/ Wheeled Vehicles-** *developing spatial awareness, balance, gross motor skills, co-ordination and control, throwing, catching, running, jumping, climbing, rolling, hitting balls*

## **Observation, Evaluation and Assessment**

In order to inform future planning, evaluate the effectiveness of provision and to identify any difficulties or successes, teachers will monitor the children's responses in play activities. These observations will identify the learning taking place and monitor attitudes to learning. Through talking and listening to the children, through observation during play sessions, through taking photographs and through documenting children's responses, teachers will record the process of learning in order to improve the children's social and emotional development, physical skills, cognitive development and creativity. The amount of adult support or encouragement needed will be observed.

The children will be encouraged to reflect on what and how they have learned.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Governors ensure that the Play and Activity Based Learning Policy is implemented throughout the school. The Principal will delegate funding for adequate, appropriate resources and for outdoor spaces to be utilised well. He will ensure that all members of staff are familiar with the Policy and understand the purpose of play. It is the role of the Principal to ensure that teachers and assistants have access to training required.

## **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.

### Key Stage 1 teachers should:

- Plan for and provide appropriate activities/experiences
- Organise and provide a stimulating learning environment
- Observe activity-based learning and make written comments if necessary (this would highlight any areas of concern)
- Work alongside children
- Evaluate and extend the provision
- Interact with children
- Ask open-ended questions, make suggestions
- Enjoy the experience

At all times the adults will ensure the play reflects the differing needs, cultural backgrounds and interests of the children. They will ensure that play does not reinforce gender, race or cultural stereotypes. The teacher will observe and evaluate the play to inform future planning.

### 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 Kesh Primary School, we try to help pupils make appropriate connections between the areas of learning by teaching in a topic-based approach. 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

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.

## Foundation Stage

Teachers in the Foundation Stage use a Topic Based Planner indicating Learning Intentions and possible activities for each learning area. These plans may refer to half-termly or monthly periods and outline the planned activities and the resources required; identify the learning potential that the staff intend to promote in each area; and be evaluated to inform future planning

## Key Stage 1

At present, planning for activity-based learning is indicated in an informal way on existing monthly planners. It is intended that later planning formats may be altered to accommodate activity-based learning more fully.

## **Management of Activity / 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 or after tidying up, children are brought together to review their play.
- Records are kept of play activities e.g. photographs, wall displays etc.
- Children tidy up the play areas with assistance when needed.
- Children can bring pieces of work home where appropriate.

### Key Stage 1

- Bring class together, i.e. beginning of topic, to explain activities on offer and potential learning
- Identify one or two focus activities for some children and have a selection of independent play-based tasks for remainder of the class.
- Involve children with the setting up of activities.
- Children are informed when they have only five minutes left.
- Children tidy up materials with assistance when required.
- Children demonstrate / discuss their learning (plenary).
- Children display their learning.

## **Time Allocated to Play/Activity Based Learning**

### Foundation Stage

The children in Foundation Stage are engaged in a sustained period of play each day which may include snack time.

## Key Stage 1

Year 3 and 4 teachers have dedicated time on their timetable.

### 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. A flexible approach will be adopted which allows for both planned and spontaneous observations. 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.

'In the Foundation Stage you have the flexibility to interpret the Areas of Learning to suit the needs, interests and abilities of your pupils.....It is important to view, learning teaching and assessment as a as a continuous cycle; assessment is not an end point but an integral part of the learning process.'

(Learning, Teaching and Assessment in the Foundation Stage: Non-Statutory Guidance Document page 6)

Observations are used to inform planning and 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

## Key Stage 1

Learning is assessed during play in a variety of ways.

- The teacher
- Peers
- Self-assessment
- Observation
- Discussion and reflection

Assessment is an integral part of the learning process.

It enables teachers to:

- monitor progress
- plan future work
- set tasks to use certain skills
- Assess the appropriateness of the activities provided and the learning that is taking place
- Know when extra materials are required to supplement or extend the play
- Assess the suitability of the equipment and materials being used
- Self-assessment
- Self-evaluation

### Observation at KS1

This is primarily based on:

- The learning intentions
- The agreed success criteria
- Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

Observations should take account of the child's cognitive, social and emotional development. They can be planned or spontaneous.

### Effective Questioning

- Ask better questions
- Ask questions better
- Deal with answers productively
- Encourage pupil questions

### 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.

**"It is in playing, and only in playing, that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self."**

**Donald Woods Winnicott**