Isobel Mair Family Centre

Forest Walk and Play Policy

Rationale

Children attending Isobel Mair Family Centre have access to the outdoors on a daily basis to enable them to learn through energetic play, exploration and investigation. In addition to our daily programme of outdoor play and learning we also access the woodlands of Pollok House on a weekly basis. Staff at IMFC are committed to providing a daily programme of outdoor learning and understand the benefits of this approach.

 *‘The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences’.*

Education Scotland (2016)

Background

Why does outdoor learning matter?

All learning is important whether it takes place indoors or outdoors. However, sometimes the outdoor environment can be a more effective and stimulating place to learn than indoors. Frequent and regular outdoor learning encourages children and young people to engage with their natural and built heritage and brings a host of benefits in terms of health and wellbeing. The outdoors also provides excellent opportunities to use a wide range of skills and abilities not always relevant in the classroom. Outdoor learning isn’t a single subject or class; it is an approach to learning which can be incorporated at appropriate times into every area of the curriculum.

Being outdoors allows children and to engage directly with the environment through a direct, ‘hands on’ approach with challenges which cannot be offered in the classroom. Outdoor learning brings together many different areas allowing children and young people to ‘make connections’ on their learning journey. For example, a project involving growing vegetables involves numeracy, sciences and health and wellbeing as well as other skills.

Who is responsible for outdoor learning?

All staff have a responsibility to offer ‘regular and frequent’ outdoor learning experiences from early years, through school and beyond. Literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing are everyone’s responsibility and taking learning outdoors can greatly help develop understanding. Staff should ensure that the outdoor environment is used in a stimulating and meaningful way. For example, in numeracy outdoor learning could involve weighing, measuring and exploring size and shape. In health and wellbeing it could be becoming physically active in alternative ways and improving emotional wellbeing and mental health by being outdoors.

What will children learn outdoors?

Children will learn progressively about different places through exploration, play, direct experience of natural materials, the natural and built environment and through a series of planned and structured learning experiences. They will learn about curriculum areas, for example studying the weather for science and social studies. Outdoor experiences take place through all seasons and in a wide range of weather conditions, thus fostering adaptability and resilience. Different outdoor learning experiences offer a breadth of opportunities for personal and learning skills development in areas such as communication, problem solving, information technology, working with others, creativity and thinking skills. These transferable skills are required to meet the opportunities and challenges of a rapidly changing world. Being outdoors offers challenge and enjoyment through learning about different aspects of the curriculum in an engaging and relevant way.

How can parents help?

The support and contribution of parents and carers is vitally important to the success of Isobel Mair Family Centre’s outdoor learning. Parents are key partners in delivery and help to prepare children for outdoor learning experiences. We hope parents, grandparents or other carers will support our woodland walks and play sessions by volunteering to assist staff by joining the forest walks. Being enthusiastic about being outdoors is one of the most valuable ways in which parents can help both their child and the Family Centre.

Will my child be at risk?

Providing challenging, stimulating experiences for children support many to sustain engagement. Most outdoor learning activities carry no higher risk than activities and situations faced by learners on a day-to-day basis. To ensure that the benefits of any planned activity outweigh the risks staff utilise a risk/benefit approach. At Isobel Mair Family Centre a full and comprehensive risk assessment has been carried out and is reviewed regularly. Staff follow national guidance. Risk management is a life skill and children are educationally involved in the process from the outset. This will help children to make good decisions about risks as they develop. Measures are in place to ensure that: there are agreed ratios of adults to children, staff are competent and emergency arrangements are in place. Children will, where appropriate, be encouraged to manage their own and others’ safety.

Health and Safety Information

Required Equipment

* First aid kit
* Risk assessment to include medical care needs and allergies
* Medication
* Children’s change of clothing
* Wipes and anti-bacterial hand gel
* Contact details for Family Centre /School
* Mobile phone

Site check

* Lead staff member will check the site for hazards on arrival before roping or taping off the area to be used that session
* Rope or tape will be removed after every session
* Staff will ensure no litter is left behind

Briefing the Volunteers

* Staff will discuss the rules of the woods and remind children how to remain safe
* Adults must not access their mobile phones during the session unless there is an emergency
* Only qualified staff should assist in toileting or first aid of children
* Each volunteer will be allocated specific children to be ‘responsible’ for
* The staff lead is responsible overall
* There should always be two members of staff – one at the front and one at the back of the walking group

First Aid Procedures

* If a child (or volunteer) requires first aid the lead staff member will quickly assess the situation
* The lead staff member will make the decision as to whether a phone call should be made to Isobel Mair Family Centre/School to request back up assistance
* If no assistance is required, the lead staff member will administer basic first aid and carry on with the remainder of the session
* If assistance is required – the lead staff member will calmly direct the second staff member in maintaining a safe environment for all other session attendees whilst awaiting assistance
* If emergency first aid is required i.e. serious injury to a child or volunteer, the lead staff member will telephone the emergency services immediately
* Once the emergency services call is made, a call should be made to the Family Centre to alert the HT/DHoC of the situation
* A volunteer should make their way to the road access to enable the emergency services easier direction to the accident site
* Children should be reassured and kept calm; children should be moved to an alternative area if required/possible

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