

# Newmains Primary School



## Play Based Learning Policy



*"Newmains Primary School C.A.R.E.S"*



## Rational:

At Newmains Primary, the best interest of the children in our school is top priority. We are guided by research into Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma and believe our Play Based Learning Policy will support children to access the curriculum through a more holistic approach.

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 access the content of the curriculum.

*“Play is fundamental to children and young people’s quality of life but first and foremost it is a child’s right and one which the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is keen to see actively applied”* (Scottish Government, Play Strategy). Through play children create their own culture, develop their abilities, explore their creativity, challenge their limitations and assumptions and learn about the people and places around them.

Many of Scotland’s educational policies and guidance documents discuss the importance of play and place a high emphasis of its value in meeting the needs of all our learners. The value of play is emphasised through the Play Strategy for Scotland’s vision; *“We want Scotland to be the best place to grow up. A nation which values play as a life-enhancing daily experience for all our children and young people; in their homes, nurseries, schools and communities.”* The 2015 Play Strategy document further outlines the value of play and the role it has in enabling young learners to access the curriculum in a way that is relevant to them.

The value of play and it’s imperative role in Scottish Education does not solely apply to Early level learners. Building the Curriculum 2 states ‘developmentally appropriate practice is most conducive to effective learning...there is no long-term advantage to children when there is an over-emphasis on systematic teaching before the ages of six or seven years of age’ pg 6. Research shows a play based approach to learning allows opportunities for learners to take ownership, develop logical and critical thinking, begin to reflect, develop creativity and express their strong sense of identity within their learning environment; all of which are key themes found within the How Good Is Our School policy document. HIGOS discusses the need for children to understand the purpose of learning, have opportunities to lead learning, participate in experiences which are both challenging yet enjoyable. It further outlines that the curriculum should provide experiences which match each learner’s needs and interests but also allow children to exercise choice and take increasing responsibility.

### Snap Shot of Curriculum Policy

“There is a need to debate curriculum balance in the early stages of the primary school, and consider whether play and self-directed learning opportunities are underrepresented.” (Building the Curriculum Two: P7)

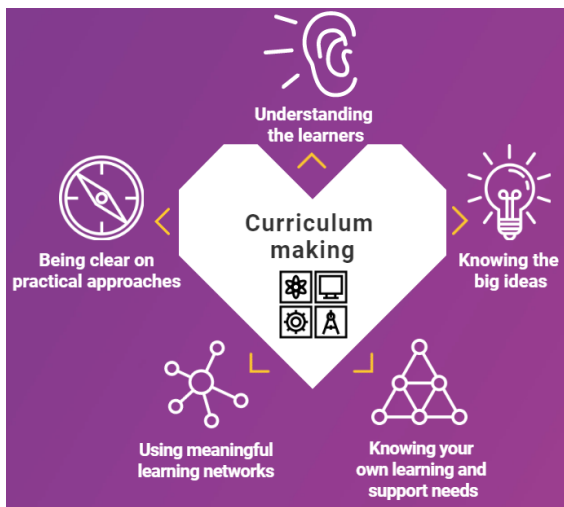


The refreshed narrative on the Scottish Curriculum documents outlines the need for greater teacher autonomy, it recognises the importance of creating an approach to learning which best meets the needs of learners in your care and notes that there is no set way to achieving this.

Scotland's curriculum – Curriculum for Excellence – helps our children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century.

Individual settings and practitioners are empowered to make the decisions needed to provide a coherent, flexible and enriched curriculum that is adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and which reflects the uniqueness of their communities.

(Refreshed Narrative on Scottish Curriculum)



(Refreshed Narrative on Scottish Curriculum)

Building the Curriculum Four; Skills for life, learning and work, alongside the Developing the Young Workforce (DYF) Policy document, clearly outline the need to develop a curriculum which supports children in fostering the necessary skills to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. DYP recognises the need for “Children and young people (to) develop interests, strengths, skills and aspirations through experiences as part of the curriculum and life beyond school.” Many of the skills noted in the image below, taken from the DYW document, are central to the play based learning pedagogy and form the very foundations of the skills and qualities the play based learning pedagogy aims to develop.



# Preparing children and young people (3-18) for the world of work



## Developing the Young Workforce

Children and young people develop interests, strengths, skills and aspirations through experiences as part of the curriculum and life beyond school. A range of partners support these exciting journeys through co-design and co-delivery and together shape children and young people's decisions about their future and the pathways they follow. Where will these journeys take children and young people and how can YOU contribute?

[www.educationscotland.gov.uk/developingtheyoungworkforce](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/developingtheyoungworkforce)



## **The importance of play:**

At Newmains Primary School practitioners aim to ensure that planning, application and evaluation of play allows the children to access play based learning in a way that supports, enhances learning and allows for self-directed learning to occur.

There are many benefits of play based learning. Play develops;

- Cognitive, social and emotional development.
- Play is intrinsically motivating, and inspires a love of learning.
- Play helps develop skills for thinking, learning and acting in social worlds.
- Play facilitates perceptions of new connections across ideas, experiences, skills and knowledge.
- Play allows meaning to be constructed from experience.
- Physical play builds brain connections and coordination.
- Exploration of feelings in play develop resilience, self-regulation and stress management.
- Play develops, creativity, imagination and independence.

At Newmains Primary School we aim to build and develop the following skills through a play based learning approach:

- Resilience
- Determination
- Perseverance
- Co-operation
- Team work
- Independence
- Creativity
- Communication skills
- Higher ordering thinking

## **The role of the teacher/adult**

Staff are committed to facilitating high quality play experiences throughout the curriculum. These experiences will:

- Encourage curiosity and questions.
- Help children reflect and extend their thinking.
- Support children to solve their own problems.
- Challenge the children through questioning.
- Offer appropriate materials and activities to support all learners' needs and abilities.
- Develop co-operatively learning skills.



- Encourage independence, resilience and perseverance.
- Encourage higher order thinking
- Build on pupils prior knowledge and experiences.

## **Classroom environment**

The classroom environment should be designed around the following zones:

1. Teaching zone – Carpet space, teaching table.
2. Creative zone – Art area.
3. Social zone – Small world area, role play area, loose parts area.
4. Discovery zone – Construction area, woodwork, water and sand.
5. Outdoor zone

Although each zone has a specific purpose, it is important to carefully consider the resources and mechanics of each area to enable transparency and flow throughout the learning environment.

Resources should be open ended and carefully selected to encourage children to explore their curiosity, problem solve, challenge themselves and their own preconceived ideas.

## **Creating a play based learning experience**

Within each learning zone the teacher should carefully select materials and resources to create a provocation with specific skills in mind, yet should not limit children's creativity, imagination or independence to take the learning experience in whichever direction they feel is right. The Reggio Emilia approach "provocation" is the *"deliberate and thoughtful decisions made by the teacher to extend the ideas of children. Teachers provide materials, media and general direction as needed, but the children take the ideas where they want. This allows children to develop skills of creativity, inventiveness and flexibility in thinking, planning and reflecting."* (Journey into Childhood, 2016).

Connection and relationships are key to organising and creating the learning environment. Creating a high quality play experience requires the teacher to capitalise on the individual children's interests and motivations. The overall goal of a high quality learning experience set out in the 'First Steps to Playful Pedagogy' document states *"The goal of the adventure (learning experience) is to facilitate experiences which enable your class, and every individual child within it, to determine their own learning goals and pathways while remaining within the CFE framework"*.

Therefore at Newmains Primary School teachers have regular meetings with their pupils. Throughout the meeting the teacher listens attentively to the children, gathering ideas and knowledge of each child's interests and the general interests of



the class as a whole. Teachers will also use observations as a way to gather information on pupil's interests. Using the information gathered from the class meeting (pupil voice) and observations, the teacher will then identify a class thread of interest and skilfully plan a provocation around this. However, it is important to note that pupils have full ownership over the thread of interest. Through the development of the thread the teacher will host regular 'class meetings' and carry out regular observations to identify where the learning will go next. Each thread of interest must have a clear beginning, middle and end and should be documented on the children's play wall which they have regular access to. Although one whole class thread of interest will be running continually, children are not discouraged from following their own thread of interest/ line of inquiry.

Observations are also key for teachers to recognise whether the children have fully explored the depth and challenge of a provocation. It is important to not change the learning experience too quickly as children need the opportunity to revisit and evaluate each area as this is what develops creative thinking (Grogan, 2020).

Below is an extract taking from the 'First Steps to Playful Pedagogy' document, created by Play Scotland:

Designing your first Learning Adventure. Here is a Figure and some overarching questions which provide a tool for thinking and reflecting on the design of your first adventure, and on the interactions (i.e. the learning processes) involved. The Design Triangle is where you start, and the Process Triangle are the learning interactions which occur as your adventure pans out. The "scaffolding" of your experience is what connects the two, i.e. the topic, provocation and challenge that gets your adventure going.



However, as the children progress throughout the levels of Curriculum for Excellence it is important that the play based experiences/provocations becomes more complex and challenging. As children move into first level of the curriculum a more Inquiry Based Learning approach may be adopted.



## Assessment, observations and documentation

Assessment, observation and documentation are critical to the implementation of the play based pedagogy. Education Scotland discusses the need for adopting a cyclical approach as part of the Play Pedagogy Toolkit.

At Newmains we have adopted a consistent approach to assessment, observation and documentation. We aim to assess children's learning and our own practice by using the following tools:

- Threads of interest progression planner, kept within the IDL section of class teacher's forward plan. This is linked to both the curriculum and Leuven scale.
- Documentation: Threads of interest, documented with photographs, videos, observational notes, children's work and quotes, following the thread of inquiry/learning with a clear beginning, middle and end identified.
- Thinking jotters (Primary Three only)





Useful Links:

- First Steps to Playful Pedagogy

[https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/First-Steps-to-Playful-Pedagogy\\_JHamend.pdf?plsctml\\_id=20120](https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/First-Steps-to-Playful-Pedagogy_JHamend.pdf?plsctml_id=20120)

- Play Strategy For Scotland: Our Action Plan

[Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Action Plan \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Play-Strategy-for-Scotland-Our-Action-Plan)

- Realising the Ambition

<https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf>

- The University of Strathclyde Play Diary created by Deirdre Grogan. A tool to evaluate the play learning environment

[Play\\_20Diary\\_202020\\_20booklet.pdf \(storage.googleapis.com\)](https://storage.googleapis.com/Play_20Diary_202020_20booklet.pdf)

- Early Level Play Pedagogy Toolkit

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/early-level-play-pedagogy-toolkit/>



## References

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