



## Policy for Play-based Learning at Holmston Primary



**‘All children have the right to relax and play and join in a wide range of activities.’**

**Article 31 from The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

### Rationale for Play

At Holmston Primary, we believe that play at the **Early Level** is an effective vehicle for learning, enabling children to experience opportunities in a meaningful and purposeful context. Children can therefore develop the skills and capabilities to be **Effective Learners**. Play pedagogy is a means by which curriculum content can be accessed; children are able to build on previous experiences and make connections, therefore improving cognition, in a fun and satisfying way. Indeed, as a school, we are committed to nurturing the wellbeing of the whole child and are holistic in our approach, therefore providing an abundance of engaging opportunities for play-based learning both within the classroom and in the outdoor environment.

### Aims of Play-based Learning at Holmston Primary

- To stimulate children’s natural curiosity to discover and explore
- To build on children’s interests (child-centred) and their personal capabilities
- To foster creativity and imagination

- To provide opportunities for children to interact with their peers, develop social skills and form positive relationships
- To support the acquisition of language, enabling children to become effective in communicating and expressing their ideas
- To deepen understanding and promote critical and divergent thinking
- To ensure healthy physical development through gross motor play and fine motor manipulation
- To allow children to make choices and develop independence, self-regulation and resilience (growth mindset) through rich, open-ended play activities
- To foster collaboration and turn-taking
- To provide active, engaging and hands-on experiences
- To foster an enjoyment of lifelong learning
- To ensure challenge and problem-solving (developmentally appropriate)
- To develop the fundamentally important skills of **Literacy** and **Numeracy**

## What is Play?

A **child's play** is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a **creative reworking** of the impressions he has acquired.

~Vygotsky

Lessons Learnt Journal

Twentieth-century theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner were advocates for the cognitive functions fulfilled by play. **Piaget** stressed the importance of symbolic representation (using symbols to convey mental processes and ideas) and socialisation. **Vygotsky** believed play to be a vehicle for interaction, role-play and self-regulation of behaviour. According to **Bruner**, play is fundamental to the acquisition of language and problem-solving capability. All three were congruent in their belief that play enables children to challenge themselves as they are intrinsically motivated to explore and investigate.

Put simply, play is any freely-chosen activity which a child finds both rewarding and satisfying.

Play is “serious and of deep significance”...the highest form of human development. (**Froebel**)

It may or may not involve equipment or other people. It may be serious or light-hearted. It may produce something, or it may be done simply for its own sake. It allows children the freedom to be creative and to make decisions.



# Our Learning Environment at Holmston Primary

## The Environment as the Third Teacher

Our learning environment is rich in authentic opportunities for children to engage with concepts and foster lifelong skills for learning. We offer experiences which are open-ended, intrinsically motivating and encourage exploration and investigation. These support the development of cognitive functioning.

Children have access to two distinct areas:

1. **The Classroom** - this has a creative area and is set up for construction with small-scale loose parts, imaginative role play, sensory exploration, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and small world play. This is both Literacy- and Numeracy-rich, providing opportunities for reading, writing and the development of mathematical skills (such as counting and number recognition) throughout.
2. **The Outdoor Learning Environment** - agility equipment for gross-motor play, creative and mark-making easel, construction blocks and large-scale loose parts, bikes and scooters, mud kitchen and planters. In addition, there is also a newly-installed closed curriculum cabin for Outdoor Literacy and Numeracy and two flexible, multi-purpose barns for children to use as they see fit.

## Observation and Assessment



**‘A young child’s voice is interpreted by our observations of their actions, emotions and words. These observations are central to assessment and inform us what children need.’**

**Realising the Ambition: Being Me**

At Holmston Primary, the adults value play and take the time to observe and scaffold children’s learning through high-quality interactions. This often happens in-the-moment in order to deepen understanding and extend learning further.

We are child-centred in our approach and will observe and assess children’s individual capabilities, documenting these on Evidence Me. We will monitor and track their attainment by highlighting the experiences and outcomes achieved. This online learning journal is

unique and personal to every child. We will be flexible in our approach and responsive to their needs, often adapting and modifying our provision to reflect their interests and stage of development. This will allow for both planned and spontaneous observations to occur. Children will be observed playing (and 'working' individually) as well as part of a group. These observations will be used to set targets and identify next steps, while simultaneously ensuring children are given a voice.

## Role of the Adult

At Holmston Primary, the role of the adult in play-based learning is vital. This involves any or all of the following:

- Facilitating
- Modelling
- Observing
- Participating
- Scaffolding
- Supporting

Adults should fully embrace and promote each of these roles, enabling them to provide high-quality play. They need to have a sound understanding of early childhood development and that children learn best when engaged in meaningful, first-hand experiences. They need to be responsive to children's interests and plan experiences accordingly. They should notice and understand behaviours that underpin their development, such as schematic play, and present purposeful opportunities to build on these.

Adults will:

- Provide appropriate materials and resources for play, matching these to children's experiences, interests and prior learning
- Be a participant who initiates, models, scaffolds and stimulates play
- Observe, skilfully question and extend children's learning (know **when** to intervene and look for those 'teachable moments')
- Plan activities which will inspire engagement and nurture children's natural curiosity
- Encourage independence and initiative
- Assess progress and evaluate learning, informing future planning
- Ensure authentic opportunities for social interaction, language development and emotional regulation
- Foster a positive approach to behaviour management and self-awareness
- Sensitively explore (and celebrate) the uniqueness of every child

At Holmston Primary, rich adult-child interactions are pivotal to challenging and supporting children. We are attuned to their individual stages of development and utilise a range of strategies for communicating and interacting with them. These include:

- Conversing
- Commenting on and describing learning
- Shared sustained thinking
- Questioning

Our collective role is to ensure that we work together and work **with** our children to clarify concepts, develop their thinking and enable them to become problem solvers. Ensuring positive, trusting relationships and children's emotional wellbeing are fundamental to play and learning in the Early Years.

## **Policy Review**

December 2021