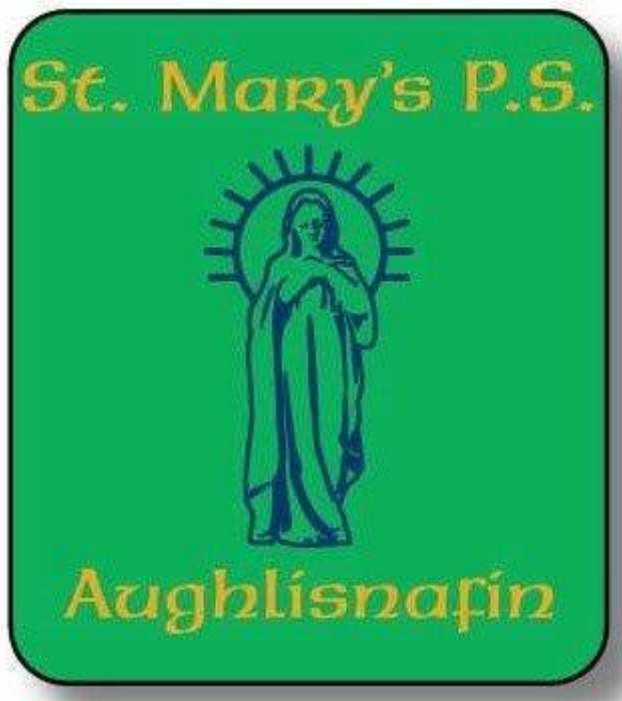


St. Mary's Primary School



Play Policy

What is Play?

The department of Education states:

“The right to play and leisure is an intrinsic entitlement of childhood (Article 31, UNCRC). Play is a natural and universal drive, in childhood. It is an essential element and contributory factor to supporting children’s physical and emotional well-being, growth, learning and development. Play can support children’s creativity and cultural awareness. Play can be structured, non-structured, formal, and non-formal. Through play children explore the world around them and learn to take responsibility for their own choices.”

The Playwork Principles state that: “Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas, and interests, in their own way, for their own reasons.”

German educationalist Friedrich Froebel suggests that: “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.”

In the 1940s, Piaget's interest in how children develop literacy, numeracy and social skills led him to identify play as less a behaviour or activity than a state of mind which allows children to become engrossed in what they are doing. Whatever activity is engaged in is done for the sheer pleasure of it. It is geared towards taking in the external world, rather than adapting to it, allowing the child to experience a sense of mastery, which is the source of pleasure.

In the 1990s the psychologist Jerome Singer, giving expression to a later strand of thinking about the function of play, proposed that children's play, with its repetitive and exploratory characteristics, represents "a critically important feature of their development of cognitive and emotional skills". (Singer 1994)

Through play children explore social, material, and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter. By playing, children learn and develop as individuals, and as members of the community.

The impulse to play comes from within the child and is intentional only in the sense of being about what interests' children themselves. This is the freedom which play allows for children when the interests of others, especially those of the adult world, recede into the background.

What are the benefits of play?

The benefits of play are broad, some of these benefits are:

- Promotes mental health
- Emotional wellbeing
- Cognitive development
- Physical development
- Social development
- Language development
- Mathematical development
- Learning about taking risk
- Creative development
- Imagination
- Understanding
- Space to explore and make sense of their environment
- Offers children opportunities for testing boundaries and exploring risk
- Provides children with opportunities to enjoy freedom, and exercise choice and control over their actions
- Offers a very wide range of physical, social, and intellectual experiences for children
- Fosters children's independence and self-esteem
- Develops children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction

- Supports the child's well-being, healthy growth, and development
- Increases children's knowledge and understanding
- Promotes children's creativity and capacity to learn

Many of the attributes enhanced by play are found to be helpful in developing resilience: "Those children who have good communication skills, a positive attitude, a problem-solving approach and the capacity to reflect tend to be more resilient. The ability to plan, a belief in control, a sense of humour are all qualities that can lead to resilience". (Mental Health Foundation 1999).

To a child Play is about having Fun, but at St. Mary's we know that play is so much more. Play is essential to healthy development from birth to adulthood, it contributes to the capacity for learning, resilience, and the development of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. By playing children learn to develop as individuals ,as members of our school and as members of our community.

Play is an essential part of a happy , healthy childhood.

Our Aims:

In St. Mary's we aim to :

- Provide the children with a wide range of play opportunities that are stimulating and well planned.
- Provide the children with play opportunities that are balanced and cover all areas of the Northern Ireland curriculum.
- Provide play opportunities both inside and outside.
- Take in to account the interests of the children.
- Provide play activities that are fun and engaging.
- Involve the children in the planning of play.
- Respond to the needs of the children and be facilitators in their learning.
- Be inclusive of all children and respect their individual needs. Every child, irrespective of gender, background, cultural or racial origin, or individual ability, should have equal access to good play opportunities.
- Regularly observe the children at play , the resources provided and the range of play opportunities to ensure the children are getting a wide variety of opportunities, that they are covering all areas of the curriculum and that they are making progress.

Play opportunities

At St. Mary's we realise that children need plenty of time to play.

Each day in Reception and the foundation stage we feel it is important that the children have access to a long period of uninterrupted play and appropriate time is given to:

- indoor and outdoor play, with children having time to make choices and to settle into and develop their play.
- activities such as story time and music time.
- routines such as those associated with break time, tidy-up time and moving from indoors to outdoors; and
- arrival and departure from the setting, to allow for conversations with individual children and informal parent–staff contact.

The children need short bursts of play at regular intervals throughout the day and they also benefit from opportunities to immerse themselves in play for more extended periods of time.

As all children are different and develop at different rates, we aim to develop the whole child by:

- promoting emotional, social, physical, creative, and intellectual development.
- developing self-esteem, self-control, and positive attitudes towards others.
- developing language and communication skills to encourage the sharing of thoughts and feelings; and
- creating confident, eager, enthusiastic, independent, curious learners with a positive and problem-solving attitude to learning.

In the Reception and Foundation stage classes opportunities for play either inside or outside should be provided every day.

In Key stage one play/play based learning opportunities either inside or outside should be provided at least three times a week.

At St. Mary's we acknowledge the importance of a play environment that is stimulating, well-resourced and challenging. The children will have the opportunity to explore play through:

- Tabletop activities
- Art/craft activities
- Small world
- Role play/dressing up
- Dough and malleable materials
- Physical play
- Writing opportunities
- Story and rhyme time

- Water play
- Sand play
- Construction
- ICT

Role of the Adult:

In St. Mary's we see the role of the adult as being important in building a trusting relationship with the children. Some key points for the adults to consider:

Young children learn best when:

- they feel happy and secure in a safe and stimulating environment that supports their well-being.
- adults are sensitive and understanding in their interactions with the children while extending their learning and development.
- the curriculum is broad and balanced, builds on their needs, and provides time for sustained involvement in play.
- they have opportunities to investigate and engage in a wide range of activities that are enjoyable, motivating, and challenging.
- the activities are based on previous learning and are carefully planned, with some flexibility.
- they have the opportunity to develop concentration and skills such as observing, making decisions and problem-solving; and
- parents/guardians/carers and other professionals work together in partnership

The adult's role:

- To give children adequate time to settle into their new surroundings.
- Establish positive relationships with the children and their parents/ care givers.
- Help the children gain confidence and promote raising their self-esteem.
- Be sensitive to each child's personal experience and family background.
- Ensure that the children are valued as individuals.
- Encourage independence.
- The adults in the class play the role of being an observer and a facilitator during play.
- The adults should enable the children to extend and elaborate on their play activity.
- The adults through observation know when to stand back and observe and when to intervene to extend learning.
- The adult's (teacher and classroom assistant) will make regular observations of each child's play and record these to build up a picture of the child's learning.

- The adults will observe activities provided and assess these for interest and adult support.
- The adult will observe the children's interests and how they develop their play, and this will feed into future planning.
- The adult will plan regularly and evaluate to extend the children's learning and to cater for their interests.
- The adults will provide a rich and stimulating play environment that will challenge the children and engage their interests.
- The adults will model language, social situations and extend vocabulary through careful intervention in play.
- Children should feel confident that the adults involved in play welcome and value them as individuals.
- Respect the voice of the child, their opinions, and reactions, should be taken into account to the maximum degree consistent with health, safety, and respect for the needs of others.
- Have effective behavioural management plans in place that have positive language and positive reinforcement and that all staff implement these consistently.

Planning of play

At St. Mary's we use a thematic approach to play. These themes are chosen carefully throughout the year to ensure that all areas of the Northern Ireland curriculum and whole curriculum skills and capabilities are covered

- Language and Literacy. ...
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding. ...
- Mathematics and Numeracy. ...
- Physical Development and Movement. ...
- Religious Education. ...
- The Arts. ...
- The World Around Us.
- ICT
- Communication
- Thinking skills and personal capabilities

Children build on the learning experiences that they bring to school from home and/or pre-school/Reception the previous year. They learn through well-planned, challenging play that develops their interests, curiosity, and creativity.

When planning the adults should consider the following:

- build on the children's prior experiences
- Planning should offer a wide range of activities and experiences both inside and outside.
- Planning should be inclusive of all children in the class and take into consideration their individual needs.
- Planning should be differentiated to meet the needs of every child.
- ensure the learning experiences for each child are broad and balanced and promote continuity and steady progression in the child's overall development
- ensure that children experience a broad, balanced, and motivating curriculum which gives appropriate emphasis to all Areas of Learning
- Planning should be flexible and changed to suit the interests of the children.
- Although we have potential learning intentions the children may take the play in a different direction and we need to facilitate this spontaneous response to the resources/activities provided, in order to extend the child's interest and learning.
- Plans should be flexible, taking account of the children's responses and the outcomes of play.
- Planning should be evaluated regularly and the interests, spontaneous response and learning of the children should be taken into consideration when planning the next cycle of play and providing adequate resources to extend learning.

- be evolving, working documents that build on the children's natural interests and previous experiences.
- staff will build up a picture of how individual children are responding and developing. This can inform the plans for future learning.
- • involve all staff in a planning and observation cycle to help everyone reflect on how they can create a stimulating, challenging environment, and plan for progression.
- • help to inform parents/guardians/carers of the learning that is taking place.

Observations in Play

Observing children and making assessments of children's learning is based on day-to-day observations and interactions with the children in a range of situations.

Observations allow staff to gain a better insight into the children's needs, experiences, interests, thinking, strengths, and areas for development. This information is essential when deciding how to support and enhance the children's learning, both individually and collectively.

The children's efforts and achievements should be recognised, shared with them, and recorded.

Regular, skilful observations are the key to effective planning and assessment for learning. It is essential to take time to plan them well.

child-centred observations may focus on their:

- levels of well-being and involvement.
- ability to recognise and begin to manage emotions and feelings.
- natural interests or current passions.
- ability to play indoors and outdoors.
- interaction with peers and other adults.
- verbal and non-verbal communication with peers and adults.
- potential for development.
- ability to concentrate, persevere, use initiative, and reflect; and
- use of resources and care for equipment

Staff should:

- observe children over a period of time and in a variety of contexts.
- adopt a flexible approach to observations that allows for the unpredictable reactions of children to the activities offered (this provides some of the most detailed insights into each child as an individual).
 - record both planned and spontaneous observations.
 - observe the children's play and use of language so that a holistic and accurate picture emerges of each child's progress across each of the Areas of Learning.

Recording observations:

Staff need to develop a method for ensuring that:

- significant observations are recorded as soon as possible.
 - the information is recorded in a concise, systematic, and manageable way, either paper based or electronic.
 - samples of children's artwork or experimental mark-making, and/or photographs or videos of the outcomes of their play, are used to assess their learning and development
 - this informs planning for the next steps in learning.

- Information recorded about the child can be shared and celebrated at plenary sessions at the end of play in an informal way.

Sharing information

- Information of the child's play can be shared with parents in an informal way through chats, good news notes and digital photos.
- A formal sharing of information is reported to parents through a parent teacher meeting and a formal school report for the foundation stage and key stage one and in the form of a standard transition form for the reception children.
- Information on each child will be shared with their teacher for next year to enable the next teacher to begin planning appropriately for each child, building on, and taking account of previous learning.

At St. Mary's we feel that it is important that good relationships and communication are developed between education, health, and social services. This allows children and their families to have broadly based, co-ordinated support that meets their needs and ensures every child feels included.

The staff at St. Mary's will seek the help and advice of other professionals in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect, and openness. The co-operation between parents/school/ and other agencies will ensure that valuable information is exchanged which will assist in the planning for the children's wellbeing and learning.

- Information on individual children can be shared with outside agencies (e.g., speech and language, physiotherapy, social services, health worker, school nurse, educational psychology) with parental permission.

The learning environment:

The staff at St. Mary's provide a rich and stimulating environment that promotes effective learning by :

- creating learning environments, both indoors and outdoors, that are motivating and inviting to the children, and which allow them to choose from a range of activities in safe and secure defined areas.
- presenting children with opportunities to explore, experiment, plan and make decisions for themselves, thereby enabling them to progress in their learning and development.
- ensuring that children's work is displayed where they have access to it; and • encouraging them to display their own work by providing space, at an appropriate height, where they can place their pictures and models.

Outdoor learning

The staff at St. Mary's aim to :

- plan carefully to exploit the unique opportunities our outdoor areas can provide
- plan to make the best possible use of space, equipment, and time so that children can make full use of the resources available.
 - provide children with a balanced programme that ensures progression in their learning and offers activities to strengthen their whole bodies.
 - ensure that outdoor learning happens frequently and is safe, varied and stimulating.
 - give children opportunities to be physical, quiet, or loud and to explore the natural environment.
 - give children opportunities to look at books, listen to stories and write in different environments.
 - give children opportunities to build with construction materials; and
 - ensure that learning is challenged as children explore their own ideas and use open-ended resources.

The Staff at St. Mary's will consider the space that is required for:

- safe play
- wheeled items
- Energetic and quite play
- Large spaces for physical play

The set up of these areas should allow for flexibility and rearranging of the furniture to suit the needs of the children and the play provided.

Materials and Equipment

The staff at St. Mary's aim to ensure that:

- children have access to a wide range of well-presented materials throughout the day that can be added to.
- materials are safe, clean, fresh, attractive, and accessible to the children; and
- where appropriate, natural, and authentic materials are used to enhance learning.

Risks in play

The child's control of their own play activity is a crucial factor in enriching their experience and enhancing their learning and development. Play is a key element in children learning to appreciate, assess and take calculated risks, which is fundamental to the development of confidence and abilities in childhood.

Children seek out opportunities for risk-taking and it is the responsibility of the adults in the class to respond with exciting and stimulating environments that balance risks appropriately. Whereas children may play without encouragement or help, adults can significantly enhance the opportunities for a child to play creatively, through the provision of an appropriate human and physical environment.

Children can sometimes unleash powerful feelings, in themselves or in their companions, through their play. Children are entitled to expect that adults involved in play provision will understand and be responsive to cues that they may be in need of comfort or reassurance as a result of their play.

Health and safety

All staff in St. Mary's are aware of health and safety issues as children explore the environment. They should:

- explain how to use equipment safely and where it is safe to engage in physical play.
- be familiar with and follow good practice guidelines on risk assessment received from the Education Authority, Health and Social Care Trusts and other relevant agencies.
- implement child protection procedures to meet legal requirements.
- promote good habits for life such as healthy eating, dental care, and physical activity; and
- be aware of and foster their own positive mental health and that of the children and their parents/ guardians/carers.

At St. Mary's we value the importance of play, and we aim to provide play that is child led, broad, balanced, stimulating, challenging , safe and all inclusive. This will be provided in a positive, trusting, safe, caring environment that promotes the needs of each child to reach their full potential.