

Kesh Community Nursery



Play Policy

Ratified by Board of Governors in:
October 2023

Signed:

Chairman of Board of Governors

Next Review:
October 2025

Signed:

Principal

‘Young children do not have to go to school to work. Playtime for them is a time of learning by practice. Every new movement which a little child makes is tried, first of all tentatively, and then repeated until the first clumsiness is gradually refined to an exact movement. Every plaything he uses is a tool for his work.’

Maria Montessori (Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents, p. 65)

‘Nothing lights up a child’s brain like play.’

Dr Stuart Brown, M.D.

‘Almost all creativity involves purposeful play.’

Abraham Maslow

‘All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate.’

Children have a natural need to play that cannot be halted. It is how they make sense of the world around them. Play enables children to learn and practice skills and to create bonds.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 31 states that child have the right to play and relax:

- 1. ‘States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.’*
- 2. ‘States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.’*

We, at Kesh Community Nursery, believe that children are strong, competent, motivated, and confident learners who explore and test their ideas, solve problems, and try to make sense of their world. We recognise that learning needs to be first hand, experiential and active; it should promote children's independence and autonomy, encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning - initiating and making decisions. Learning needs to take place in the social context and we believe 'talk' is central to the learning process. We also understand that learning cannot take place unless children's emotional needs are met, and they feel safe to take risks.

We believe that parents/ carers are the first and most enduring educators who have the most impact on their child's life and education. Therefore, we work in partnership with parents to seek their perspective of their child to inform planning that is meaningful, purposeful and curriculum based on the interests and strengths of their children.

Here at KCN we value the process of learning highly and understand that young children have the right to communicate and explore their learning in a variety of ways.

Aims:

We will:

- Support every child to achieve their full potential
- Ensure that teaching and learning is personalised, creative, challenging and fun
- Create an environment in which children feel safe, supported, valued and happy
- Ensure that the teaching and learning of young children is differentiated to meet individual children's needs
- Establish what children already know and build upon it
- Structure and pace the learning experiences to make it enjoyable yet challenging
- Enable children to become active partners in their learning allowing them to take "safe" risk in order for them to become confident problem solvers and thinkers
- Regularly use encouragement and authentic praise to engage and motivate children
- Value children's previous experiences and achievements and liaise with parents and other settings using the information as starting points for children's continued learning
- Plan a curriculum and learning environment indoors and outdoors that responds to children's interests and recognises that children's learning is holistic
- Ensure that all areas of the Ni Pre School Curriculum is covered at a developmentally appropriate stage for every child

Engaging children

We believe that every child has an active part in their learning and development, therefore we will ensure that children:

- Have access to learning activities that will develop their sense of achievement
- Are engaged in relevant, interesting and enjoyable learning activities
- Have access to a variety of learning experiences to match their ages and stages of development, and different learning styles
- Will make sustained progress over time, building upon what they already know
- Develop skills to become independent learners
- Are encouraged to develop social, emotional, cultural and spiritual awareness.

We recognise that:

- Play is fundamental to every child's development.
- All children have a right to play and that play is important for children.
- Children's play needs should be continually considered and catered for.
- Children need access to safe quality play both indoors and outdoors in a child centred environment.
- Children need choice.
- Play opportunities enable children to develop as individuals and play activities must be specific to the age and stage of development for all children.
- Children's views are listened to, valued and considered
- Play should enable children to develop confidence and empower them.
- Good practice should be celebrated and shared - for example with our parents through Seesaw and with other professional colleagues through our local Early Years Nursery Cluster group here in Fermanagh.
- An adequate amount of well-equipped space should be allocated for children's own directed play.
- There needs to be adequate resources of good quality for children's play.

Objectives:

In order to achieve this, we ensure children have opportunities to play which enables them to:

- Explore and use all their senses
- Practise motor skills
- Be creative
- Experience new things
- Share
- Act out/Role Play
- Have fun
- Build
- Observe and copy
- Explore and take risks
- Practise activities and situations
- Pretend.

At Kesh Community Nursery we provide the space, time, activities, and resources for the children to play with e.g., dressing up clothes, games, sticks, stones, mud, water, boxes, balls, and bikes.

We use a mixture of child led and adult led play to provide a balanced learning experience. However, where possible we attempt to follow the children's lead.

We provide opportunities for physical, creative, imaginative, sensory and Investigative play.

We support the children to play themselves to enable the children to explore their world and their place within it and to develop at their own pace. We do this by:

Operating Policy:

Providing a child centred play area:

- Make sure it is childproof and clean
- Avoid over-stimulation
- Allow children to leave constructions up for a while so they come back and engage in new adventures in the world they created
- Store play items safely but make them easily accessible

Providing toys with play value that:

- Can be used in many ways
- Allow children to determine the play
- Appeal to children at more than one age or level of development
- Can be used with other toys for new and more complete play
- Will stand the test of time and continue to be part of play as develop new interest and skills
- Help children develop skills important for further learning and a sense of mastery

Encouraging a balance in play activities:

- Encourage outdoor play that uses large muscles - running, jumping, climbing and playing games
- Curtail time spent in adult-organized activities - child directed play is important
- Do not allow the children to become over-scheduled - self-directed play should be encouraged
- Encourage new activities such as art, music, building or science - I make the introduction then leave the children to play and explore on their own

The enabling emotional and physical environment

- The daily routine is structured to include time for personal exploration, small and large group sessions, and social experiences
- The routine ensures time for children to repeat, revisit and reflect on their previous experiences, which includes a long, uninterrupted 'explore time' during which children can really 'get lost' in their learning
- The routine is always consistent, thus ensuring children feel secure and can operate independently. Within the elements of the daily routine varied and enriching experiences are planned to maintain and stimulate children's attention and learning.
- Children are emotionally supported by all staff
- Boundaries are clear and consistent across the setting
- Children are empowered to manage their feelings, keep themselves safe and resolve conflicts using PATHs and with the support of the adults where needed
- Children have continual, free flow always access an environment both inside and outside in our shelter during our first free play session and then the extended outdoors area in the latter part of the nursery morning
- Planning for the environment is informed by children's interests, their learning styles and preferred ways of communication. We use the child's interests or next steps to develop

play through offering a breadth of opportunities or resources for the child to use in a variety of ways.

- We understand the needs of the child and work towards providing opportunities for **child-initiated play**. This can be achieved through observations and building a solid relationship with the child, in order to learn about their likes and dislikes.
- We create play areas to meet the different needs of play to enable children to participate in activities and use the space to build on their ideas and experiences. For example, quiet areas to allow children to observe others such as our sensory room and our tent and these give them time and space to reflect on their learning, an outdoor environment to help nurture the minds of children and encourage child led play. The large open spaces and the breadth of natural resources enable children to use their imagination and problem-solving skills to develop their play.
- We provide children with a variety of play equipment and toys to allow the children to choose what that play with and for how long.
- Resources are easily accessible, plentiful, well maintained and organised and appropriate - with an emphasis on open ended exploration and collaborative learning
- We provide the parents with information on the importance of play and ideas to support and encourage it through regular communication through Seesaw and our Getting Ready to Learn Programme

Developing learning power

We believe that children will become confident learners if equipped with the appropriate skills, attitudes and capacities for learning from an early age. Children need to develop resilience, resourcefulness, and become reflective and reciprocal learners. In order to develop these appropriate attitudes, we:

- Enable children to initiate and carry out their own activities and make independent choices and decisions
- Encourage children to find, use and replace equipment and resources independently
- Encourage the children to make plans, modify plans, review, and reflect on their own learning.
- Set challenges for children and support them through the process of problem solving.
- Model and use the language of learning with both children and adults alike
- Use and encourage use of open ended and challenging questioning techniques
- Model 'being stuck' and learning from mistakes
- Using consistent strategies for what to do if you get stuck
- Encourage collaboration
- Enable children to see each other as tools for learning as well as the teaching staff
- Developing noticing skills
- Encourage absorption, and an awareness of distractions
- Plan for varied imaginative play situations
- Encouraging children to make connections from their experiences and explore possibilities.

Inclusive play:

We provide inclusive play by ensuring all children have the same access to play opportunities, regardless of their specific abilities, needs and backgrounds. Inclusive play bridges the divide between all abilities including those with special educational needs. All children can benefit from these play methods and learn a lot from mixing with those different to themselves. Children at all ages learn in all aspects of development through play: emotional, social, physical and mental.

Inclusive play offers children a richer play environment and evolves according to their changing needs and interests. It offers a sense of place and is supported through observation-led planning.

Inclusive play provides respect for the culture of children's play and recognises that all individuals are welcomed and valued.

We support inclusive play by

- ensure the layout of the room is not too cluttered.
- there is a clear pathway from one activity to another and to the toilet etc,
- make sure that each child has the adult support they require whilst promoting independence
- make sure the activities are presented in a way that promotes the child's independence, for example accessible to all children.
- All toy boxes are labelled with pictures so that all children can decide what to play with.
- work in partnership with the parents and other professionals to understand the best way to provide inclusive play to each child.
- observe the children and how they interact with the toys, environment and determine if their needs are being met to enable them to develop and adapt as necessary.
- Provide a wide range of activities, both child led and adult led based on children's learning needs
- Provide a wide range of opportunities to motivate, support and develop children and help them to be involved, concentrate and learn effectively
- Plan for each child's individual care and learning requirements including additional or different provision required to meet particular individual needs

Policy Implementation:

The role of staff

- To have a firm understanding of child development and an awareness of age-appropriate needs, behaviour and learning
- Be attuned to individualised feelings, needs, fascination and lines of enquiry
- Be attentive to any patterns of play that may be emerging and children's emotional need using gathered information to reflect on and aid progress
- Encourage children to communicate in a variety of ways and value first language and cultural heritage
- Develop planning that is personalised and challenging but achievable
- Ensure quality interactions which scaffold and prompt thinking, building on children's interests, strengths, and questions
- Encourage and support children's interactions with other children and adults
- Model feelings, learning characteristics and re-searchful learning
- Model language of learning and exploration of emotional well-being

- Support children to ask questions, take and evaluate risks, develop resilience, and have ownership for their learning
- To ensure the environment is safe, calm, purposeful, challenging, and supportive.
- To provide inspiring learning experiences and provocations in which children can become the leaders

Parents in partnership

Parents and carers are fundamental in their children's development and learning therefore we actively seek to help support our parents and involve them in all aspects of their child's learning.

We foster this relationship through:

- An ethos of openness and honesty, that encourages parents /carers to share their knowledge, understanding, hopes and concerns with us
- Opportunities to listen to and value personal histories
- Up to date communication through Seesaw, emails, messages, newsletters, notice boards, displays etc and consultation
- Providing one-to-one support where needed for example, when SEN have been identified, workshops and opportunities to meet with the nursery teacher in parent-teacher meetings and encourage our parents to organise other meetings at any point throughout the year as well as daily opportunities to speak with staff at drop off and collection times on a more informal basis.

Observation, assessment, monitoring and record keeping

Children skills and stages of development are observed and monitored by all staff. Staff will have individuals to observe on a regular timetabled basis. Observations are made either on post-its which are then photographed and uploaded or, written directly onto our iPads in the Seesaw Learning Journal app. Parents have also have access to their Home Seesaw app where photographs of their children in the setting will be shared with home. This Home app will be separate to the observation class.

This means that assessment of a child is ongoing through a mixture of informal observations, interactions with the child, the use of our written observation/photographs and discussion during regular staff meetings.

These observations and records inform our planning, identify specific targets for each child including identifying a learning difficulty or talent. These feed directly into our actions for specific children targets.

Children's progress in play is shared with parents/carers during their first term at parent interview and in any incidental meetings throughout the year for example at education learning plan reviews, planned appointments or at informal meetings with parents at drop off or collection times if deemed appropriate for example to share reports of improvements in sharing/ turn taking etc. This enables two-way sharing of information and planning of the next steps. Use of our Home app from Seesaw also enhances this.

We share the following with our parents:



Play Today?

You say you love your children
And are concerned they learn today
So am I - that's why I'm providing
A variety of kinds of play.
You're asking me the value
Of blocks and other such play.
Your children are solving problems
They will use that skill every day.
You're asking what's the value
Of having your children play.
Your daughter is creating a tower
She may be a builder some day.
You're saying you don't want your son
To play in that 'sissy' way
He is learning to cuddle a doll
He may be a father some day.
You're questioning the interest centres
They just look like useless play
You're children are making choices
They'll be on their own some day.
You're worried your children aren't learning
And later they'll have to pay
They're learning a pattern for learning
For they'll be learners always.

Leila Fagg