St. Francis’ Nursery Unit

Outdoor Play Policy

The Importance of Outdoor Play

“The best kept classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky.”

Margaret Mc Millan (1925) - Nursery Schools and the Pre-School Child NSA Publication

We the staff of St. Francis Nursery Unit are in full agreement with the above statement and are continually working to improve our outdoor learning environment. We recognise that the outdoor play is one of the best environments for children to learn and develop in all areas of the curriculum.

As young children learn through play, by offering the children in our care easy access to good quality outdoor play provision we provide them with first hand experiences and opportunities to develop in all areas of the pre-school curriculum, not only physically.

Most children enjoy playing outdoors. It gives them a feeling of energy and well-being, as it provides a sense of freedom that they do not have indoors.

The Principles of Outdoor Play

As Early Years practitioners we fully agree with Helen Bilton’s “Principles of Outdoor Learning in the Early Years” and strive to implement them in our setting. These are stated below:

- Indoors and outdoors need to be viewed as one combined and integrated environment.
- Indoors and outdoors need to be available to the children simultaneously.
- Outdoors is an equal player to indoors and should receive planning, management, evaluation, resourcing, staffing and adult interaction on a par with indoors.
- Outdoors is both a learning and teaching environment.
- Outdoor design and layout needs careful consideration.
- Outdoor play is central to some children’s learning, possibly more to some children than others.
- The outdoor classroom offers children the opportunity to utilise effective modes of learning-play. Movement and sensory experience.
- Children need versatile equipment and environments.
- Children need to be able to control, change and modify their environment.
• Staff have to be supportive towards outdoor play.

We agree that well planned and well-resourced outdoor play experiences allow for progression in a child’s thinking and understanding as well as development in all areas of the pre-school curriculum as the whole Early Years Curriculum can be discovered outside. Indeed some learning can only really take place outside, such as
• Experiencing changes in weather
• Encountering living creatures
• Gardening
• Running and shouting
• Spilling water
• Throwing, kicking balls and aiming at targets
• Acting out stories and scenarios that need plenty of space
• Large scale construction

However the outdoors should always complement what is happening indoors.

**The Purpose of Outdoor Play**

Through good quality outdoor play all the basic needs of the children are met.

• Outdoor play lends itself to allowing children to relive their experiences through their most natural channel, namely environment. Movement is one of four vehicles through which young children can learn, the others being, play, talk and sensory experiences.
• It enables the children to develop mind-body growth.
• Physical development is a pre-requisite for children’s growth. It
  - Enhances the development of fine and gross motors skills.
  - Develops co-ordination, balance and body awareness.
  - Keeps the body, heart and other organs healthy.
  - Develops a life-long good habit of daily exercise.
Areas of Learning

Our Aims (Long Term Planning)

(Ideas taken from "Learning Outdoors in the Early Years" File and "Learning Outdoors in the Early Years" by Dawn Crosby SEELB)

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

During outdoor play we aim to provide the children with opportunities to:

- Develop confidence, self-esteem and a sense of security.
- Develop independence as they acquire new skills.
- Care for themselves and their personal safety.
- Take care of the outside environment and treat it with care and respect.
- Become aware of and respect the need of others and reflect on their behaviour.
- Learn to follow new rules, share and take turns.
- Develop tolerance and perseverance.
- Explore, experiment and be adventurous.
- Learn to work as part of a group during group games.
- Take responsibility for looking after plants and growing seeds outside.

Physical Development and Movement

During outdoor play we aim to provide the children with opportunities to:

- Enjoy physical play and the freedom and sense of well-being it brings.
- Begin to understand the importance of physical activity for good health and fitness.
- Develop spatial awareness and how to share space with others.
- Move confidently with increasing control and imagination.
- Acquire essential movement skills like:
  - Balance - develops co-ordination and control of body actions.
  - Locomotion - focusing on basic motor skills such as running, jumping, and moving the body around in different ways.
  - Manipulative skills - using equipment to develop aiming, predicting and estimating techniques.
  - Experience the vocabulary of movement and words of instruction.
  - Understand simple rules and use tools and equipment appropriately, safely and with increasing control.
Language and Literacy Development

During outdoor play we aim to provide the children with opportunities to:

Talking and Listening

- Talk about their experience in the outdoor environment.
- Talk about the features of outdoor play.
- Develop language related to all areas of play.
- Use language to describe, explain, predict and ask questions.
- Interact with others and extend language in all areas of play.
- Develop ideas.
- Follow directions and instructions.
- Listen, respond and link language with physical movement in action songs and rhymes, role play and practical experiences.

Reading

- Access a wide range of texts - books, leaflets, catalogues, reference materials, magazines, posters, maps, charts.
- Enjoy stories, rhymes and songs in the outdoor environment.
- Experience a variety of meaningful print, such as signs, and begin to become aware that print has meaning.

Writing

- Experiment with early writing, using a wide range of media, such as, water and rollers, brushes, chalk, paint, clipboards and pencils.
- Use their drawings, marks and attempts at writing to express their ideas and feelings.
- See adults and peers writing for purpose.
- Write during role play and other activities such as writing measurements in the construction area.

The Arts

During outdoor play we aim to provide the children with opportunities to:

Art and Design

- Explore a variety of materials and appreciate colour, shape, texture and sound.
• Explore the properties of natural and man-made materials.
• Work at vertical and horizontal levels.
• Do large scale work.
• Experience a variety of media and techniques such as painting, drawing, chalking, mark making, modelling, printing and temporary pictures.
• Develop their sense of spatial awareness.
• Observe and experience outdoor characteristics using all their senses.

Music
• Listen to a variety of sounds, rhythms and songs in the outdoor environment.
• Make music in a variety of ways.
• Make and use instruments to invent music which expresses thoughts and feelings.
• Participate in simple dances and singing games.
• Listen to and recognise sounds in the outdoor environment.
• Use outdoor features as a stimulus for music.

Drama
• Plan, design and engage in stimulating role play.
• Play co-operatively, negotiate roles, agree rules and act out scenarios.
• Express their thoughts, ideas, feelings and imagination with confidence, enhancing self-esteem and oral language.
• Link imaginative play scenes inside and out, providing more scope for large movement, noisy play and involving the whole child.
• Access to a wide range of equipment, resources and props to promote quality outdoor play.

Early Mathematical Experiences
During outdoor play we aim to provide the children with opportunities to:

• Sort & categorise resources, equipment and natural materials.
• Identify, understand & use number, such as counting games, rhymes & songs.
• Develop appropriate mathematical language.
• Recognise, explore and create patterns, shapes & colours e.g. Leaves and pebbles.
• Match objects.
• Experiment & talk about routine and the passing of the day and the seasons.
• Experiment with and compare size, length, capacity and weight.
• Investigate and talk about patterns, colours and shapes in the outdoor area, e.g. Shape of trees, leaves and clouds.
• Build with a range of 3D materials.
- Explore spatial awareness through the different types of movement, such as balance, locomotion and manipulation.
- Begin to use and understand mathematical language in relevant contexts.
- Follow a sequence of movements.
- Follow a pattern on the ground, such as the road way.

**The World Around Us**

During outdoor play we aim to provide the children with opportunities to:

- Develop their emotions such as wonder, joy and excitement.
- Develop observational skills.
- Develop their senses.
- Develop simple prediction skills, such as what would happen if we didn’t water plants.
- Recognise objects by using their five senses.
- Explore and investigate weather, materials, living things, forces.
- Ask questions, experiment, design, make and solve problems.
- Recognise change in the environment, for example seasonal and weather changes.
- Care for and respect God’s creatures and handle them sensitively.
- Recognise and talk about mini beasts.
- Grow seeds and plants.
- Listen to stories outside about people and places.
- Talk to others about their home, school and community environments.
- Use role play to understand and talk about themselves, People Who Help Us in the community, events, festivals and experiences.
- Record simply what they have seen, e.g. on clipboards.
- Explore the properties of natural and man-made materials and sounds in the environment.
- Become aware of everyday technology.
- Talk about how play equipment works e.g., peddling, pushing, spinning pivoting.
- Develop a range of skills related to building, woodwork, and gardening.
- Experiment in water and sand.
- Talk about environmental issues simply.
- Recycle outdoors.
The Organisation of Outdoor Play

The Areas of Play

We aim to provide the children with good quality areas of play outdoors, which mirror those indoors. We provide:

- **A Large Construction Area** - Including blocks of various kinds, crates, boxes, turf, peat briquettes, wood, builder tools.

- **A Small World Area** - Including topic based resources, such as cars and trains.

- **A Sand Area** – Including sand, gravel, wheel barrows, buckets, spades, shovels, rakes, brushes, blocks, moulds, sieves.

- **A Music Area** – Includes a range of musical instruments made from everyday resources, such as pots, pans, teapots, spoons, tubing.

- **A Water Area** – Includes a water tray, buckets, jugs, bottles, tubing, guttering, paintbrushes and rollers.

- **A Ball Area** – Including games, hoops, bowls, basketball net, bats and balls.

- **A Fairy Glen Area & Percy's Area** – Imaginative play depending on the topics.

- **A Grass Area** – Running, games, tyres, imaginative play depending on the topics.

- **A Horticultural Area** – Gardening, digging, weeding, planting, flowers, trees and shrubs.

- **A Role Play Area** – Changes depending on the topics.

- **A Physical Play Area** – Includes climbing equipment, balancing beams, obstacle courses, rockers, tunnels, barrels, crates, jumps.

- **A Wheeled Toy Area** – Includes trikes, bikes, tractors, dumpers, two seater trikes, four and two wheeled scooters, roadway, road signs, parking bay.

- **A Painting, Drawing and Chalking Area** – Includes topic based drawing, painting and chalking materials.
• **A Book Area** – Includes books on the outdoors and topic based books.

• **A Den Area** – Imaginative Play

• **A Willow Dome** – For sun protection & imaginative play

**Prop Boxes**

We also are building up prop boxes which presently include:

• Windy day resources e.g. Parachute, fine scarves, simple kites, windmills.
• Rainy day resources e.g. Umbrellas, wellington boots, buckets.
• Investigating and science resources e.g. Spades, trowels, buckets, magnifying glasses, inspection pot, clipboards, pencils.
• Role play resources - topic based.

**Storage and Accessibility**

All of our small resources are stored in clearly labelled storage containers which are child friendly and are easily accessible to the given areas. Our bigger equipment such as the wooden climbing equipment and bikes are stored in the shed. At tidy up times the children are taught to put the equipment away in the correct areas. The children are free to access any small equipment they require from the storage containers placed around the outdoor area.

**Planning For Outdoor Play**

At the moment we plan for outdoor play on a monthly basis due to the weather conditions to allow each child equal access to explore each area. We plan through topic based approach and we see the outdoor environment as an extension of our indoor environment. (See monthly outdoor play plans in the planning file.)
Role of the Adult in Outdoor Play

Outdoor play can only be fully effective if staff know how to support children in the outdoor environment. To quote Helen Bilton, “Outdoor Play in the Early Years”,

“The success of outdoor play rests with the staff. It is only when the whole staff support and enjoy outdoor play that it will work... If adults provide quality outdoor play, children will become confident, independent and learn a great deal. It is the adult’s role to ensure that all children can learn, enjoy and reach their potential. Practitioners need to enjoy being outside and be committed to the outdoor area.”

Consequently in our setting we the staff:

Plan:

- The environment and management of play
- The use of time, space and resources
- Learning objectives
- A balanced programme
- Long, medium and short term plans. (See Plans)

Monitor:

- Children’s safety

Our outdoor safety rules are below:

- I play safely with all the toys and tools.
- I play safely with my friends and look after them.
- I ride safely on the roadway.
- I tidy up and leave the toys/tools in the proper area.
- I listen to the adults.

- The opportunities of the equipment.

- Equal opportunities
  - Children of all abilities are encouraged to play and explore the outdoor environment, with specific needs being addressed.
  - All children are encouraged to play in non-stereotypical ways.
  - All children’s cultural issues are respected.

- That learning outcomes are attained
Access and Record:

- Children’s experiences and achievements
- By making written observations
- To inform future planning.

Play:

- With children, challenging, motivating, stimulating and enriching their play
- With the children, at times helping to initiate interesting activities

Evaluate:

- Our provision, planning and policy for outdoor play on a regular basis and amend it where appropriate.

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