***PLAY/ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING/LEISURE POLICY***

***RATIONALE***

In Sperrinview school we recognise the importance of play and activity based learning as a fundamental part in the process of learning. ‘The right to play and leisure is an intrinsic entitlement of childhood’ (Article 31 UNCRC, 1989)

Play is a means by which children can develop the skills and capabilities to be effective learners and as such provides a context, to access the content of the curriculum. ‘Children learn best when learning is interactive, practical and enjoyable’ (The Northern Ireland Curriculum).

‘Play for young children is not recreation activity …. It is not leisure time activity nor escape activity…. Play is thinking time for children. It is language time, problem solving time. It is memory time, planning time, investigating time. It is organisation of ideas time, when the young child uses his mind and body and his social skills ad all his powers in response to the stimuli he has met’ (James L. Hymes)

At the heart of the Northern Ireland Curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of pupils’ skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society. By engaging pupils in active learning contexts across all areas of the curriculum, pupils’ personal interpersonal skills and capabilities and their ability to think both creatively and critically are developed.

‘Children through play are unravelling the world at their own pace, savouring new experiences as they unfold, reconstructing and revising them. Essentially the child is in control. This active exploration, this involvement and the sense of ownership of the activity and experience enables the child to feel sustained and satisfied.’ (Heaslip)

***AIMS***

We aim to provide stimulating, relevant and enriching learning experiences with equality of access for each child so as they may develop an enthusiasm for learning as a lifelong process. Play is a useful tool in the fulfilment of this aim and can assist each child fulfil his/her potential in all areas of life. We recognise that what children can do, rather than what they cannot do, is the starting point of a child’s education.

It is hoped that as children engage in play and activity based learning, they will become

* More independent
* Willing to share and take turns
* Willing to ‘have a go’
* More co-operative
* Better problem solvers
* More confident
* Better communicators
* Able to cope with making mistakes
* Exercise choice
* Better at making decisions
* Develop a range of gross and fine motor skills
* Develop curiosity and stimulate imagination
* Enjoyment
* Concentration
* Interaction with adults and peers

***ORGANISATION***

The experiences provided for our children during play and activity based learning encompass the six areas of learning. The learning is integrated through a topic based approach and enables children to make appropriate connections. Emphasis is placed on the development of skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society.

Opportunities for meaningful play are provided both indoors and outdoors by providing inviting and interesting areas for challenging, progressive play so that each child may develop at his/her own rate. We aim to take account of each child’s individual needs, interests and abilities.

The outdoor environment provides children with one of the best possible environments in which to learn. We believe outdoor play is for everyone and we will endeavour to ensure it is accessible for all children.

‘the best kept classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky.’ (Margaret McMillan).

Children should enjoy energetic activity both indoors and out and the feeling of wellbeing that it brings. Outdoor play provides a multi-sensory environment which responds to individual learning styles. It complements and enhances all aspects of children’s development and learning through its physical, open ended nature.

In Sperrinview we have a sensory garden which all classes are encouraged to access on a weekly basis.

***PLANNING***

Planning underpins effective learning and teaching and takes account of the developmental stage of the children as well as their previous experiences. Planners are flexible and can be changed or added to as children’s responses and outcomes of activities are observed. Planners are evaluated to ensure effective assessment.

Teachers use a weekly indoor play planner indicating learning intentions and activities/experiences for each learning area.

Outdoor play planners have been devised jointly by Junior school staff and take the form of termly planners. Outdoor planning reflects all areas of learning within the curriculum and are designed to be flexible thus facilitating teachers to structure teaching and learning as appropriate to the individual.

***MANAGEMENT***

Outdoor and indoor play make up a total learning environment. Children have access to the following areas of play:-

Creative, table top, water, sand, exploratory, construction, small world, sensory, imaginative, play dough, book corner, ICT, outdoor play, sensory garden.

Children will be given some free choice during play sessions but will also be encouraged to engage in different areas of play with the support of choice boards, play schedules etc. as appropriate to the individual. Children will be informed before play finishes and will be encouraged to assist with tidy up.

Preschool pupils are engaged in sustained periods of indoor and outdoor play each day.

Children at foundation stage are engaged in a sustained period of indoor or outdoor play each day.

Year 3 and Year 4 pupils have two sessions of sustained play per week.

Key Stage 2 pupils have 2 sessions of activity based learning per week.

The secondary department encompasses leisure from Year 11 to Post 16. It is aimed towards more age appropriate activities based on the developmental level of the child eg. Clubs, free choice activities, physical activities.

***ROLE OF THE ADULT***

A suitable adult child ration will be maintained at all times in order to provide a safe and secure learning environment. Adults will ensure that the outdoor area is safe and secure and will model a positive attitude to outdoor play. Adults will ensure that pupils are appropriately dressed for outdoor play. All pupils in junior school have wet weather suits which they are encouraged to wear when engaging in outdoor play.

The quality of adult interaction is a critical factor in the quality of learning which is experienced by the child. The adult’s role is that of provider, facilitator, participant, observer, evaluator in order to promote quality play.

Adults are participants who initiate, encourage, model language, join in, name, stimulate and extend the learning. It is necessary to observe children carefully, assess their progress, evaluate the learning taking place and use this information to inform future planning.

***OBSERVATION, ASSESSMENT AND RECORD KEEPING***

Observations will be a regular feature of classroom practice. They provide much information about the children and the quality of the play provision. A flexible approach will be adopted which allows for both planned and spontaneous observations. Observations are used to inform planning. They help teachers to monitor child’s progress, assess the appropriateness of the activities, know when extra materials are required to supplement or extend the platy, ensure that the child is experiencing a wide range of experiences and not confining his/her play to a limited number of areas.

Observations should include information about the child’s

* Physical, social, emotional and cognitive development
* Use of language
* Ability to problem solve and make decisions or demonstrate thinking skills
* Level of involvement and concentration
* Willingness to investigate and be creative
* Purposeful use of resources

Teachers use a variety of methods to record observations eg. Post it notes, photos, videos, 2 simple app, individual booklets etc.

Assessment is an integral part of the learning process. It enables teachers to monitor progress, plan future work and set tasks to use certain skills.

***RESOURCES/ACTIVITIES***

Each class has its own set of indoor play resources and classes are encouraged to share resources if and when required. Outdoor areas are shared between classes. Classes are encouraged to plan some joint outdoor play sessions in these areas so promoting and encouraging co-operative play amongst pupils. These joint play sessions often create a ‘buzz’ in the playground and enable pupils to have a wider range of peers. Links are encouraged with local nursery schools and opportunities provided for preschool pupils to integrate with these nurseries for outdoor play sessions both in the playground and sensory garden.

‘Big play days’ are popular in Junior school and are planned for termly. Classes each create an inviting area of play around a specific theme. These areas of play are set up in the main hall and two junior classes then access this area for a 45 minute slot before then resetting for the next two classes. Other events eg. Teddy Bears picnic, paddling pool are organised as and when appropriate.

***ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES***

All staff who work with pupils have a responsibility to encourage and observe play and activity based learning. Mrs Julie Coert is the co-ordinator for this area. The Principal has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

***MONITORING AND EVALUATION***

The play and activity based learning policy will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis through consultation with pupils, staff and parents.

***REVIEW***

A sub-committee of the Board of Governors will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy as part of a timetabled, on going process.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_