



A Policy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment

We believe that childhood is a time for play and through play we discover the excitement of learning, the rewards of achievement and we acquire our life skills. Banbridge Nursery School, with its experienced and enthusiastic staff and well-planned, busy environment, encourages the

development of skills, attitudes and understanding that will help our children to live full satisfying lives and become confident, active and effective members of a diverse, constantly changing society.

This policy sets out the aims, objectives, strategies and evaluation processes employed at Banbridge Nursery School (BNS) to ensure that every learner in our school community is enabled to further develop his/her capabilities, skills and knowledge across all areas of development.

“Play is essential for children’s development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and to relate to others.”

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE 2012)

“Play is the most natural way for children to learn. They discover, explore, created, imagine and experiment on a daily basis in a variety of ways. Through their play, they make sense of the world around them, explore cause and effect, discover how things work and find their place in the social dynamics of a group when playing with their peers.”

Learning Through Play in Pre-School and Foundation Stage (CCEA 2022)

Young children demonstrate a variety of skills that make them natural, effective and successful learners; they want and need to play and it is through play that they learn most effectively. At BNS we follow a play-based curriculum and all learning starts FROM the child. We have an agreed set of principles that underpin our planning and practice of facilitating learning and development for all.

Our Guiding Principles:

- Play has status
- Children want and need to play
- Play does not have pre-determined outcomes
- Play can take a long time
- Play is messy
- Play is boisterous
- Play is freely chosen and directed by the participants
- Children learn best from repeated activity with feedback from successes and failures in a low-stakes environment

- Physical play, particularly outdoors, is the healthiest, most natural and beneficial play
- Risky play is essential as it teaches children to look after themselves and others
- Learning is most successful when adults enable children to own the experiences and see the relevance of these experiences in every day life (authentic experiences)
- There must be a balance between adult-led; adult-initiated and child initiated play, with child-initiated play being of highest value
- The role of the adult is to facilitate, support and respond to what children initiate
- There must be a high value on independent learning during which the responsibility is on the child to find and choose resources, solve problems, make decisions, use their initiative and collaborate with others
- Children must be fully engaged and happy in their play if they are to realise their full potential as learners

“Play is freely chosen by the child, and is under the control of the child. The child decides how to play, how long to sustain the play, what the play is about, and who to play with. There are many forms of play, but it is usually highly creative, open-minded and imaginative. It requires active engagement of the players, and can be deeply satisfying.”

p.159; Starting from the Child by Julie Fisher 2013

Aims of Learning through Play

- To develop self-esteem, self-confidence, independence and a love of learning
- To stimulate curiosity and foster skills of observation, investigation and problem-solving across all areas of the pre-school curriculum
- To encourage creativity, self-expression and imaginative thinking
- To develop social skills including communication, sharing and turn-taking
- To extend language development
- To encourage children to know about, understand and value the world around them
- To provide opportunities to explore a range of themes across all areas of learning

In addition to these aims we believe:

- Children of this age (3-4 years old) have different needs and interests which must be recognised, understood and used as a basis for planning for progress
- All children should have equality of opportunity, regardless of gender, race, culture or individual needs
- Parents are the children's first and primary educators and so they are vital, highly valued and active partners in the processes of assessment, teaching and learning

The Role of the Child

Play is the work of childhood. Every child's job is to wire up his/her brain through vigorous and repeated play. Children must engage in "free" play, within agreed boundaries, during which they play where they want, with whatever and whomever they choose, for as long as they want, in whatever way they want. It is through "free" play that children will learn to become successful as adults.

Once basic skills are mastered, children will move on to engage in more advanced activities that will further progress learning and skills. Through trial and error, in low-stake contexts, children will develop the social, emotional, physical and cognitive capabilities they need in order to confidently take on increasingly complex situations/experiences/activities. If children fail to do this, they will be socially, cognitively and emotionally impaired.

The Role of the Staff

The role of the adult is to provide safe, stimulating environments which are conducive to high quality play and therefore, learning. It is these environments, rather than any adult direction, that must stimulate and motivate the child to be playful. Adults will facilitate the time, space, resources, experiences and opportunities required for effective, high-quality learning.

Knowledgeable, skilled and experienced adults will observe the children in a range of play situations in order to ascertain what the child is interested in; what she/he knows and what she/he can do. Adult observations will also record the extent of a child's social and emotional development and they extent to which he/she plays alongside and with other children.

All our assessments for learning are drawn down from these observations and we use our assessments to identify targets for future development for each individual child. Additionally, we use our observations and assessments to monitor and further develop the quality of the different learning environments and our interactions with our very young children.

Adults respond to the children as they lead their own play. The aim is to respond in a way that enables the child to make progress, i.e. the adult will teach. The “teaching” strategies we employ include communicating and modelling language; showing; explaining; questioning; recalling; providing a narrative for what they are doing; facilitating and challenging. If the adult feels that play has lost momentum or needs a boost to maximise the potential learning, she might pose a question or add new resources which give the child-initiated play a fresh impetus/energy.

When adults become involved in a child’s play it will be in a sensitive and skilled manner and it will result in the co-construction of shared playful experiences.

The Role of the Environment

The environment is a key component of our learning community. It supports all children to be fully engaged in purposeful play of their own choice and interest. Through the use of authentic, versatile resources, the individual interests of our young children can be explored. In this way, imaginative thinking and creativity are valued and nurtured, for example, when fabrics are turned into costumes or blocks are turned into castles.

Outdoors and indoors, there is a strong emphasis on accessibility of resources for all children. By creating a workshop set-up, in which the resources are available and accessible to the children at all times but nothing is “set-out” by the adults. At the start of every session, all areas are clear, stocked and tidy. This encourages independent choices to be made by the children to select the resources they need to explore in a way that is interesting to them. It is the role of the adult to then “notice” the children’s play and to facilitate the learning that is happening.

Research has shown that “200 per cent more talking occurs outside and some children can only become deeply engaged in their play when they are outside” (Ephgrave, 2018). At BNS, we value thinking and learning outdoors above indoors as we have been witness to the value it holds in meeting the well-being, learning and developmental needs of our young children. The time we commit to outdoor play reflect the status it holds in our school.

The resources we use are selected according to their versatility and potential as effective ingredients for discovery and learning. Everything we use is vetted for value in relation to learning and development. We subscribe to a policy of “continuous provision” which means that children have access to carefully selected, authentic and well-used resources throughout the course of the year. These resources will be used differently by the children at different times of the year and at different points in their development. Continuous access to high interest, accessible and real-life resources enables repeated use and therefore developing expertise and exploration across all developmental and pre-school curricular areas. In order to sustain or build on the children’s interests and expertise, the learning areas are “enhanced” at times by adding additional or alternative resources for the children to explore, e.g. the addition of an old suitcase in the home corner; a bicycle at the tool table; mud and leaves in the art resource.

To ensure that the environment continues to fulfil its function of motivating; stimulating and facilitating learning, the staff and children work together to monitor its effectiveness/appeal. By observing the levels of engagement of children in the learning environments, the staff can ascertain when things are not working so well. By engaging in discussions with the children, we can then negotiate an environment that continues to reflect the interests and needs of the children and that continues to promote and facilitate high levels of child-led play.

The displays in our school reflect the experiences, personal interests and achievements of our pupils. They also seek to support a better understanding by parents and visitors to school, of the rationale behind our approach to teaching and learning. The displays are calm and simple. They are learning resources in their own right and they strive to value the work and voices of our young learners. Outdoor and indoor areas are kept calm and simple – we allow the children to bring the energy and vibrancy!

The Role of the Parents

Prior to starting school:

- Use the child's Welcome Booklet and FB videos to talk to your child about the setting and the adults therein in a positive and warm manner
- Teach your child to be independent in self-help skills, e.g. using the toilet independently; taking off/putting on coats, shoes and boots
- Teach your child to hang up his/her coat
- Explain to your child that when playing indoors or outdoors, they can play with anything but when they have finished, the things must be put away
- Play with your child and show them how to use resources and equipment
- Ensure that your child walks indoors and uses a quiet voice indoors

While at school:

- Attend meetings and sessions that help you to develop your understanding of how children learn and how you can behave in a manner that effectively promotes and enables this type of learning
- Talk to your child about his/her day in school (don't always expect much of a response as it can take a while for children to process their experiences. Keep these conversations for later in the evening if your child is too tired or reluctant to talk when you collect him/her from school)

- Use our Seesaw app and school website as catalysts for conversation about your child's learning in school
- Meet with the teacher when invited to discuss your child's progress, set targets for future achievement and share strategies to facilitate learning as effectively as possible
- Share information about your child's interests, achievements and areas for development with your child's teachers
- Keep lines of communication with school open and respectful

The Organisation of the Nursery Day

We hope and expect our children to enter school full of energy and enthusiasm each day. To capitalise on this, the day is organised in such a way that the children are afforded every opportunity to engage at a high level, in their own way, in pursuits and activities that interest, stimulate and motivate them.

Following self-registration, the children immediately make independent choices about where, how and with whom they wish to play. Play is not directed by adults but if and when children present with difficulties making a decision about what they wish to do, the adults will use their knowledge and understanding of a child's character and interests to support them in enjoying and engaging in an activity that affords relevant and appropriately levelled learning opportunities.

Our day begins with indoor play but access to the outdoor learning environment is opened as soon as possible and by 10am at the very latest. The children are invited to continue to play indoors until they wish to go outside but it is our experience that the vast majority of children wish to head outside at the earliest possible opportunity.

The transition from indoors to outdoors and vice versa is an opportunity for children to further develop their autonomy. They quickly become familiar with our routines and can follow these to increasingly good effect to change into appropriate clothing which is stored in a very accessible manner. We expect that our children come to school with a desire and some ability to complete basic self-help skills such as putting on and taking off coats, shoes and boots.

However, we make it our business to know who needs support and encouragement to become increasingly independent in these basic self-help capabilities. All children's attempts to be increasingly independent are valued and celebrated.

The first play session takes up the first 2.45 - 3 hours of the day. We believe that really effective learning through play needs time. It can be slow-paced. It can be repetitive. Children need time and space and opportunities to revisit activities and ideas and experiments in order to

develop their thinking and to assimilate new knowledge and understanding into existing concepts.

At the end of the play sessions, children are often engaged in plenary sessions where a particular area of interest has been explored intensely or where a particular discovery has stimulated further “wondering”. These sessions are important on several fronts. First and foremost, they recognise the validity of the children’s play (work). Secondly, the opportunity to revisit and to describe what has been done, using appropriate vocabulary to articulate their learning, will not only serve to promote the development of language skills but also to deepen conceptual understanding and knowledge. Plenary sessions also promote interest from other children who may not necessarily have been involved in the original play but who are now given something to think about and which, once processed, might lead them to explore similar ideas through their own play. It is these plenary sessions that also equip vigilant educators with the information they need to “plan” for the facilitation of future relevant opportunities which enable progression in learning. Photographs are often taken by the children and adults. These are then used to further explore our thinking and learning and are used to excellent effect in displays that form a very relevant part of our teaching and learning environment.

The children’s sense of respect and responsibility for their learning environments is continuously fostered by the expectation that they will tidy away the resources they have used and ensure that the spaces we share are kept safe and tidy once “play” is over.

Following the morning play session, the children will move to their class quiet room with their teacher to enjoy stories, songs and rhymes. This section of the day is adult-led in the sense that the children are expected to attend and listen as the adult reads stories and leads songs and games. However, adult-led tasks are planned in response to the interests and needs of the children as observed through their play and through their communications with their friends and the adults in school.

After this, the children prepare for lunch which is eaten in the classroom. This is a highly valued aspect of our day. We have a system of “family style” dining where the adults and children all eat together in around shared tables. The children are highly involved in the preparations and the clearing up process. They are given responsibility for setting their own area of the table; choosing what and how much to eat and tidying their space once their meals are finished. The conversations we have together at these times not only enable the children to develop a very good knowledge of the food they are eating but also to develop relationships; share observations and interests and also improve communication capabilities.

Following dinner, the children will either return with their teacher to the quiet room for action rhymes and games or will return to the outdoor play areas from where their parents/carers will collect them at the end of the school day. This opportunity for parents/carers to come into school on a daily basis helps to foster and nourish a sense of shared interest in and understanding of the children’s work and also it is a very good opportunity

for staff and parents to celebrate the achievements of the children together.

Routines are central to nursery school life as they provide a structure which children appreciate. The security provided by this structure enables children to dig deeper and to try new things in a secure and familiar environment where stakes are low. Humans are more likely to take risks if they feel there is little to lose and we do not learn without challenging ourselves and taking acceptable risks.

Routines also promote acceptable behaviour in the school setting. Children know what is expected of them in relation to their behaviour through the communication of simple rules and routines for safe and happy play. Our "Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy" is available to read on the school website. It is also included in every family's Welcome Pack at the start of each new year.

Assessment for Learning

"[Attentive practitioners] know the children in great detail and can make assessments confidently and accurately without referring to bits of paper and other forms of evidence."

p.132, "Planning in the Moment with Young Children" (Ephgrave, 2018)

As Anna Ephgrave acknowledges, effective educators in school, just as educators at home (parents/carers), know their children due to the fact that they have spent time playing with them; talking with them; watching them and listening to them in all sorts of different situations.

When children have genuine choice and a high degree of autonomy in their learning, the role of the adult in school is to observe their play, assess what we see, plan how to respond and then teach the next steps in a way that is uniquely suited to that particular child/group of children at that specific point in time. This is called "planning in the moment" and it is the most effective strategy we employ as it is the most responsive to the child's needs. The ability to do this effectively is continuously practised and evaluated by the school staff during formal and informal discussions about our professional practice.

As it would be impossible to record every single instance of such teaching and learning cycles, a sample of these are recorded for every individual child during the course of each school year. The following outlines our procedures for observations; assessments and planning for learning:

- Each week, a group of children are identified as our "focus children" for that week. This group constitutes around 15 per cent of the total class, i.e. usually four children from each class.
- A parent consultation sheet "Learning Journey" is sent home asking parents to share some information about significant events, experiences or achievements in their child's life. Parents are asked to complete this and forward some photographs of the children via our Seesaw app or email. On this consultation form, parents are also asked to record any questions they have about their child's

presentation and progress in school. The class teacher can then respond to these questions during the course of the week either during a conversation in school or via phone or email.

- The information gathered from these parent consultations is used alongside the observations of the focus children at play, which are carried out by all staff, to create a “picture” of the individual children’s interests; relationships; preferred learning styles; skills; capabilities and knowledge.
- These observations are then analysed by the class teachers to assess the learning and areas for future development for each child with this information being used, in turn, to inform targets for future achievement and planning for teaching and learning.
- Parents are provided with regular feedback about their children’s progress and targets for achievement through informal and formal meetings throughout the course of the school year. Two “Planning for Learning” (Terms 1 and 2) and one final “Profile of Achievement” in Term 3 are provided as records for every family.
- Families of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are invited to meet to discuss progress and agree targets for future learning and achievement, on average, every 8 weeks. Provision for children with SEN is detailed in our SEN Policy which is available to view on our school website www.banbridgenursery.com .

The information gathered as a result of our observations and assessments does not stop with the pupils. The work of the staff is grounded in a culture of self-reflection and self-evaluation. All of our practices, procedures and the ethos and environments we create are constantly under review.

Planning the learning environment; planning for individual children and planning for the adult support to be provided is all drawn down from the information provided through our continuous observation and assessment procedures.

In addition to focus observations, spontaneous observations of all children take place throughout the course of the school year. When children present with particular needs, specific measures can be put in place to support them. These might include the use of an assessment tool such as a basic speech sounds check or the use of a tool such as the WELLCOMM assessment which helps to identify and address particular areas of difficulty in relation to language and communication.

External Partnerships

Teachers will actively strive to “link in” with any external agencies supporting the children in our school. These agencies may include Speech and Language Therapists; medics; social workers and Educational

Psychologists. We value collaboration with these agencies as this enables us, collectively, to provide the optimal support for each and every child.

Where the support strategies employed in school do not have the desired impact, support can be sought from external agencies including, but not limited to, the Health Visiting team; the Regional Integrated Support for Children in Education team (RISE team); EA services including the Behaviour Support Team and the Educational Psychology, to name a few. Parents are always kept fully informed of their children's specific needs and external agencies are contacted with prior notice being given and agreement being sought. The only exception to this is in the case of a Child Protection issue where staff deem the child to be put at further risk if parents are informed of a referral being made to an external agency such as the PSNI and/or Social Services.

Transitions are recognised as a very important, exciting time in a child's life. However, transitions can also be challenging as they often involve a step into the unknown. In order to support smooth transitions both from home/child care to school and from school to P1, we have developed programmes that promote readiness for each big step taken by the children.

There are, of course, transitions that take place each and every day, e.g. home to school; school to child-care; child-care to home. Every effort is made to ensure that children are supported in being able to navigate these transitions to different settings confidently and happily, through dialogue and information sharing, as appropriate and as agreed with parents/carers.

Finally, the learning opportunities at BNS extend beyond the physical boundaries and the people welcomed therein every day. Visits from a large number of different people and groups and trips to places beyond our school campus, further enhance the learning opportunities afforded to our children. The local community and the businesses, organisations and facilities on our doorstep (and sometimes a little further afield) offer bountiful opportunities for exploration and learning and these are both recognised and acted upon by the staff at BNS.

Promoting a Learning Community

The focus on a community of learners and educators, is a key component of our vision here at BNS. The children are at the very heart of what we do but, in order to enable our young girls and boys to benefit from a relevant, meaningful and high quality educational experience, then everyone (children, staff, parents and external agencies) has a very important role to play and everyone's role is valued.

It is our greatest objective to ensure that every member of the school community feels enabled and included in our endeavours to ensure that the needs of each individual child are met and that he/she is afforded every opportunity to become a confident, caring and competent member of society in the 21st century.

“Play that is well planned and pleasurable helps children to think, to increase their understanding and to improve their language competence. It allows children to be creative, to explore and investigate materials, to experiment and to draw and test conclusions...such experience is important in catching and sustaining children’s interests and motivating their learning as individuals and in co-operation with others.”

Starting with Quality, The Rumbold Report, HMSO, 1990

Statement of Aims

During the year at Nursery School we aim to:

- Help children develop the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes needed for learning
- Develop children’s self-esteem, self-confidence and independence
- Enhance their social and emotional development
- Provide opportunities for physical development
- Create an environment where children’s language can flourish and develop
- Encourage a sense of wonder and curiosity in children
- Offer opportunities for children represent their learning through story, song, rhyme, drama and art.

In addition we believe:

- The nursery year is part of a child’s childhood, to be enjoyed in its own right
- Children in nursery school learn and develop best through play
- Children of this age have individual differences and needs which must be recognised and met
- All children should have equality of opportunity regardless of gender, race, culture or individual needs
- Young children need the encouragement and help of adults in the nursery to learn
- Parents are children’s first educators and continue that role in partnership with the nursery staff

The role of the staff (meeting the children’s needs)

- To give priority to settling the children happily in school and continue to promote their confidence and co-operation
- Provide a rich and stimulating environment which promotes the children's all-round development
- Value, and encourage children's play; interact with the children as they play, and use it as the main vehicle to promote learning
- Promote the children's abilities to make choices and decisions for themselves
- Have high expectations of the children's developing abilities
- Agree and implement the curriculum, management of the children, assessment and the general aims of the nursery school
- Model, for the children, open communication, a sense of mutual trust, and effective teamwork

The organisation of the Nursery day (time, space, materials, equipment, parents)

- Children are given time to engage in free play with access to a wide range of equipment, materials and stimulating activities
- All aspects of the pre-school curriculum are offered, including music, story and physical play indoors and out doors
- The necessary routines eg toileting and snack, are organised efficiently so that children are not waiting about or curtailed in their play
- The beginning and end of the session is organised to facilitate informal contact between the parents and staff

Planning and monitoring the Curriculum

- Staff plan the nursery programme as a team in line with the pre-school curricular guidance
- Identify the learning potential and ensure that everyone working with the children understands it
- Take account of the needs of the children through systematic assessment
- Evaluate the children's progress and use it to inform future planning
- Use assessment of children to meet individual needs
- Provide parents with regular and comprehensive information about their children's progress

Staff interaction to ensure optimum learning and development

- They interact easily and spontaneously with the children
- They support the child's chosen play
- They promote safe and productive play

- They exploit the learning potential of the activities and equipment
- They encourage children's curiosity, imagination, and problem-solving abilities through open questioning and comments
- They develop children's language and learning across the curriculum

Monitoring, recording and reporting the children's progress

- Staff systematically observe children and record all aspects of their development
- Keep a profile of each child's progress and achievements
- Use this information to tailor the planned programme to individual need
- Use this information to inform parents, and to encourage them to help their children at home

Provision for children with special educational needs

- Staff organise activities and materials to provide for the special needs of children
- Ensure the children have equal access to the curriculum where appropriate
- Provide the necessary support when the special educational needs are identified, and, if necessary, keep individual education plans
- Seek appropriate help and advice from other relevant professionals
- Keep the child's parents fully informed and involved

Links with parents

- Staff ensure that parents feel welcome on a daily basis, and that parents know that the staff care about the children and are approachable and will deal with enquiries promptly and effectively
- Three Parent/Teacher meetings are offered each year
- Parents are made aware of the aims of the nursery and are encouraged to express their views about the work
- They are given regular information of the curriculum through photographs/displays/ newsletters, and how it is contributing to their child's learning and development
- Parents are encouraged to contribute to the nursery through taking part in classroom activities, educational visits,

providing materials eg junk and display items, and fund raising

Liaison with others

- The staff recognise the vital importance of a smooth transition from home to school, and from Nursery School to Primary 1
- A child's settling-in is proceeded with slowly and monitored with the parents
- Primary 1 teachers visit the school and are given verbal and written information about the children's progress
- Staff maintain relationships with other external agencies e.g. Social Worker, Speech and Language therapist, Occupational Therapist, Educational Psychologist, School Medical Officer, Dental Officer, etc in order to improve the provision for the children, including those with special educational needs

The Community

- Staff recognise the local community of the school to be a valuable resource which enables them to extend the children's opportunities for learning
- Staff use the local community to make a contribution to the life of the nursery through educational visits, open days, trips, competitions and concerts