

Enquiry Based Learning Policy

*‘Play is a central part of young children’s learning. Through play, children explore ideas, feelings and relationships. They take risks, make mistakes and try things without fear of failure. Play can push out the limits of what is possible and help children to be creative, flexible and imaginative for sustained periods. Rich play promotes control, mastery, confidence and wellbeing.’*

**Learning for life: Early Education (2002)**

**Rationale**

Enquiry Based Learning describes an environment in which learning is driven by a process of enquiry owned by the pupil. It is an active, child-centered approach to learning which gives pupils opportunities to reflect on their learning, ask questions and discover (Levy et al, 2013). This policy statement has been produced to reflect the value that our school places on play and enquiry based learning and the importance of children and young people in our society. The Scottish Government has stated that “*play is key to raising attainment*” and we want each child to enjoy an education that encourages them to be the best they can be, providing them with a strong foundation for their learning journey. One of Gartconner’s aims is *to provide a curriculum which promotes a love of learning, high quality experiences, leadership and achievement for all* and enquiry based learning encapsulates this aim.

At Gartconnner we strive to raise attainment and provide quality learning experiences across all curricular areas. The pupil roll at Gartconner is steadily growing every year and our young people are coming from very different social and economical backgrounds. With this in mind, we aim to provide support and challenge for all our learners through an enquiry based play approach which ensures the needs of all our learners are met.

As set out in Building the Curriculum 2 this approach to learning engages and challenges children’s thinking using real-life and imaginary situations. It takes full advantage of the opportunities for learning presented by:

* Spontaneous play
* Planned and purposeful play
* Investigating and exploring
* Events and life experiences
* Focused learning and teaching

This policy sets out the school’s commitment to ensuring that quality play based learning opportunities are available to all our children. We believe that all children need opportunities to play which allow them to explore, manipulate, experience and problem solve.Our school recognises children’s right to play as contained in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991). At Gartconner we encourage children to explore their world through play and ensure that all children, regardless of ability, have the opportunity to access quality play experiences.

Much of the children’s learning at Early and First level in our school is through well planned and challenging play experiences that embed the experiences and outcomes outlined within Curriculum for Excellence. This approach reflects our aspirations that all children should develop the four capacities and become: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Enquiry Based Learning and Play Pedagogy are deeply connected within the Scottish Government’s four capacities:

* **Successful Learners:** Closing the attainment gap is a Scottish Government priority, and a lack of play experiences have been linked with poorer educational outcomes. P1-P3 spans a critical stage where through play, children develop the ability to think, reason and reflect. Evidence has shown that rich play experiences contribute to attentional development in children.
* **Confident Individuals:** The Scottish Governments aim is that our learners become confident individuals who can relate to others and communicate their own beliefs. Play Pedagogy enables this as part of the formal learning process.
* **Responsible Citizens:** Our aspiration is that our young learners become responsible citizens with respect for others and develop and understanding of the world. Play Pedagogy helps our learners understand their own and other people’s responsibilities.
* **Effective Contributors:** Through Enquiry Based Learning children learn to work with others in partnership and it helps to build resilience in our young learners. This independence promotes learning and motivation.

At Gartconner we believe that enquiry based learning is essential to the development of the whole child. One of the most important aims of education is to help each child fulfil their potential in all areas of life. Enquiry Based Learning can be a useful tool in the fulfilment of this aim. Through play based learning children are encouraged to problem solve, use their initiative, be creative, develop self-belief and confidence, and communicate with others and this success will help them build positive attitudes towards school and learning.

As a school over the last couple of years we have developed this approach across Early and First level as a tool for facilitating learning which is relevant to all our learners. We wanted to continue the child centred approach to learning that is embedded in our adjoined nursery as we noticed the positive effect this play based approach in our early years setting was having on the children’s learning, wellbeing and development. Research has shown that enquiry based learning helps to support children’s academic needs and their wellbeing. Across our authority in 2017-2018 there were found to be statistically significant differences between the achievement of Early Level for children who had experienced enquiry based learning compared to those who hadn’t, in reading, writing and talking and listening.

**Aims**

In keeping with the vision, values and aims of Gartconner these guidelines seek to ensure that through play children are given the opportunity to:

* develop social skills - sharing, turn taking, working as part of a team
* be involved in decision-making on the planning, design and creation of play opportunities.
* build resilience and self-confidence
* think creatively
* develop concentration and perseverance.
* enhance language development through talking and listening and communicating
* acquire problem solving skills
* explore and investigate
* think independently and make their own choices and decisions
* obtain a positive attitude to learning through rich and stimulating experiences both indoors and outdoors
* develop physical co-ordination, spatial awareness and fine and gross motor skills

Finally we aim to promote play as a pleasurable, worthwhile experience. *“Play is the highest level of development. It is the spontaneous expression of thought and feeling. Play is never trivial - it is serious and clearly significant”.* **Frobel 1785 – 1852.**

**Our Vision**

We believe that every child deserves the best possible start to ensure excellent progress in all aspects of their learning and development. We believe that enquiry based learning is fundamental to this. We recognise that children learn through both child led and adult directed experiences and to ensure our learners are able to develop skills in literacy and numeracy, they will be involved in a balance of direct teaching using Curriculum For Excellence (CfE) literacy and numeracy programmes and free play. As the children progress through Early Level and beyond, the balance will gradually shift towards more direct teaching.

**The value of play**

* Play contributes to keeping children healthy and active.
* Play allows children to experience and encounter boundaries and learn to assess and manage risk.
* Play helps children learn about themselves; their abilities, interests and preferences and how that can contribute to a larger group.
* Play enables children to learn through trial and error, use their imagination and problem solve.
* Play allows children to gain satisfaction from their own accomplishments
* Play supports children to make a plan and follow through

**UNICEF (2018) Learning through Play**

**What is Play?**

‘*Play should be ‘freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development - not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live.*’ **Scottish Government (2013) Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision.**

Play is any freely chosen activity which a child finds satisfying and creative. It may or may not involve equipment or other people. It allows children an opportunity to be creative and make decisions. We believe children should be given the opportunity to play at all ages and that it is the role of the adults to support the play process.

At Gartconner we recognise and appreciate the value of play in allowing children to develop and make meaning of their learning. Play provides children with the time to make sense of their thoughts and learning, to experiment and challenge themselves while maintaining motivation and enthusiasm for learning (UNICEF, 2018). This also includes learning in the outdoors which we aim to do on at least a weekly basis with our children. Learning outdoors encourages children to view the world around them in a more meaningful way and apply their learning in different, and often more meaningful, contexts.

**Wellbeing**

​*“Investing in children’s play is one of the most important things we can do to improve children’s health and wellbeing in Scotland.”* **Professor Sir Harry Burns, Former Chief Medical Officer Scotland.**

Play is important for the social, emotional, physical and mental wellbeing of children. At Gartconner we use the Ferre Laevers Leuven Scale which is a 5 point scale which allows us to measure emotional involvement and wellbeing in our learners, which are two vital components of learning in children. Three times a year we use the scales to undertake a whole class screening which involves a two minute observation of the child. High levels of involvement are an indicator of more meaningful learning taking place. We then use the information gathered from our observations to make changes to our play environment, if need be, to improve learner engagement and involvement or to create an action or support plan.

**Observations and Assessment**

An important part of understanding children’s learning is to observe what they are interested in. Observation provides opportunities for teachers to reflect on the children’s experiences and learning, allowing them to implement effective responsive planning opportunities. In our infant classes we use the scales more regularly to observe how involved our learners are in their environment. Class teachers timetable weekly observation sessions of children during free play into their planning where they target a particular number of children for that week. They observe the child in the learning environment alongside other children for a 2 minute period. They write down what they observe by describing what they notice, analyse what this information tells them and then note down what the child’s next steps are in terms of their learning. Teachers then use this information to find out how engaged the children are in the play on offer, whether any changes need to be made to the play environment to engage the children further and whether they can extend and scaffold the children’s play. This ensures that we reflect children’s interests in what we provide. When children are engaged in an activity or experience that is absorbing they are more likely to learn.

**Observations help our teachers to:**

* Assess the development of the children’s physical, social and cognitive skills.
* Gain knowledge of what a child can do.
* Monitor the children’s progress.
* Plan to meet the needs, interests and abilities of the children.
* Ensure that the children have experience at a wide variety of activities.
* Know when extra materials are required to extend or supplement play.

There are different ways of approaching the assessment of children’s learning. At times we carry out focused and purposeful observations so that we can assess a particular area of a child’s learning. At other times the observation will be open and fluid and teachers will assess what emerges from th `e observation. Assessment information is then used to adapt the provision to meet a child’s needs and helps with planning for adult initiated learning tasks.

**Planning**

‘*Children become most deeply engaged when they have autonomy – when they are able to choose what to do’* **Anna Ephgrave (2018) Planning in the moment.**

Research in to play based approaches has found that infant children show many more signs of disengagement when taught through traditional whole class sessions compared to during more active play based activities (Martlew et al. 2011). At Gartconner play experiences are child centred allowing children to play at their own level of development and enabling them to self-direct their play. Our infant teachers plan a mixture of child led, adult led and adult initiated learning.

* **Child led play**– children have access to free play where they select the resources they play with and where they play.
* **Adult led learning** – children receive 10-15 minute teaching inputs in small teaching groups every day in phonics, reading and numeracy. The children then receive follow up tasks related to these inputs.
* **Adult initiated learning** – teachers provide or set up a stimulus or provocation linked to new learning for the children to explore and observe what the children do with this.

Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) found in their research that a balance of child initiated and adult initiated activities was the most effective in terms of social and cognitive outcomes for children. Play is set up between class bases, our shared infant area and outdoor garden area to provide a rich stimulating learning environment. The play environment is constantly changing and evolving. Through our continuous provision we provide opportunities for children to engage with experiences and outcomes outlined within CfE Early and First Level. The children are involved in helping to plan the play provision for the following week which ensures our environment is stimulating and interesting to our learners and is engaging for all, as it is based on the children’s interests at the time. This planning is then recorded in our class playbooks. Our class playbooks contain each area of our continuous provision and are linked to the CfE benchmarks. Class topics are also planned with the children and are based on the children’s interests at the time.

**Parental Involvement**

At Gartconner we believe that parents are the first and most influential educators of their children. Parents will have the opportunity to hear about the importance of play at their child’s transition visit and stay and play sessions throughout the year. As part of our transition process parents will be invited into school throughout the year. This should allow parents to see how we are embedding the learning through play experience as well as consolidating the independent skills developed during their early learning experiences. Parents and family members are encouraged to support experiences through sending resources, such as loose parts into school, home learning where relevant and play and stay opportunities. Parental engagement at our school for learning through play continues to be high and supportive and they have commented on how effective the approach has been.

**Transition**

Nursery children across our authority spend the majority of their day engaged in high quality play experiences. At Gartconner we follow the guidance in Building the Ambition that focuses on uninterrupted, child led experiences with careful observation and support from staff. As our children transition from nursery to Primary 1, they continue to have the opportunity to play indoors and outdoors. Children are given the time to choose what they want to play, who they want to play with and develop a wide body of transferable skills. Children are also part of focused teaching groups. We believe it is important to achieve as much continuity as possible when children move from our nursery setting to Primary 1. Close communication about children’s previous experiences and learning is crucial at the time of transition. Our nursery team and Primary 1 team work together to support transition and to effectively share their practices and skills to support high quality learning experiences across Early Level.

**The Learning Environment**

Our infant classrooms are situated around a shared resource area. Both are used daily for play and enquiry based learning. We believe a well organised, stimulating and secure environment enables children to become confident, active learners. We strive to ensure that materials and equipment are readily available so that children can select what is needed for their activity. This enables adults to spend more time interacting during play. Clear labelling allows the children to select and return equipment, further promoting independent learning. Our learning environment reflects the learning taking place within our classrooms. Building the Curriculum 2 sets out three important factors for successful implementation:

* **Time:** Children need plenty of time to play. As well as short bursts of play at regular intervals through the day, children benefit from opportunities to immerse themselves in play for more extended periods of time.
* **Environment:** The physical environment is a platform for play. Children need spaces that they can use in their own way and which offer variety and flexibility.
* **Resources:** Children need suitable resources for playing, open ended materials such as, loose parts, blocks and natural materials enable children to extend their play activity.

The children in our setting have free access to the following continuous provision areas:

* Imaginative/role play (Home/Shop Corner)
* Creative area
* Writing area
* Sand Play
* Water Play
* Construction
* Library corner
* Small World Play
* Outdoor garden area