

# St. Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit



# Outdoor Learning Policy

September 2017

## **Introduction**

This policy is aimed at developing outdoor learning for all of the children in St Mary's Primary School. Currently children range in age from four years old in Primary One to eleven years old in Primary 7. Our school grounds provide a variety of different activities, resources and equipment. Overall our approach is to develop the physical, emotional and social well being of our children through outdoor activities.

St. Mary's Primary School uses outdoor play to ensure that all children are actively involved in physical activities to become healthier, happier and more physically competent when playing outdoors.

St. Mary's Primary School provides a framework for the children to have the opportunity to:

- Have a more co-ordinate approach to outdoor play and increase the opportunities available to be physically active,
- Reinforce appropriate messages in relation to physical activity,
- Establish effective working partnerships towards a common goal, between staff and parents,
- Engage the entire community in use of our Outdoor Learning Area,
- Ensure quality of access and participation for all,
- Communicate shared vision, ethos and values to children, parents and the wider community.

## **Rationale and aims**

We believe that our outdoor learning area has much to offer all our children. It can provide relevant, engaging experiences that support learning in all areas of the curriculum. These can be presented by transferring activities normally carried out indoors, school garden projects, environmental education or learning through play.

*"The best kept classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky"*  
*(Learning outdoors in the early years – A Resource Book)*

Providing positive opportunities for active learning, the outside environment can promote skills of enquiry, problem solving, communication, co-operation, creativity and evaluation, therefore we seek to offer outdoor experiences that allow children to:

- Find space to be alone or interact in social groups of different sizes
- Plan, build, evaluate and sometimes demolish

- Find similarities and differences, observe and classify
- Be energetic, adventurous and assess risk
- Make marks, use large scale media, be messy
- Plant and grow
- Hide, explore and discover
- Investigate, make predictions and test
- Imagine, pretend and reflect
- Measure, locate, transport and record

## **Objectives**

Our objectives are to provide a well-balanced programme of activities to support the physical development, sensory development, health and well-being and social skills of all children.

Our outdoor learning environment provides a range of opportunities, sufficient space, time and resources to allow time for effective physical development time, opportunity and support for children with sensory difficulties or physical disabilities in partnership with outside agencies. Well planned and well resourced outdoor play experiences allow for progression in a child's thinking and understanding.

## **Resources**

We have developed resources in the following areas:

- ✓ School garden
- ✓ Physical development area
- ✓ Outdoor Classroom
- ✓ Sensory Area
- ✓ Playground

Within these five areas there is a wide variety of equipment, teaching tools and activities to help develop learning in the outdoors and in all areas of the curriculum:

- ✓ Language and Literacy
- ✓ Numeracy
- ✓ The Arts
- ✓ The World Around Us
- ✓ Thinking skills and personal capabilities
- ✓ Physical development and Movement

Our aim is to integrate Outdoor play into all areas of the curriculum where possible.

*“When Outdoor play is viewed as a peripheral activity it will only have a peripheral effect on children’s learning”.*

*(Learning outdoors in the early years – A Resource Book)*

### **Assessment and Recording**

Good practice in assessing outdoor learning is no different from assessment elsewhere in school. Where possible activities should allow children to demonstrate ‘performance of understanding’ – children are given tasks that show they can use the knowledge and skills they have learned in the classroom:

- Generalise
- Apply exceptions
- Give explanations
- Make predictions
- Evaluate
- Find examples
- Find solutions
- List strategies

Assessment may be teacher led, peer or self evaluation. Assessment and observations are then used to inform future learning.

### **Health and Safety**

At St. Mary’s Primary School we ensure that children can have access to outdoor learning every day, all year round. A daily health and safety check of all Outdoor Learning areas and equipment is carried out before taking the children out and any defects are removed. We ensure that children wear coats, hats etc in the winter time and sun hats and sun creams during the summer period (Parents responsibility to send to school).

*“Physically the area has to be safe but still allow risk and challenge. Safeness is about enabling things to happen, not shutting down opportunities”.*

*(Learning outdoors in the early years – A Resource Book)*

All staff regularly discuss with our children about safeness, risk and challenge in the outdoors. When staff are outside we ensure that we are ever watchful, even if we are engrossed in an activity with a particular group of children.

## **Role of the Adult**

The role of the adult is to:

- ✓ Provide planning and resources for a challenging outdoor area that is integral with overall planning and identifies practitioners to support lead activities
- ✓ set up and store equipment safely
- ✓ observe key children/focus children and plan appropriately
- ✓ be an active role model interacting and supporting children's learning and planned play
- ✓ provide varied opportunities for supporting and encouraging children to explore and extend their experiences
- ✓ extend and develop children's language and communication in their play
- ✓ consult and involve children in planning
- ✓ support our colleagues
- ✓ ensure appropriate ratios are maintained
- ✓ wear appropriate clothing and advise parents and carers on clothing suitable for outdoor learning
- ✓ display a positive attitude to outdoor learning
- ✓ observe and monitor children's play and learning in the outdoors

When Planning and organising the outdoor learning area in St. Mary's Primary School staff ensure they meet the curriculum learning goals. Planning for outdoor learning should recognise the area as an extension of the indoor learning area. Well-planned play, both indoors and outdoors, is a key way in which young children learn with enjoyment and challenge.

## **Aims for children**

Through play in a secure environment with effective adult support, children can:

- ✓ Explore, develop and represent learning experiences that help them make sense of the world;
- ✓ Practise and build up ideas, concepts and skills;
- ✓ Learn how to control impulses and understand the need for rules;
- ✓ Be alone, be alongside others or cooperate as they talk or rehearse their feelings;
- ✓ Take risks and make mistakes;
- ✓ Think creatively and imaginatively;
- ✓ Communicate with others as they investigate or solve problems
- ✓ Express fears or relive anxious experiences in controlled and safe situations.

## **Equality of opportunity**

St. Mary's Primary School ensures that Equality of opportunity outside is covered by the following:

- Ensuring that all children have the ability or support to play and explore in the outdoor area.
- Monitoring how children use the outdoor area
- Providing opportunities suitable for both genders to ensure enjoyment and enthusiasm for all children

This policy will be reviewed and updated in September 2018.

**Signed by Principal:**

**Signed by Outdoor Learning Co-Coordinator:**