

Ballycraig Primary School

North Eastern Education & Library Board

Principal: Dr Hazel Edwards
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OUTDOOR LEARNING POLICY

VALUE STATEMENT



At Ballycraig Primary School, we value outdoor learning because it allows learning to become fun and memorable. The opportunity to play outside throughout the year, in all different kinds of weather, is as important as playing inside. Nearly everything that is provided inside can be provided outside and some of the best learning can only happen outside. For many children, the learning that happens outdoors is the most important. It is every child's entitlement.

"The best classroom and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky" Margaret McMillan.

At Ballycraig Primary School, we believe that well organised and supervised, "risky freedom" helps all children to find out about themselves and their capabilities. It helps develop self confidence, independence and lays the foundations for a healthier life. We are aware that there can be risks associated with outdoor learning experiences; however it is important that children recognise risks and how to manage them and this is a part of their growing up. It also helps them to develop new skills. As teachers we are aware that a balance is needed between risk and fun. This policy seeks to minimise the risk and maximise the fun.

AIMS

Outdoor learning offers opportunities:

- To provide suitable outdoor learning activities for all ages (4-11).
(This includes out of classroom experiences such as school trips, 'welly walks', visits within the local community, taking the classroom into the outdoors and taking curriculum topics outside the classroom building for relevant outdoor experiences.)
- To develop learning skills of enquiry, experiment, feedback, reflection, review, communication, problem solving, to become independent and co-operative learners.
- To develop an awareness of their local environment and take care of it.
- To provide a dramatic contrast to the indoor classroom.

(There is strong evidence that good quality learning outside the classroom adds much value to classroom learning. It leads to a deeper understanding of concepts that span traditional subject boundaries and which are frequently difficult to teach effectively using classroom methods alone.)

- To develop experiences which can be powerful and motivating both with impact and credibility.

(The results from outdoor learning can be instantaneous as well as active and therefore impact on behaviour, as well as tapping into the learning styles of the more kinaesthetic learner.)

- To allow, through skilled teaching, outdoor experiences which readily become a stimulating source of fascination, personal growth leading to breakthroughs in learning.

RESOURCES

We are exceptionally fortunate to have extensive grounds which offer excellent opportunities for both formal and informal learning and play. The formal garden, outdoor learning classroom, gym trail, woodland walk, grassland, hedgerows, pond life and river corridor all tie in well with the school's Eco school programme. Our efforts to have biodiversity and sustainability as an integrated theme throughout our curriculum is evident in all aspects of the life and work of the school, in exactly the same way a healthy life style permeates our school policies. The local environment too harbours a wealth of opportunities within relatively accessible distance. Learners can develop their skills to explore this local environment.

PLANNING AND ORGANISATION OF ACTIVITIES

- Teachers must ensure that planning for outdoor play is integral and included in each year group's medium and short term planning.



MANAGING EQUIPMENT AND SAFETY

- All fixed play apparatus and equipment has been installed subject to the manufacturer's instructions. (Creative Activity)
- Play equipment and playground areas are frequently assessed for condition and safety by the Buildings Supervisor. Should there be damage to, or concerns surrounding the safety of, any playground equipment, these will either be addressed immediately or the equipment will be taken out of use until the matter is resolved.
- Apparatus is only used by children of the appropriate age, skill, and physical abilities.

- It is understood by all staff that they have the ultimate responsibility of ensuring that the outside play area is safe. Any concerns need to be reported to the Principal and the Buildings Supervisor.
- Some equipment is stored in the red metal container and is only taken out when it is to be used. It is put away safely when not in use.
- Sun Protection - all children must wear hats during the hot weather. We expect our parents to apply sun cream to their children before coming to school. If necessary children will be asked to top-up an application with sun cream provided by their parents. Teachers are able to supervise this but are not able to apply the sun cream to children.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Parents need to strike a reasonable balance between the value of experience and levels of acceptable risk.

ROLE OF THE CO-ORDINATOR

The role of the outdoor learning co-ordinator is:



- To co-ordinate the outdoor learning areas in the school, in particular overseeing the continued development of it. This involves making the area aesthetically pleasing and stimulating for the children with suitable equipment/resources and activities.
- To monitor the outdoor learning experiences of all Year groups, ensuring teachers are planning outdoor experiences for children in their short term and medium term planning.
- To provide information for the school development plan.
- To support staff and inform them of any outdoor learning experiences that may be relevant for or will provide a rich learning experience for their year group.



MONITORING AND REVIEW

Outdoor learning activities/experiences will be found in teachers' short and medium term planning. Evidence of learning is provided from children's work and a record of photographs kept by the class teacher.

Written January 2015

Ratified March 2015

For Review March 2017

Appendices:

1. P1/P2 half term planners
2. RSPB planner (P2)
3. Green Fingers Club planner
4. Eco Action Plan and P1-P7 RHS planner



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