



## **Outdoor Learning Policy**

### **St. John's Primary School, Coleraine**

Principal: Mrs H. McDonnell

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**Reaching New Heights!**

# Reaching New Heights

## Rationale

St. John's believe that when learning outside the classroom, children:

- attain higher levels of knowledge and skills
- improve their physical health and increase their motor abilities
- socialise and interact in new and diverse ways with their peers and adults
- show improved attention and enhanced self-concept, self-esteem, mental health and emotional intelligence
- change their environmental behaviours and their values and attitudes.”

The outdoors can provide space and freedom for a type of learning that is difficult to replicate indoors. All children have the right to experience the unique and special nature of learning outdoors. At St. John's P.S. we feel it is important to enable children to use the outside environment as a context for learning throughout the year.

## Aims

- To ensure opportunities to apply skills are embedded across the whole school curriculum.
- To encourage close links with parents and the school in celebrating our outdoor space
- and the rich learning that can take place within it.
- To empower children to take ownership of their learning, allowing their minds and bodies to thrive.
- To provide a safe and secure environment that children can take risks in.
- To encourage children to care for their environment.

## Policy into Practice

Opportunities for outdoor learning are planned across all subjects within the school curriculum, using it as a context and a natural resource for learning.

## We will:

- Ensure that we make the most of the extensive outdoor space we have available and use it to offer children what the indoors cannot. (This should be the focus for outdoor provision, complementing and extending provision indoors.)
- Ensure that our outdoor area and resources within it are inclusive, flexible and versatile, where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their learning and play environment.
- Ensure that children enjoy energetic activity outdoors and the feeling of well-being that it brings, including opportunities to develop their gross motor skills.
- Observe, assess and record outdoor learning, ensuring that there is adequate provision for children to extend their learning.

- Plan for outdoor learning with the children to offer experiences which have meaning to them and which are led by the child.
- Enable children to work both individually and co-operatively outside.
- Enable children to appreciate the beauty of nature; encouraging children to use a variety of natural resources.
- Give children the opportunity to find a quiet space to reflect.
- Encourage children to enjoy and have fun outdoors in many contexts.
- Work together (children, staff, parents, community) to create a better environment for all.
- Organise and/or provide necessary resources such as Wellington boots and raincoats (Y1-4 waterproof coats and trousers are provided and centrally stored).
- Develop a set of rules through discussion with children. Enable children to use resources safely and to manage and use the space and freedom responsibly.
- Help children to take responsibility and care for the outside environment and resources within it.
- Encourage children to respect their environment and to care for living things.
- As an Eco-School have an Eco-Council. They will work on Projects aimed at encouraging the school to 'reduce, reuse and recycle'. They will also plan 'themed days' to further improve our outdoor space.

## **Resources**

The school has an extensive outdoor environment which provides an excellent resource for outdoor learning. A biodiversity garden has been created at the bottom of the playground. We have a stone pathway leading to the garden for ease of access.

The enclosed outdoor area of school has been refurbished in line with 'Learning Through Play' consultancy advice. The area includes water play, sand play, a mud station, loose parts and go-karts for children from Year 1-7.

High quality training is sought for staff on an ongoing basis and resources are purchased in line with school needs based on identified priority within the School Development Plan.

At St. John's we utilise local outdoor environments such as the beaches, forests, The Mount, the River Bann to name a few. Through working closely with expertise from the local area such as Beach Schools NI experts, trained Forest School staff and staff from the University of Ulster, we focus on enhancing the learning experiences of our children and upskilling staff.

## **Health and Safety**

We will support children in taking risks within a safe and secure environment. It is important to ensure that the outdoor environment offers challenges and teaches the children how to be safe and aware of others. All activities will be considered for a risk assessment. Children and staff are advised about possible risks before entering the area. A qualified first aider will be present in school at all times to deal with a situation should the need arise.

## **Weather**

At St. John's P.S. we continue with our outdoor education lessons in all weathers. All children are regularly advised to bring coats to allow them to go outdoors. Extreme wind can bring other dangers against which children cannot be wrapped up such as flying debris, or simply being blown over. Decisions to work outdoors should assess this possibility and decide if the activity can go ahead on any given day. The sun too can bring its own concerns. Children and parents are advised to bring a sun hat, as well as applying sun cream before they come to school. If the activity outdoors is prolonged, we ensure that children remain hydrated and stay under shelter from the sun.

## **Equality and inclusion**

As a Centre of Excellence for Inclusion, we endeavour to ensure that all children whatever their abilities are able to play and explore outdoors within the school grounds and further afield. Activities are not offered on the basis of gender, and we try to balance out over time the specialist visits offered to all children within the school. At all times we aim to respect cultural issues.

## **Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation**

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" i.e., they should be given tasks that show they can use what they have learned to...

Generalise

- Apply exceptions
- Give explanations
- Make predictions
- Evaluate
- Find examples
- Find solutions
- Work independently
- Work with a partner
- Work as part of a team.

## **Policy Review**

This policy has been drawn up in conjunction with staff, pupils, parents and Governors.

Date of next review: February 2026