



Tribe: Always Stay Curious

Play Policy

Ardnashee School & College

Play Policy

'You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation'
(Plato)

What is play?

'Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone, is the free expression of what is in a child's soul.'

(Friedrich Frobel)

In Ardnashee School and College staff are follow the CCEA Learning Through Play – A Resource Book as part of our creative curriculum. This guidance is used to support staff in reviewing, developing and improving their practice in learning through play.

Play is....

- **Active** - Children use their bodies and minds in their play. They interact with the environment, with materials and with other people.
- **Adventurous and risky** - Play helps children to explore the unknown. The pretend element offers a safety net that encourages children to take risks.
- **Communicative** - Children share information and knowledge through their play.
- **Enjoyable** - Play is fun and exciting and involves a sense of humour.
- **Involved** - Children become deeply absorbed and focused on their play, concentrating and thinking about what they are doing.
- **Meaningful** - Children play about what they have seen and heard, and what they know. Play helps them to build and extend their knowledge, understanding and skills in a way that makes sense to them.
- **Sociable and interactive** - Children play alongside or with others. Sometimes they also like and need to play alone.
- **Symbolic** - Children imagine and pretend when they are playing. They try out ideas, feelings, and roles. They re-enact the past and rehearse the future. This can involve them 'reading' and 'writing' long before they develop these skills.
- **Therapeutic** - Play helps children to express and work through emotions and experiences.
- **Voluntary** - Children choose to play. Their play is spontaneous. They shape it as they go, changing the characters, events, objects, and locations.

(NCCA, 2009: 53)

Aim:

'Children learn through play. Play is natural and instinctive, enabling children to test their own abilities, and to learn and develop new skills and knowledge.'

(Playboard NI cited: June 2021)

Ardnashee School and College staff recognises the importance of providing play as part of learning in the curriculum. Staff recognise the benefits of play for developing key skills, improving children and young people's learning; health and happiness; social skills and teamwork; confidence and communication; problem solving; creativity and imagination. Play enables children and young people to develop thinking skills and personal capabilities and staff are encouraged to observe play as part of our Assessment tasks annually.

Objectives:

In line with the NI curriculum requirements for play and our commitment to play as a Playboard NI Tops Award School, we will:

- offer a stimulating environment tailored to the child's individual needs
- develop existing skills by building their knowledge using their interests, giving them opportunities to be creative, explore and to engage in playing, sharing, learning and working together
- develop the fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy, and oral communication, organising, recording, interpreting and predicting.
- foster independence, self-esteem and confidence.
- encourage respect for one another and offer opportunities for social interaction, personal and emotional development.
- foster wellbeing, healthy growth and the development, knowledge, creativity and capacity to learn.
- offer opportunities to develop early life skills and assist in understanding the world around us.
- take outdoor play seriously and ensure play zones are safe and resourced for students on the Achieve, Succeed or Conquer pathway.

As a playboard NI school for TOPS (Taking Outdoor Play seriously) all classes have contributed to our Play Pledge. (Appendix 1). All staff completed training with Play Board NI led by Play Worker S. Mc Cusker and completed the quality assurance programme successfully from September 2021 to June 2022. All parents were nagged in the TOPS training session and funding is allocated to play resources annually through the Key Stage Leaders. Play activities, training and resources/equipment may be requested through the Friends of Ardnashee Charity annually. Our new school build will have state of the art play zones and we are consulting with Planning Learning Spaces England for support with selecting the most appropriate and imaginative play equipment for our SEN setting.

How valuable is play at ASC?

CCEA NI Curriculum on Play

'Children should have opportunities to experience much of their learning through well planned and challenging play'

(CCEA 2003)

As a Rights Respecting School, we recognise that apart from the enjoyment of play, play has a valuable contribution to make to the children's learning. Within the medium and long term planning documents staff are supported to create an overview of play to include opportunities for learners on the Achieve, Succeed and Conquer pathways. Staff share planning and best practice through the Best Practice Library on the One Drive.

We understand the impulse to play is innate for some children; and for some children play is a skill which needs to be taught and nurtured to promote:

- Physical development
- Speech and language development
- Cognitive development
- Mathematical/scientific and creative skills
- Emotional and social development

How we organise play:

Our children are often passive in their attitude to exploration and therefore require much more support in their learning from play. The class team have a key role to play in order to build the right conditions for learning. We provide:

- Structured play specifically designed to build on the strengths and interests of the children.
- Free play which develops from a rich and nurturing environment full of opportunities to develop learning through play.
- Support for children to encourage and develop their ideas.

We organise play throughout the daily routine to actively engage all children, appropriate to their individual needs and abilities.

The activity areas that we have agreed to address are:

- Role play
- Music/Listening
- Water/Sand
- Creative Writing
- Construction
- Dough/Clay
- Small World
- Table Top games
- ICT
- Outdoor
- Soft play
- Sensory play

Role of Adult:

We here at ASC understand that the quality of intervention is a critical factor in the quality of learning, which is experienced by the child, the involvement of the adult places value in the children's play. Without appropriate adult intervention, play may become repetitive and unrewarding. The adult's role is to facilitate play and allow the play process to happen. The adult chooses an intervention style that enables the child to extend their play and develop their play skills whilst keeping them safe from harm, offering appropriate, broad, and balanced activities/experiences which ensure continuity and progression. Our school supports staff in undertaking training to keep up to date with developments in play and encourages staff to evaluate practices and resources when is updates when required.

Developmental stages of play:

- Unoccupied Play
- Solitary play
- Onlooker/Observer play
- Parallel play
- Associative Play
- Co-operative/Social play

Planning for play:

We understand that planning is important in order to make sure that all children have equal access to quality learning experiences. Play planning is topic based and indicates:

- The expected/desirable learning outcomes
- The materials/resources intended for use.
- The activities
- All children learning is observed, and progress is monitored during play.

We recognise that rigid planning is not always appropriate for our children so from time to time the best-intentioned plans can be disrupted as spontaneous learning opportunities lead the child's learning.

Observations/Record Keeping:

At ASC, teachers assess the development of the child's skills and monitor the child's progress on a continual basis, thus aiding the teacher to plan and meet their needs, interests and abilities of the children and ensuring that the child's experience of play is appropriate, broad, and balanced. We use a variety of tools on a regular basis to observe, record and track interests, development, and progression, ensuring a high-quality play provision, which is both enjoyable and challenging.

Links with the wider community:

Ardnashee shares the school site with the Liberty Consortium Playtrail and this enables further opportunities for collaborating with play specialists and forest skills tutors and we have full access to a primary and post primary play park, a sensory park, play trails in the woods, an ampi-theatre and outdoor forest play space as well as garden spaces for horticulture based experiences. We have strong links with the local community and work within Your Space circus school, Replay Theatre Company and the Millennium Forum.

Ardnashee school and college employ play, music and dance therapists. The Pathways team are skilled in a variety of therapies including Therapeutic Play, Sand Tray Play, Water Play, Sensory Play, Lego-Based Therapy, yoga and mindfulness. These practices are shared across the school community to ensure children and young people learn through play.

Play in the post primary

At ASC we emphasize the importance of play and recreational activities in the holistic development of students in a post-primary setting. We promote the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive well-being of students through structured and unstructured play opportunities. We recognize the significance of play and recreational activities in the lives of adolescents. These activities contribute to students' overall well-being, support academic learning, and foster social skills. We ensure that play and recreational activities are an integral part of the school's culture and daily routines.

Objectives:

1. To provide regular and diverse recreational opportunities for all students in post primary.
2. To create a safe, inclusive, and stimulating environment for play and recreation.
3. To integrate play and recreational activities into the school curriculum and daily schedule.
4. To encourage the development of social skills, teamwork, and physical health through recreational activities.
5. To collaborate with parents and the community to support recreational activities.

Implementation;

- Ensure that the school day includes designated times for physical education, extracurricular activities, and free time for recreation.
- Incorporate short breaks throughout the day to allow students to engage in informal play and relaxation.
- Integrate play and recreational activities into the curriculum to enhance learning and personal development.
- Use recreational activities to teach teamwork, leadership, and other social skills.
- Encourage project-based learning that includes creative and hands-on elements.
- Provide professional development for teachers and staff on the benefits of play and effective facilitation of recreational activities.
- Train staff to recognise the different types of recreational activities and how to incorporate them into daily routines and lessons.

Therapeutic play

ASC is committed to fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for all students by promoting the emotional, social, and psychological well-being of students through therapeutic play interventions. Therapeutic play is a form of play that uses toys, games, and creative activities to help children process their emotions and experiences in a safe environment. These interventions aim to support students facing emotional difficulties, social challenges, or behavioural challenges, and to enhance their overall learning experience. At ASC we ensure that therapeutic play is integrated into the school's support

services in a structured and effective manner facilitating communication, fostering emotional wellness, enhancing social relationships, and increasing personal strengths of all our students.

Objectives

1. To provide a safe space for students to express their emotions through play.
2. To support students in developing social skills and emotional resilience
3. To integrate therapeutic play into the school's broader support system
4. To collaborate with parents, teachers, and external professionals to support student well-being.

Implementation

- Teachers, parents, or guardians can refer a student for therapeutic play services.
- Referrals are reviewed by the pathways team.
- Parental consent is required for participation in therapeutic play sessions.
- Goals and objectives for the therapeutic play sessions will be established in collaboration with the student, parents, and relevant school staff.
- Therapeutic play sessions will be conducted in a designated safe and confidential space within the school.
- Sessions will be held regularly, with the frequency and duration determined based on the individual needs of the student.

At ASC we provide support to staff members to successfully integrate play into the school environment. We provide professional development opportunities including workshops, sharing best practice, and training sessions that focus on the importance of play in education and strategies for incorporating play into the curriculum. We are committed to create a supportive school culture that values and encourages play throughout the whole school. This is achieved by recognising and celebrating the efforts of staff members who are successfully implementing play in their classrooms. We have created a resource room with play materials and items to share amongst staff. Expectations of play are clearly communicated by the leadership team to staff. Clear goals and objectives have been set to support members with a better understanding of how they can effectively incorporate play into their teaching practice.

Celebrating Play

To assess play effectively in ASC, it is essential that we integrate the insights from Qskills, QUEST, Levels of Progression, and play observations. This allows for a comprehensive and individualised approach for all our Achieve, Succeed and Conquer learners. We view Play as not just an activity, but a core learning tool that fosters a variety of skills, including social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. We celebrate play across our entire school from nursery to Post 16.

The ASC Play policy supports the Assessment policy as teachers in the EYFS are expected to complete 10 play observations over the academic year. Furthermore, end of term assessments is facilitated through play experiences. Based on the observations from this play-based assessment, the teacher can gather information about the child, highlighting areas of strength and identifying any areas that may need further support.

We work with the CCEA framework 'A Playful Learning Continuum' to support staff with observing play and celebrating student success. These observations are also used to support planning and evaluation of PLPs.

<https://ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea-asset/Resources/A%20Playful%20Learning%20Continuum.pdf>

Date ASC Staff Consulted	22.01.25
Date Ratified by ASC Board of Governors	
Chairpersons Signature	
Principals Signature	
Review Date	September 2028

Parent and Carer Information Pack