Play Policy

1. Introduction and Purpose

Play is a fundamental aspect of a child's overall development; it is a critical factor in enriching learning and development. The nursery acknowledges the importance of play within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and incorporates play as a key element of the learning experience

Children have a natural need to play that cannot be halted. It is how they make sense of the world around them. Play enables children to learn and practice skills and to create bonds.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 31 states that child have the right to play and relax:

- Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (2025) Statutory frame work requires all childcare providers to consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.

This policy should be read in conjunction with Home from Home's Ethos and Pedagogy, Forest School Handbook, Garden Management Plan, Outdoor Policy and Wild Beach Policy.

2. Contents

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3. Definition of Play

"Play is an essential part of every child's life and vital to their development. It is the way children explore the world around them and develop and practise motor skills. It is essential for physical, emotional and spiritual growth, for intellectual and educational development, and for acquiring social and behavioural skills. Play is a generic term applied to a wide range of activities and behaviours that are satisfying to the child, creative for the child and freely chosen by the child. Children's play may or may not involve equipment or have an end product. Children play on their own and with others. Their play may be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, light-hearted or very serious".
(Ref: The New Charter for Children's Play 1998)

4. How we enable children to Play

Play is fundamental to every child's development.
Our aim at the nursery is as follows:

- Play activities are freely chosen and the nursery will help to ensure that play is fun and enjoyable for children.
- All children have access to a balanced range of play with access to both the indoor and outdoor areas for the majority of the day.
- The nursery listens to children and aims to meet their needs in an inclusive way.
- The nursery recognises the need for play opportunities to be challenging whilst free from unnecessary hazards.
- The nursery reviews practices and resources to establish how children can best be supported in their play.
- Employees create an environment that fosters opportunities for play.
- Play is used to support and develop our planning to extend children's learning experiences. It is important for us to recognise the diversity and complexity of children's play and use our skills and observations to extend children's learning.
- Our role as practitioners is to enable rather than direct the child in accordance with EYFS recommendations.
- The nursery helps and supports parents/carers to understand the value of play in the overall development of children.
- Play opportunities should enable children to develop as individuals and play activities must be specific to the age and stage of development for all children.
- Play should enable children to develop confidence and empower them.
- Good practice should be celebrated and shared.

5. Enabling Environment

We meet the rights for the children to play by implementing the EYFS (2025) principle that children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.

The nursery environment is developed using natural resources, such as wooden blocks, pine cones and other open-ended resources. Wherever possible we aim extend the natural environment and thus avoid plastic wherever possible.

We provide an enabling environment which promotes play by:

- providing a safe environment for the child to explore and test out their ideas.
- We create play areas to meet the different needs of play to enable children to participate in child initiated activities and use the space to build on their ideas and experiences. For example, quiet areas to allow children to observe others and gives them time and space to reflect on their learning, an outdoor environment to help nurture the minds of children and encourage child led play. The large open spaces and the breadth of natural resources enable children to use their imagination and problem-solving skills to develop their play.
- We provide children with a variety of play equipment and resources to allow the children to choose what they play with and for how long.
- We provide the parents with information on the importance of play and ideas to support and encourage it

Our environment set up will ensure children have opportunities to play that enables them to

- Explore and use all their senses
- Practise motor skills
- Be creative
- Experience new things
- Share
- Act out
- Have fun
- Build
- Observe and copy
- Explore and take risks
- Practise activities and situations
- Pretend.

6. Outdoor learning

- The nursery believes that outdoor learning is essential to children's health, development and well-being.
- Outdoor learning compliments indoor learning and is equally important. Play and learning that flow seamlessly between indoors and outdoors enables children to make the most of resources and materials available to them and develop their ideas without unnecessary interruption. Consequently, it is vital that as an early year setting the nursery maximises the children's opportunities outdoors.
- The outdoor learning environment is planned so that all seven areas of learning specified in the EYFS can be met through play.
- The nursery aims to use our whole environment as an extension to our indoor classrooms so the children can freely use both indoors and outdoors. Statistics show that children are happiest when outside and thrive in the natural environment.

- Our outdoor areas are fully risk assessed and are checked on a daily basis. Employees follow correct procedures i.e., staff/child ratios, making sure areas are safe, monitoring play, etc.
- The nursery asks that all parents/carers be aware of our outdoor learning philosophy and dress their children appropriately for the weather conditions.
- Observations are made on the children's learning developments whilst playing outside.
- The nursery encourages parents/carers to talk to their child's Key Person or Senior Early Years Educator if they have any concerns about outside play.

The garden consists of 8 areas to support the above which includes:

- Forest area including forest school activity
- Grass area for open ended play and water play
- Beach area with sandpit, scientific activity
- Quiet area - reading and quiet craft activities
- Allotment and potting house – gardening and nature activities
- Soft play area for trikes and bikes
- Outdoor learning area

7. Forest School

Forest school sessions offer the chance to take learning out of the indoor environment and into the great outdoors. Children are given an opportunity to learn in a new way and within a different environment. Forest school introduces a whole new dimension to teaching and learning, with new experiences for both the children and practitioners. Forest schools promotes the opportunity to develop skills to manage risks and attempt new challenges they would not face in their usual environment, such as tree climbing, building fires and den making. This adds a sense of excitement and adventure for the children, who are free to explore and manipulate the environment around them using all of their senses. The weather has no impact upon forest schools, the children will still be outside making the most of the experience.

- The children experience Forest School within the grounds of the nursery in our dedicated Forest School area
- The children will engage in activities that are fully risk assessed
- The staff ; child ratio will reflect the nature of the activities that are available and therefore the group size will be reduced.
- Employees leading forest schools will be qualified or training to level 3 in forest schools teaching. They will be accompanied by two further employees, at least one of whom will be Level 1 Forest School trained or will have received in house 'upskilling"
- Children are expected to wear waterproof clothing in the winter and be dressed in appropriate footwear at all times.
- A first aid kit and mobile phone will be accessible at every forest school session.

8. Wild Beach

Our aim is to connect children with their local marine environment through outdoor play and child led learning.
Preschool children are part of a small group (maximum 6) that will visit the beach once a week for a six-week programme each term.

The children explore our local beach and discover how it changes each visit with different elements taking an effect.

A Typical Wild Beach session will involve the children walking to the beach from the Nursery with two members of staff, one of which will be a qualified Wild Beach Leader. Once they are there, they will discuss the tide and find ways of observing it. For example, the children all select a large rock and they place these in a line on the shoreline and return later in the session to see what has happened.

9. Child Initiated and Adult Led Play

We use a mixture of child initiated and adult led play to provide a balanced learning experience. Both adult led and child initiated learning supports the seven areas of the learning and development of the EYFS, some activities will be more child initiated and other adult led.
We provide opportunities for Physical, Creative, Imaginary, Sensory and Heuristic play.
We support the children to play initiate themselves, to enable the children to explore their world and their place within it and to develop at their own pace. We do this by:

- Providing a child centred play area:
- Make sure it is childproof and clean
- Avoid over-stimulation
- Allow children to leave constructions up for a while so they come back and engage in new adventures in the world they created
- Store resources safely but make them easily accessible
- Providing resources with play value that:
- Can be used in many ways
- Allow children to determine the play
- Appeal to children at more than one age or level of development
- Can be used with other resources for new and more complete play
- Will stand the test of time and continue to be part of play as they develop new interest and skills
- Help children develop skills important for further learning and a sense of mastery
- Encouraging a balance in play activities:
- Encourage outdoor play that uses large muscles – running, jumping, climbing and playing
- Balanced time spent in adult-organized activities – child directed play is important
- Do not allow the children to become over-scheduled – self-directed play should be encouraged
- When encouraging new activities the practitioner will make the introduction, then observe the children playing and exploring. They will support their further learning by extending or scaffolding the activity.

10. Inclusive play

We provide inclusive play by ensuring all children have the same access to play opportunities, regardless of their specific abilities, needs and backgrounds. Inclusive play bridges the divide between mainstream and children with additional needs. Both groups can benefit from these play methods and learn a lot from mixing with those different to themselves. Children at all ages learn in all aspects of development through play: emotional, social, physical and mental.

Inclusive play offers children a richer play environment and evolves according to their changing needs and interests. It offers a sense of place and is supported through observation-led planning.

Inclusive play provides respect for the culture of children's play and recognises that all individuals are welcomed and valued.

We support inclusive play by

- Ensure the layout of the room is not too cluttered.
- there is a clear pathway from one activity to another and to the toilet etc,
- Make sure that each child has the adult support they require whilst promoting independence
- make sure the activities are presented in a way that promotes the child's independence, for example accessible to all children.
- All toy boxes are labelled with works and pictures so that all children can decided what to play with.
- work in partnership with the parents and other professionals to understand the best way to provide inclusive play to each child.
- Observe the children and how they interact with the toys, environment and determine if their needs are being met to enable them to develop, I adapt as necessary.
- Provide a wide range of activities, both child led and adult led based on children's learning needs
- Provide a wide range of opportunities to motivate, support and develop children and help them to be involved, concentrate and learn effectively
- Plan for each child's individual care and learning requirements including additional or different provision required to meet particular individual needs
- Enable children to be consulted effectively to ensure they are gaining the most benefit from the setting.

11. Roles and & Responsibilities

It is the role of all Practitioners, Nursery Assistants and Apprentices to ensure Home From Homes Play Policy is adhered to during every day practice.

Room Managers, Team Leaders and Deputy Team Leaders are responsible for training and coaching team members to ensure this practice is being delivered.

12. Training

Although there is no specific training provided in relation to this policy, line managers will be required to ensure their respective employees are made aware of its contents and to cascade through the usual dissemination routes.

13. Review

This policy be reviewed in line with any statutory changes, and will be automatically reviewed on an annual basis or as required following any amendments to national guidance.

14. Version Control

Version	Date	Status	Comments	By
1	October 2024	New Draft Policy –	Issued 22/10 for review by senior team	Julia Pattenden & Beckie Devlin
2	July 2025	Reviewed		Sophie Eade
3	May 2026	Reviewed		Sophie Eade