Outdoor Play Policy

Record of Policy Amendment/History

Version/Issue	Date	Author	Reason for change
2	18/01/17	Whole school	Review
3	28/02/2020	RNS	Review

Ripley Nursery School and Childcare Outdoor Play Policy

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

At Ripley Nursery School we value children as 'skilful communicators, meaning makers, researchers and explorers' seeking to make sense of the world around them and the people within it.

We believe all children should have access to and opportunities to develop care for a rich and varied natural environment.

We believe that parents, carers and practitioners have a key role in promoting a love of and care for our natural world.

This policy seeks to outline our view of children as active learners and how a rich outdoor environment planned and supported by sensitive 'tuned in' practitioners support and extend children's thinking and learning.

The active child

Children are active learners; they work as scientists seeking to make sense of the world. Children are intrinsically motivated by their curiosity to learn about the world and how it works; the objects, landscapes and the people within it. A rich natural outdoor environment offers a wealth of learning opportunities.

Young children learn by doing, by having an impact on the world around them. They want to explore things which can be moved and transformed – which they can have an effect on. Children and adults make use of all their senses to access information about the world, we develop theories and ideas which we repeatedly test out and reformulate. As we mature the processing of the sensory information becomes more automatic and we use our theories about the world to develop our abstract thought and reasoning.

In young children access to rich sensory environment stimulates the development of nerve connections in their rapidly developing brains – they literally wire up the brain through experience. Children and adults access and process information through their senses: touch, taste, auditory, visual, smell, proprioception, (developing control over our bodies) and vestibular, (balance and co-ordination).

We are embodied; we use our whole bodies to find out about the world, see how things work and how we relate to the objects in the world and the people within it.

For young children movement is thinking; through close observation you can see a child physically working out solutions and explanations to the questions which arise as he/she encounters new situations and resources within their ever expanding world.

At Ripley Nursery School we support children to gain mastery over their physical skills, for their age and stage, to work on developing balance, locomotor skills, co-ordination, strength and control.

Additionally, we recognise that the process of language acquisition requires the catalyst of experience; moving through a rich stimulating environment and interacting with the resources within it – especially people – is the motivation to communicate, to share our thinking.

We understand that for a child to develop into a competent, 'can do' learner they need the opportunities and the challenges to make many small step achievements 'scaffolded' by a sensitive practitioner.

Children need freedom, time and opportunity to practise and consolidate their learning, they need the security of a supportive adult who demonstrates appreciation and respect for the child's learning.

The sensitive practitioner

At Ripley Nursery School all children and their families have a keyworker responsible for supporting the child to settle with confidence in school, to document and plan for the child's learning and to work in partnership with parents to support their holistic development.

Emotions are a very powerful trigger in learning: if children experience positive emotions towards their learning; if they are supported in feeling competent, if adults are 'tuned in' to and understand their thinking providing them with appropriate learning opportunities then, they will flourish and develop proactive attitudes to learning.

We are committed to supporting high levels of well-being and high levels of involvement in learning through a rich natural outdoor provision facilitated by experienced and enthusiastic practitioners.

Children with high levels of well-being and involvement flourish supported by nurturing and stimulating practitioners. High levels of involvement in learning = high levels of motivation to learn.

Nurturing is crucial to the learning process – to develop high levels of well- being children must feel secure in their learning environment and with their practitioners. For our youngest children this involves developing secure attachments to their keyworkers. Sensitive practitioners need to develop close relationships with their children, to be skilful in observing their learning and have the knowledge to 'feed' their thinking.

The learning throughout school; indoor and outdoor is organised into adult initiated planned provision where staff have the overview of children's learning and plan to stretch

capability and child-initiated where children have the confidence and permission to select from the continuous provision to work creatively following their own ideas.

The nurturing outdoor environment

Children need access to the natural world; to experience different weather conditions, the changing seasons, the materials of the world beneath their feet and in their hands. A well thought out and richly resourced outdoor space is a natural and immediate rich sensory environment for both children and adults.

Our outdoor space is ever changing and includes:

Loose parts for imaginative construction,

Enchanted Forest shed where we can access snack on a rainy day,

Planting areas,

Mud kitchen,

Water exploration area including dry stream,

Climbing frame and double slide,

Space to run, jump, to be boisterous and noisy,

Seating to sit and think or chat with friends,

Places to work together,

Bike shed and bike track,

Gravel pit,

Sand pit with large scales and free standing pulley systems

An allotment with a green house,

Dens and secret spaces

Opportunities to swing.

Our plans for the future include developing habitats, including a wild meadow, within our nursery garden.

To discover what's happening in our nursery garden take a look at our website www.ripley-nur.derbyshire.sch.uk and facebook page.

Research indicates that access to green spaces supports attention, cognitive functioning and emotional well-being. As well as the elements of the natural world nurturing our children, we in turn support child's love and care for our natural world by giving them access to the outside with enthusiastic practitioners. Adults in a child's world are immensely powerful role models and we communicate our values and beliefs not only by our words but also by our gestures, facial expressions and our actions.

"To be environment stewards ……let them play in natural settings". David Sobel

Appreciation of the seasons and of nature – what better way to encourage our children to take care of the natural world as adults than to be immersed in it as children?

We are an indoor and outdoor school: children have the opportunity to be outdoors every day for majority of each session; children are supported to access the space independently in dressing for the weather conditions. We encourage a robust attitude to the British weather – it is a resource to be explored and investigated.

"There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing". Sir Ranulph Fiennes.

We provide a range of suitable clothing including snowsuits, wellington boots, fleeces and waterproofs for ages 0 – 5 years.

Health benefits of active engagement with the great outdoors: 1. Natural sunlight boosts the production of vitamin D, vital for healthy bone development. 2. High levels of oxygen to support development of white blood cells to boost your immune system. 3. Early exposure to bacteria in the environment 'prime' the immune system to prevent allergies. 4. Green spaces support attention and concentration. 5. Green spaces support emotional well-being. 6. We need access to space and resources to develop strong physical skills. 7. Opportunities to work in the large scale and engage in real, concrete experiences to support and extend thinking. 8. Opportunities to learn about and care for our environment. 9. Opportunities for active and social play; children, especially boys bond through physical 'rough and tumble' play.

This is by no means an exhaustive list but an indicator of the physical and emotional benefits to learning outside.

Challenges and Risks

Challenges and risks must be safely managed but they are essential to children's learning and developing abilities, including how to keep themselves safe. Young children need to

have the confidence to take minor risks; intellectually, emotionally and physically every day in order to develop their potential.

A hazard is something a child does not see.

A risk is a challenge a child can see and chooses to undertake or not.

Eliminating risk leads to a child's inability to assess danger.

Useful risk assessment involves discussion, reflection and questioning, "what could we do?", "what steps could we take to minimise the risk?", and "what are the potential benefits of an activity?". All risk assessments are reviewed on a regular basis and revised if necessary.

Be risk aware not risk averse: adults must make considered judgements; is the activity within the child's ability?

Attentive adults are the most important item of safety equipment in any given situation.

Forest Schools

Forest school is a fun, creative and inspirational process which provides learners with regular sessions in the outdoors. Forest school inspires individuals of any age to explore the natural world first hand in all weathers, developing a respect for the world around them.

Children are provided with opportunities to investigate the area, working independently or collaboratively as part of a group. Professional practitioners support all learners during their time in the outdoors, adapting sessions when necessary and observing the interests of individuals. Forest school practitioners ensure all sessions maintain learner's curiosity and support their holistic development. Practitioners provide opportunities for the learners to assess and take risks appropriate to them as they develop their skills in den making, working together, setting physical challenges and tool use.