



Primary schools in Edinburgh are adopting a play approach in P1. This leaflet will give you some information about why this is important for your child's learning.

A Play Approach

Play is how children explore and experience their world.

A child's overall physical, emotional, cognitive and social development depends on play. For your child, playing and learning are the same thing.

A play approach is supported by decades of research about how best to support children's development and to help them to be successful and confident learners throughout their school career.

Research also shows that when children are able to learn through play their social skills and emotional regulation skills are enhanced, supporting their resilience throughout their school career.

Across Edinburgh our schools are working together to build a strong play foundation in Primary One. This work is being supported by Education Scotland.

This approach to learning through play is based around the interests and strengths of each child and builds their independence and confidence as learners and individuals.



From an early age, children are capable and curious, traits that are best nurtured through this way of delivering the curriculum.

Scotland's curriculum, *A Curriculum for Excellence*, is designed for children and young people to be leaders of their own learning, and for young children play is the best vehicle for that.

The first phase of the curriculum, the Early Level, starts when a child is three and is designed to extend into Primary 1.

A play approach across the whole of Early Level means that your child's experience of learning will be smooth and will build on their interests and successes.

“Curriculum for Excellence (2007) gives prominence to play, particularly across the early level and the transition between ELC and primary school. The transition will likely be smoother for the child if play remains and continues as the main vehicle for their early learning in P1 and beyond.” Realising the Ambition (2020:45)

The Power of Play

Children are competent and capable learners from birth and show an incredible drive for learning.

Play starts from what the child can do, wherever they are in their learning.

It is highly motivating, and this encourages children to concentrate for long periods of time and persevere when things don't go as expected.

Unexpected things happen in play and plans sometimes don't work. This helps children to look for alternative “answers” and ways of solving problems. It helps them develop a growth mindset and a can-do attitude for learning.

Children learn holistically in play. In play children coordinate different aspects of their learning including both knowledge and skills.

Play involves children in developing “soft skills” such as negotiation and collaboration as they work with others.

In play children lead their learning in co-created environments which also inform adult-directed and adult-led experiences.

In play children apply their learning and skills to new situations and make connections between what they know and new learning.

Children develop the skills to lead their learning, enquiring and investigating and developing their confidence and creativity.

In the context of play children often challenge themselves more than they would in an adult led task.

Play helps children move from the concrete here and now to more abstract thought which is essential for literacy and numeracy.



Open-ended play is a powerful context for developing thinking.

“The learning environment in the early stages of primary school should not look or feel starkly different from a motivating ELC environment. The level of provocation might be greater, the interaction might be more challenging, and the experiences on offer might be different, but the school environment should be conducive to learning through play.”

Realising the Ambition (2020: 46)

The Crucial Role of the Adult

“Learning through play requires skillful adult interactions and conversations in environments that support and extend thinking and actions”

Realising the Ambition (2020:68)

High quality learning through play involves skillful adults who use observation of children to:

- * Set up and continually develop open-ended spaces and experiences which support and challenge children and build on what they can do and what their concerns are.
- * Interact with children in their play to support children to scaffold their learning and to extend their thinking
- * Assess where children are in their learning to inform adult-directed experiences and adult-led teaching

- * Model knowledge, skills and understanding in play contexts
- * Ask relevant questions to provoke learning and thinking
- * Remind children what they know and help them make links in their learning
- * Encourage children to try things in different ways and give them permission to explore and experiment
- * Encourage children to talk about their learning and plan for future learning

Play does not sit alone as the medium for learning. Child-led play informs adult-initiated and adult-led experiences. All work together to ensure children are engaging in motivating, supportive and challenging contexts for learning and embedding learning.

“Developing the right balance between child-initiated, adult-initiated and adult-directed experiences, will depend on the uniqueness of the needs of each setting’s children and wider contexts; including the cultural environment in which children learn and play.”

Realising Ambition (2020:49)

It is important then that practitioners and teachers provide, through responsive and intentional planning, a blend of child-initiated and adult-initiated learning experiences. The emphasis should be on child-centred play pedagogy to ensure continuity in children’s curriculum experiences.



Useful Websites

[Play Scotland, the national expert in Play](#)

[Playful Pedagogy - Play Scotland](#)

[Learning through play | Learning at home | Parent Zone \(education.gov.scot\)](#)

[Helping your child through play | Parent Club](#)

[Why Playful Pedagogy? - Play Scotland](#)

[Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision \(www.gov.scot\)](#)