

Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School
"Nurturing curiosity and inspiring imagination"



Play Policy and Guidance

DOCUMENT STATUS

Produced By	Version	Date	Action
Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School	1	13.03.14	Adopted by school's Premises, Health and Safety Committee
	2	10.11.25	Reviewed by Teaching and Learning Committee

WRITING AND REVIEWING THE PLAY POLICY

The Play Policy relates to other policies including:

- Curriculum Statement
- Teaching and Learning
- Inclusion Policies
- Safeguarding Policies
- Risk Assessments

Play Policy and Guidance

1. Introduction

At Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School, we believe that play is fundamental to a child's learning, development, and well-being. This policy outlines our commitment to providing a rich, stimulating, and safe play environment that fosters curiosity, creativity, resilience, and a lifelong love of learning. We embrace both indoor provision and the unique opportunities offered by our Forest School approach, recognising that children learn best through active engagement and exploration in diverse settings.

2. Aims and Objectives

This policy aims to ensure that all children at Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School:

- Have opportunities for spontaneous, child-initiated play
- Engage in purposeful, adult-supported play that extends learning
- Develop physically, emotionally, socially, cognitively, and creatively through play
- Experience a broad range of play opportunities both indoors and outdoors, including the natural environment of our Forest School
- Develop an understanding and respect for nature and the environment
- Learn to assess and manage risks appropriately
- Build confidence, self-esteem, and independence
- Develop communication, language, and social skills
- Have access to a stimulating and safe play environment with diverse resources

3. Principles of Play

Our approach to play is guided by the following principles:

- **Child-Initiated Play:** We prioritise and respect children's choices and interests, providing ample time and space for them to explore their own ideas and direct their own play
- **Adult-Supported Play:** Practitioners sensitively observe children's play, identifying learning opportunities, extending thinking, and scaffolding development through thoughtful interactions and resource provision
- **Inclusive Play:** All children, regardless of age, gender, ability, or background, have equal access to all play opportunities and resources
- **Risk and Challenge:** We believe in providing appropriate levels of risk and challenge, allowing children to test their boundaries, problem-solve, and develop resilience in a safe and supervised environment. This is particularly central to our Forest School ethos
- **Rich Environment:** We provide a stimulating environment with a wide range of open-ended resources that encourage imagination, creativity, and exploration
- **Observation and Assessment:** Practitioners regularly observe children's play to understand their interests, developmental stages, and learning styles, using this information to inform future planning and provision

4. The Role of the Practitioner

Practitioners at Sandy Lane Nursery and Forest School:

- **Observe:** Carefully watch children's play to understand their interests, development, and learning

- **Interact and Intervene:** Join in play sensitively, modelling language, offering suggestions, asking open-ended questions, and extending learning without dominating the play
- **Resource and Plan:** Provide a rich and varied indoor and outdoor environment with resources that stimulate curiosity and support all areas of development. They use observations to plan for continuous provision and specific activities
- **Facilitate and Support:** Create a safe, enabling, and emotionally secure environment where children feel confident to explore, take risks, and express themselves
- **Promote Independence:** Encourage children to make choices, solve problems, and take responsibility for their actions and the environment
- **Assess and Record:** Document children's progress and learning through play, using this to inform individual learning journeys and share with parents. Tapestry is used by staff across all nursery classrooms
- **Model Positive Behaviour:** Demonstrate respect for others, resources, and the natural environment

5. Indoor Play Provision

Our indoor environment is designed to be inviting, accessible, and stimulating, offering a balance of quiet and active areas. It includes:

- **Creative Area:** Mark making opportunities, easel, paint, playdough, junk modelling, collage materials, sensory trays
- **Role-Play Area:** Regularly changed themes, dressing up clothes, props that reflect diverse cultures and real-life experiences
- **Construction Area:** Blocks (wooden, soft, large, small), Lego, Duplo, magnetic tiles, natural loose parts
- **Reading Corner/Quiet Area:** Comfortable seating, a diverse range of books, puppets, soft toys
- **Small World Play:** Farm animals, dinosaurs, dollhouses, transport toys, multicultural figures, pets, wild animals, forest animals
- **Manipulative and Problem-Solving:** Puzzles, threading, fine motor skill activities, simple board games
- **Sand and Water Play:** Dedicated trays for exploration, measuring, and experimenting
- **Music and Movement:** Instruments, scarves, space for dancing and expressive movement

Resources are clearly labelled and accessible, encouraging children to choose and tidy up independently.

6. Outdoor Play Provision

Our outdoor space is an extension of our indoor learning environment, offering opportunities for larger-scale play, sensory experiences, and connection with nature. It includes:

- **Large Motor Play:** Wooden balance and climbing resources, open space for running and chasing, water pump with watering cans and containers, hoops and balls
- **Natural Play Areas:** Mud kitchen, digging patch, sensory garden, interactive water resources

- **Construction:** Large blocks, planks, crates, fabric, tyres for den building and imaginative construction
- **Creative Arts:** Chalks, rollers and brushes for use with water, natural collage materials
- **Sensory Exploration:** Sand pit, water play, exploration of natural elements (leaves, stones, bark)
- **Quiet Areas:** Space for reflection, reading outdoors, or observing nature

7. Forest School Provision

The Forest School element of Sandy Lane Nursery is integral to our play policy. It is based on regular, long-term sessions in a natural woodland or outdoor environment, facilitating child-led learning and holistic development.

- **Emphasis on Nature:** Children engage directly with the natural world, fostering respect, understanding, and a sense of wonder
- **Risk Management and Challenge:** Children learn to assess and manage risks appropriate to their age and stage, for example, using tools safely, climbing trees, or navigating uneven terrain under expert supervision
- **Child-Led Exploration:** Sessions are highly child-initiated, allowing children to pursue their own interests, develop resilience, and discover solutions to real-world problems
- **Skills Development:** Activities may include shelter building, knot tying, nature art, fire safety (age-appropriate and supervised), tool use, and identification of flora and fauna
- **Holistic Development:** Forest School strongly supports physical development (balance, coordination, stamina), emotional regulation, social skills (collaboration, communication), and cognitive development (problem-solving, scientific observation)

Safety in Forest School

- All Forest School sessions are led by qualified Forest School Leaders
- Thorough risk assessments are carried out for all activities and the site itself and regularly reviewed
- Clear boundaries and safety rules are established and consistently reinforced with children
- Appropriate clothing and footwear are ensured for all weather conditions
- First aid provision is always available and easily accessible

8. Safety in Play

The safety and well-being of the children are paramount.

- **Risk Assessments:** All areas, equipment, and planned activities are subject to regular, thorough risk assessments, which are reviewed and updated
- **Supervision:** Children are always supervised by an appropriate number of qualified staff, ensuring ratios are met and vigilant observation is maintained
- **Equipment Maintenance:** All equipment, both indoor and outdoor, is regularly checked for damage and safety, and maintained to a high standard. Damaged equipment is immediately removed
- **Clear Boundaries:** Children are taught and regularly reminded about safe boundaries and expectations for behaviour in all play areas
- **Developing Risk Awareness:** Children are encouraged to identify and manage risks themselves, learning through experience how to be safe and responsible. Staff

model safe practices and engage children in discussions about risk and consequence

- **Hygiene:** Appropriate hygiene practices are followed, especially after outdoor play, sand/water play, and before eating

9. Inclusion and Diversity

We are committed to providing inclusive play experiences for all children.

- **Accessible Resources:** Resources and play spaces are selected and arranged to be accessible to children with diverse needs and abilities
- **Diverse Representation:** Resources reflect the diverse cultures, backgrounds, and abilities of our families and wider society
- **Individual Needs:** Practitioners adapt play opportunities and provide additional support or resources as needed to ensure all children can participate fully and achieve their potential
- **Partnership with Parents:** We work closely with parents to understand individual children's needs and preferences to best support their play and learning

10. Monitoring and Review

This Play Policy will be reviewed annually by the Nursery Headteacher, Forest School Leader, and staff team. The review will consider:

- Observations of children's engagement and learning during play
- Feedback from children, parents, and staff
- Any changes in legislation or best practice for Early Years and Forest School provision
- Effectiveness of resources and environmental provision