



# MARTENSCROFT

NURSERY SCHOOL & CHILDREN'S CENTRES

## Title: Play Statement

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# MARTENSCROFT

## NURSERY SCHOOL & CHILDREN'S CENTRES

### INTRODUCTION

At Martenscroft Nursery School, we believe that *play is the foundation of all early learning*. It is through rich, meaningful, imaginative and joyful play that children explore their world, build relationships and develop essential skills for life.

Our ethos emphasises nurturing care, high-quality environments and an image of the child as *curious, capable, expressive, resilient and deeply motivated to learn*. Our excellent outdoor areas and home-from-home environment further support play as a natural and powerful driver of development.

This policy outlines our principles, our research foundations and how we implement play based learning across our school.

### OUR VISION OF PLAY

Play at Martenscroft is:

- **The central vehicle for learning** – a process through which children make sense of the world.
- **Child-led, exploratory and open-ended** – driven by children's interests, questions and fascinations.
- **Enhanced by sensitive, attuned adults** who extend thinking, language and possibilities within play.
- **Social, collaborative and relational**, supporting communication and friendships.
- **Physical, creative, imaginative, sensory and expressive** – reflecting children's varied life experiences, languages and interests.

This vision is fully aligned with our school ethos and image of the child: children are communicators, thinkers, explorers and unique individuals.

### RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

Our approach to play draws on the following pedagogical influences:

Reggio Emilia

- Children have *a hundred languages* – multiple ways of expressing ideas.
- The environment acts as the *third teacher*.
- Documentation makes learning visible and meaningful.

## Montessori

- Children learn best through hands-on exploration.
- Independence and self-direction are encouraged.
- Purposeful materials support concentration and mastery.

## Hygge in Early Years

- Warmth, comfort, connection and wellbeing underpin learning.
- Calm and aesthetic environments help children feel safe, settled and ready to explore.

## Children's Rights (UNCRC)

- Every child has the right to play (Article 31).
- Every child has the right to express themselves and have their voice heard.
- Our Rights Respecting ethos emphasises respect, equality and inclusion.

Together, these approaches align with the values of: inclusion, respect, individuality, wellbeing and high expectations for all.

## TYPES OF PLAY VALUED AT MARTENSCROFT

Martenscroft intentionally supports **all forms of play**, recognising their equal importance:

- **Outdoor play** using our well-designed outdoor spaces.
- **Sensory play** to support emotional regulation and exploration.
- **Dramatic and role play** for imagination, language and social skills.
- **Physical play** for health, coordination and confidence.
- **Loose parts play** to stimulate creativity and problem-solving.
- **Construction and block play** developing spatial, mathematical and collaborative skills.
- **Creative arts and expressive play** as part of the child's way to express themselves.
- **Forest-school influenced-play**, including natural materials and outdoor inquiry.

We also teach and assess our children as learners through play, supporting them to acquire the following play skills:

- Unoccupied Play - using their senses to explore the world and moving their body.
- Solitary Play - playing alone without interaction with others. They are trying to figure out their place in the world.
- Spectator Play - watching and observing others without joining in. They are learning social rules.
- Parallel Play - Playing alongside one another but with little engagement. They may copy what the other is doing but they aren't playing together to achieve a goal.
- Associative Play - focusing on their own ideas and goals however they will invite others into their play.
- Cooperative Play - complex and interactive, playing cooperatively to achieve a common goal.

## PLAY IN OUR CURRICULUM

Our curriculum is rooted in the Early Years Foundation Stage and alongside group learning, our curriculum is delivered through a play-based approach including independent learning and inspired learning opportunities. To achieve this, we use the following methods:

- **Responding in the moment**
- **Following children's interests**
- **Continuous and enhanced provision**
- **Inquiry-based provocations**
- **Characteristics of Effective Learning** embedded throughout

We personalise learning to reflect each child's interests and next steps, ensuring excellent progress in line with our commitment to high quality provision.

## THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

At Martenscroft, our Early Years Practitioners:

- Build warm, responsive relationships to create emotional safety.
- Observe deeply to understand children's learning behaviours.
- Extend play sensitively through modelling, questioning and vocabulary.
- Co-play, follow the child and scaffold new learning when appropriate.
- Create enabling environments that invite exploration.

- Document learning using Tapestry, floor books, and displays.

Our team of Early Years experts nurture children and ensure a personalised and enhanced curriculum is provided for all.

## ENVIRONMENT

Our indoor and outdoor environments are:

- Carefully organised to promote independence and choice.
- Calm, welcoming and hygge-inspired.
- Rich in natural materials, open-ended resources and sensory opportunities.
- Inclusive and accessible for children with SEND.

All learning environments are designed to promote curiosity, communication and creativity in line with our school ethos.

## INCLUSION, DIVERSITY AND SEND

We value each child's uniqueness and ensure all children are fully included in every aspect of school life. Play is adapted to meet individual needs to ensure access, belonging and meaningful participation. This is done through:

### Personalised Support and Planning

- We create **individualised plans** for children who require additional support, including those with SEND or specific learning, sensory, or communication needs.
- These plans are developed collaboratively with families and relevant professionals to ensure consistency and a shared understanding of next steps.
- Strategies, interventions, and targets are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain meaningful, achievable and responsive to each child's progress.

### Representative and Inclusive Resources

- Resources across the setting intentionally reflect a wide range of cultures, family structures, abilities, languages and communities, ensuring every child sees themselves represented.
- Books, posters, play materials and role-play resources include positive images of disability, gender diversity and different ethnic and cultural identities.

- We actively audit resources to ensure they avoid stereotypes, remain up to date and offer rich opportunities for children to explore difference with curiosity and respect.

### Adapted Play and Learning Opportunities

- Play experiences are adapted to meet individual needs, ensuring all children have **equitable access, a sense of belonging and opportunities for meaningful participation**.
- We use visual supports, simplified language, sensory adjustments and tailored materials so all children can engage at their level.
- Staff are skilled in recognising when a child may need adult scaffolding, environmental modifications, or alternative routes to play.

### Reflecting Cultures, Faiths, and Significant Events

- Play areas and continuous provision are thoughtfully enhanced throughout the year to reflect a broad range of **religious events, cultural festivals and community celebrations**.
- Enhancements are meaningful rather than tokenistic: they incorporate real experiences, artefacts, food, music, books and stories shared by families and the local community.
- Children are encouraged to share their own experiences, traditions and ways of life, fostering mutual understanding and respect.

### A Proactive and Whole-Setting Approach

- All staff model inclusive attitudes and language, fostering an environment where diversity is seen as a strength.
- We work closely with families to understand each child's background, identity and needs, ensuring these inform our curriculum and learning environment.
- Regular reflection, staff training and moderation ensure our inclusive practice continues to evolve and improve.

## ASSESSMENT, DOCUMENTING AND OBSERVATIONS

We assess learning through:

- **Ongoing observation**
- **Tapestry journals**
- **Floor books and displays**
- **Conversations with children and families**
- **Monitoring wellbeing and involvement**

Please see our 'Documenting Children's Learning Policy' for further information.

## FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

We know that strong relationships with families are essential. Parents are welcomed into our play-based learning approach through:

- Tapestry contributions
- Stay-and-play events through our Children's Centres
- Community events with links to other partners in the community
- Workshops and advice sessions
- Open conversations about children's interests

This reflects our commitment to being a supportive, home-from-home setting for children and families.

## SAFETY AND RISK BENEFIT

We promote safe exploration through:

- Careful supervision
- Risk-benefit assessments for activities / provision that may be seen to be high risk
- Teaching children to manage risks by providing them with appropriate challenges
- Ensuring environments are safe, inclusive and well maintained

Providing carefully managed risky opportunities benefits young learners because it helps them develop confidence, resilience and vital decision-making skills. When children assess and navigate appropriate risks, they learn how to judge safety, manage challenges and build independence. These experiences prepare them for real-world situations, support physical and emotional growth, and promote a stronger sense of capability and self-belief.

## CONCLUSION

Learning through play is central to children's development and underpins everything we do. Through rich, purposeful and joyful play experiences, children build the foundations for academic learning while also developing crucial life skills such as problem-solving, communication, resilience, and creativity. Play allows children to explore the world at their own pace, follow their interests and make meaningful connections in a way that feels natural and engaging. By valuing play as a powerful driver of learning, we ensure that every child is supported to thrive, feel confident and develop a lifelong love of curiosity and discovery.