



The Purpose of Play at PWSS

PWSS supports children in developing the self-regulation, emotional and executive function skills which will enable them to engage more fully with learning. The service also aims to provide pupils with the social skills and experiences which will help them to cope in different social groupings, teaching them how to co-operate, interact, negotiate and solve problems in positive ways. Emotional and physical wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do at PWSS and this is strongly reflected in this play policy which aims to provide learners with a wide range of opportunities to plan, direct and reflect upon play which is imaginative, creative, flexible and intuitive; allowing children to follow their own ideas and interests within a supportive, consistent framework provided by responsive adults.

At PWSS we know that imaginative play nourishes the spirit, offering our pupils the chance to follow their own ideas in their own time. This encourages them to value their own thoughts and ideas; building their self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-worth. Gray explains:

'Free play is nature's means of teaching children that they are not helpless. In free play children learn to make their own decisions, solve their own problems, create and abide by rules and get along with others as equals...' Gray (2013)

This is of vital importance to our core wellbeing focus because, as Gray (2013) explains:

'when children feel that they are not in control of their own learning and their own world then this is directly linked to feelings of anxiety and depression.'

In order to support children to feel in control and to relieve this anxiety, free-flow play has an important role in our curriculum.

This is also supported by Anna Ephgrave who explains that engagement and involvement are integral to successful learning and children become most deeply engaged when they have autonomy (Ephgrave, 2018) meaning they can choose what to do, how long to do it for and who to do it with. This works well with the nurturing environment at PWSS where children's voices are respected in an ethos of mutual understanding and respect built on a foundation of strong relationships and trust.

This approach, with play at its centre, ensures that children love learning and are ready to face new learning experiences and challenges whilst also giving them opportunities to develop the social and emotional skills they will need to learn in different ways and to succeed.



Why Play at PWSS?

The following explains the relevance of play in the PWSS setting:

- Play is fun. It is an absorbing and seemingly purposeless activity for children that provides enjoyment. It is self-motivating and intrinsically rewarding, teaching children that learning is worthwhile, challenging and empowering.
- Vygotsky argued that free play with others is the main way children learn to control their impulses and emotions. Children's drive to play leads them to ignore discomforts and suppress impulses so they can continue playing, and such abilities transfer to their lives outside play. At PWSS this can be seen most often during outdoor games play where pupils often walk away when things go wrong but return because they want to continue playing the game. Reflection, self-regulation and resilience are all developed through this play.
- Brown (2010) explains that throughout life imagination is central to emotional resilience and creativity. Deprivation studies show that fantasising (imagining the inner life of others and comparing it to one's own) is one of the main routes to developing empathy, understanding and trust as well as personal coping skills.
- Play Scotland (2020) notes that play is vital to support children in their recovery from the impact of Covid 19, given that it supports healthy physical, social and emotional development. Such play will also be vital for our pupils at PWSS.
- The social and physical benefits of play through child-led games with rules have an important role to play at PWSS, giving the children opportunities to participate in shared group play where the development of rules and 'stories' is an intricate process allowing the pupils to communicate ideas, adapt rules, work collaboratively and cope when things do not go to plan.
- Loose parts play has an important role in providing a richer learning environment for children where the possibilities are endless and children can follow their own interests, empowering them to be active participants in their learning. This encourages learners to believe in themselves, giving them the confidence to take risks, learn from their mistakes and develop the resilience they will need in the future. As we move forward, learning to cope with Covid 19 and its impact, it will be important that we continue to provide children with opportunities to engage in play which supports physical and mental wellbeing, as outlined in the Playful Schools Loose Parts Project (2020). This loose parts play will have the benefit of:
 - Improved listening skills
 - Stronger communication skills
 - Improved negotiation skills
 - Increased emotional regulation including frustration and disappointment
 - Increased sense of bravery, self-belief and self confidence
 - Ability to review perceptions of self and others
 - Increased resilience from perceived failures
- Children's Right to Play is stated in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This is central to children's learning at PWSS,



ensuring that our pupils have experiences which support their individual social, physical, emotional and cognitive needs and each pupil has every opportunity to become involved and engaged in quality play. This is also supported by The Play Strategy for Scotland (2021) which is underpinned by three principles:

- We should value all children and young people
- We should enable all children and young people to realise their right to play
- All children and young people should have the space and time to play.

At PWSS we know the importance of providing positive play experiences no matter a child's strengths and challenges.

With this in mind, the key principals of **wellbeing, creativity, social skills,** and **reflection** are the guiding themes for play at PWSS.

Playful Pedagogy, Teaching and Learning

'Education is about setting our children up for life in the 21st century. Play, meanwhile, is how we naturally make sense of the world and adapt to new situations, seeing the joy and fun in learning. Combining the two is central to a playful pedagogy approach.' (Play Scotland, 2020)

Playful Pedagogy encourages the children to problem solve and reason through their play, building knowledge, skills, ideas and interests as they play. Playful pedagogy also values the adult as both a participant and an observer in the play, intervening to scaffold ideas, supporting and challenging the pupils as they play. It respects and understand children's need to play to make sense of the world and resources and arranges environments sensitively to support this. Playful pedagogy supports different kinds of play including physical play, outdoor play and loose parts play where children use their developing communication skills, creativity and socio-emotional skills to have fun and enjoy learning whatever and wherever they choose to play.

This evidence-backed approach to teaching and learning has five aspects which help children flourish: active learning; social, interactive; familiar, joyful and meaningful.

Successful Learners: Closing the attainment gap is a policy priority, and lack of play has been linked with poorer educational outcomes. Evidence shows the relationship between meaning and perception, developed through play, both underpins and contributes to formal learning and attentional development. P1-P3 spans a critical stage where through play, children develop the ability to think, reflect and reason, separately from the world of objects around them. It is important to note that for some pupils at PWSS this need for play extends beyond Primary 3.



Confident Individuals: Social Determination Theory demonstrates that our confidence grows through tasks which support our autonomy, enable personally meaningful activity, and help us feel connected to others. Playful Pedagogy enables all of these as part of the formal learning process.

Responsible Citizens: Psychological theories tell us that play is fundamental to the development of social skills, perspective-taking, empathy, and understanding of social/cultural rules. Playful Pedagogy helps us understand our own and other people's responsibilities.

Effective Contributors: Through Playful Pedagogy children learn to collaborate and cooperate with one another; this positive interdependence promotes learning and motivation. It has a particularly strong effect on children in need of additional support and works best when it involves pupils with adults and wider communities.

Our nurturing approach ensures that:

At PWSS we spend considerable time building trusting relationships with our pupils and play is a valuable way to do this.

We set clear boundaries, expectations and routines for play which are jointly created between staff and pupils to foster responsibility and ownership. This helps children to feel safe and supported to take risks and enjoy challenges through their play. They trust that as a team we can overcome any difficult issues as part of a solution-based, problem solving approach where everyone's voice is heard.

Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Scot Gov. 2020) explains that interactions, experiences and spaces all unite to provide high quality provision for learners. This involves:

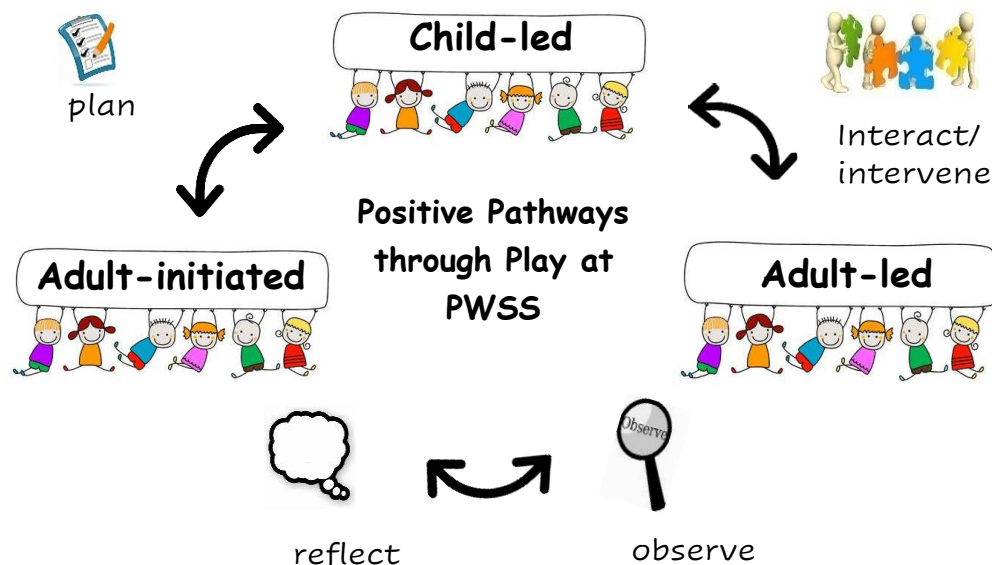
- Providing a clear, shared vision for play which matches the needs of the pupils in the setting
- A child-friendly environment where there are lots of different possibilities for play and access to a range of well organised resources.
- An environment which is flexible, responsive and provides provocations for new and challenging experiences.
- Providing interesting play spaces both indoors and outdoors.
- Skilled and knowledgeable practitioners who reflect and learn alongside the pupils, building their knowledge and experiences and using these to inform their practice.

Within a nurturing approach at PWSS we continually strive to achieve these elements in our play provision against the overarching aims of offering opportunities for joy through creativity, mental and physical wellbeing, the building of social skills and reflection on successes, difficulties and next steps.



The balance of adult-led and child-led experience

At PWSS play takes place throughout the day and is responsive to our pupils' needs. Some children enjoy playing as soon as they enter their classroom and they use this play to process the transition from home to school and to regulate their emotions. Other children choose to play as part of their task time whilst others have difficulty managing the transition between play and more formal tasks therefore the teacher will plan a play programme that suits the individual child. This programme will have each of the types of activity outlined by Julie Fisher (2007) which are: child-led, adult-led and adult-initiated (2007). This is to ensure that our pupils have a balance of experience that suits their particular needs whilst providing the challenge they need.



- **Child-led play:** Children are planners; the resources they select and where they chose to play with them are chosen by the child. At PWSS we support children to select these resources and offer opportunities to play indoors and outdoors. This is a valuable time for our pupils to practice their developing social and self-regulation skills, making choices about how and where they play. We can sensitively extend this play through observations and interactions. Importantly we also quietly observe the play to ensure our pupils are supported both socially and emotionally.
- **Adult-led learning:** The children learn something new/specific/valuable with the class teacher and at PWSS this is often called 'task time.' However, this term may change to suit individual children who become anxious when they hear this term. Children are gently encouraged to engage in a range of tasks, some of which are directly with the teacher and some with a peer or independently. Task coins are earned to symbolise achievement and can lead to 'choice time' where children have full control of what they do. It is aimed that children are taught to engage in and manage a range of learning activities some of which are play and some of which are more formal tasks.



- **Adult initiated learning:** The adult provides a starting point/stimulus/provocation/invitation and observes what the children do with this. For example, resources linked to new learning or interests are left out for the children to explore. At PWSS this is often used by the teacher who models play which the children can join if they wish. The adult then plays as an equal participant to 'learn alongside the child'.

Play is an invaluable way for children to practice their developing executive function skills which are the skills that will enable them to function in the wider world. This is a group of skills that help us to focus on lots of information at the same time whilst looking for mistakes, making decisions, changing plans, concentrating and resisting the feeling of frustration or overwhelm (Harvard University, Centre on the Developing Child, 2011). At PWSS we offer a wide range of activities and teaching opportunities to encourage children to develop these skills and we know that play is the principal way that children can practice these skills in a relaxed, demand-free environment.

The environment and resources

The environment at PWSS is integral to the pupils' success here. It is a carefully balanced arrangement of low arousal areas with well-organised and well-resourced areas to support play and the curiosity and independence this play creates. This means that as well as having quiet, calm areas within each room we also have structured learning spaces alongside our play areas. These areas can be accessed by all of the pupils and this access is planned by the pupils in partnership with the teacher as part of the planning, learning and reflecting process which is responsive to the pupils' needs at any one time. This planning and learning is flexible and the pupils and teachers adapt as they play and learn in order to provide the responsive approach that the pupils need.

It is important to note that this learning environment is also a careful balance between the structure and routines the children need, often supported by visuals, and the freedom they need to make choices and take responsibility for their own learning.

Each play area is well resourced with a range of open-ended tools and resources and these are stored with easy access for the pupils. Pupils are taught how to access and tidy away these resources and how to use them safely. Resources are maintained and modified regularly, often in partnership with the children. This promotes ownership and responsibility. Children can use sand and water play, construction play, role play, junk modelling and small world play. Often these areas are not all available at once, to avoid sensory overload, but are mobile and can be set up quickly should they be part of a pupil's plan for play.

Resources are supplied using the principle 'less is more' to ensure pupils are not overwhelmed. These resources are often 'loose parts' so that children can use their imagination and social skills to build stories around them. This 'affordance' theory (coined by James J. Gibson 1979) is designed to promote the creativity and ownership that is central to play at PWSS. It involves the idea that in play an object can be whatever a child wants it to be so, for example, a stick can be a wand, a light sabre



or a mixing spoon. This is compared to more structured play with structured objects like a red racing car which can really only be a red racing car therefore limiting creativity and options.

The level of involvement is the main measure of the success of a play area, as explained by Anna Ephgrave (2018) and, should involvement be low, staff and pupils make a plan to change resources to try to improve pupils' interest and curiosity. To promote wellbeing some resources are permanent for those pupils who respond well to familiarity and routine and this is managed sensitively by staff who know their pupils very well.

Julie Fisher talks about the emotional environment and how it should support the pedagogy that practitioners want to promote. She says:

'The emotional as well as the physical environment impact significantly on a child's willingness to relax and share their ideas and thinking' Fisher, 2016, P.57

At PWSS we work hard to build strong relationships by getting to know our pupils very well. This builds the trust and certainty they need to engage well in both conversations and play. Through play staff let children know their ideas are respected and included and this in turn encourages the pupils to continue to play, engage and interact positively with staff. Staff build on this by modelling interactions with other pupils, scaffolding these interactions and play between pupils to provide them with the social skills they need to play well and feel positive about themselves as learners. Play is also a central way staff get to know pupils. By following a pupil's play interests this opens doors to positive interactions where pupils build the skills and confidence to share their thoughts and feelings, knowing they will be heard and validated.

Outdoor play environment

Outdoor play at PWSS is a continuation of indoor play but the transition between the two is well managed and planned in partnership with the children. The children and staff are working hard to develop the outdoor garden area to create an open-ended environment where the possibilities for play are extensive. This involves the arrangement of loose parts resources which promote both free-flow play and our driving principles of creativity, wellbeing, social skills and reflection.

Playful Schools: The Power of Loose Parts Play (2020) noted in their Covid hub loose parts play project that their research:

'...clearly demonstrated that the freedom to use the Loose Parts Play in any way they wished enabled the children to process, connect and relax... the research also demonstrates... that supporting children to engage in free play also supported their continued social, emotional, cognitive and physical development even within the complexities of the Covid 19 landscape.'

At PWSS outdoor play involves:

- A mud kitchen: set up and resourced with the pupils
- A den: chosen and set up as safe space by the pupils



- A range of loose parts to build assault courses or 'parkour' courses within a safe environment eg, wood, tyres, cable reels, outdoor mats
- A pond: as a focus for a pupil's interest in frogs.
- Bird feeding areas and growing areas: to promote an appreciation for nature and our part in supporting our environment as well as to foster an enjoyment of the sounds, smells and tastes of the garden.
- Access to a wide range of 'interesting' objects to be explored in whatever way the pupils choose eg. steering wheels, different water sprayers, den building materials.
- A digging area to meet some pupils' need for heavy physical activity and to develop gross motor skills. This is resourced with real tools to promote trust and develop skill in their use.

This outdoor play is complimented by outdoor learning which differs to outdoor play in that it has a pre-planned, structured activities and is adult led. However, in some cases children can replicate their experiences from outdoor learning sessions in their play if this is appropriate. It is important to note that the outdoor area at PWSS is designed in partnership with the children to promote ownership of it and its design is inclusive of all of our pupils to meet their differing sensory, emotional, physical and social needs.

We also support socio-physical play at PWSS and have access to a trim trail and playground for this. This is an area where staff have modelled 'games' play with children as part of our adult-led teaching. This has had the benefit of giving our pupils the skills to participate in small group games and the regulation skills which accompany this play such as coping when the rules change or the game does not go to plan. The children are then able to apply these skills in their own games, which is termed 'children's choice' and the adults participate by following the pupils' ideas for games and the pupil-negotiated rules. Sometimes we remove this scaffolding and encourage the pupils to play without adults (free-play) and this supports the idea that:

'In social play children learn how to negotiate with others, how to please others and how to modulate and overcome the anger that can come from conflict. Free play is also nature's means of helping children discover what they love. In their play children try out many activities and discover where their talents and predilections lie. The predominate emotions of play are interest and joy.' (Gray, 2013)

By offering these chances at PWSS we empower our pupils to engage, believe in themselves as players and learners and to have fun. This is particularly relevant to the pupils at PWSS as they learn that strong emotions can be overcome and that they can cope in challenging learning and social situations.

Adult interactions and interventions

At PWSS we know our pupils very well and an important part in building relationships and interacting meaningfully is developing an understanding of our pupils' personalities, interests, social skills, strengths and difficulties and using this information to inform our practice. A vital part of getting to know children is taking



time to observe them at play, tune in to their thinking and interact sensitively in a way that respects their thoughts and ideas, showing they are worthy of deep listening and interactions which support their learning and their wellbeing. The first step here is attunement:

'Underdown (2007) describes the complex and multi-faceted process of attunement as one when, through 'empathetic responsiveness', the practitioner looks closely for verbal and non-verbal signals from the child that suggest how the child is feeling and what their current needs, interests and fascinations might be.' Fisher, 2016

This attunement process involves (Fisher, 2016):

- **Careful observation** - using the what, when and whether mantra to support this:
What: Is the child managing on his/her own? If not, could I say something or do something to help?
When: If I step in now will I support the child's efforts or will he/she feel disempowered?
Whether: Would it be best to say or do nothing? Maybe the answer here is 'not yet.'
- **Sustained attention** - taking the time to listen and be involved without stopping to write things down or take photographs as this sends a message to the child that you are not fully focussed on him/her.
- **Active listening** - involves using what the child says and does together to build a picture of what he/she is thinking because often what a child is doing is not directly related to their thinking and it takes time and gentle discussion to work this out.
- **Co-construction** - getting alongside the learner to skilfully sustain a conversation through attentive listening and careful commenting in order to keep the child's thinking going.

The important thing to note is that when deciding whether talking to a pupil will be interacting or interfering, if the pupil is concentrating intensely it can be natural to intervene to help them do this and be part of this positive experience. However, Fisher (2016) notes that:

'...as Bruner (1980) reminds us, when a child is thinking intently about what they are doing, they do not always have the headspace to hold a conversation at the same time. Intense concentration sometimes means that all of the child's energy is focussed on thinking about and wrestling with whatever they are trying to figure out or explore. Consequently, any intervention from an adult becomes interference.'

At PWSS we work hard to ensure we support our learners by being available to them, however this may look. This means we observe, listen, play alongside pupils, model ideas and skills, extend thinking and share play experiences including all the rich emotional and social learning that is central to these experiences.



Against this backdrop of sensitive observation, listening and interaction we also work hard to maintain involvement and interest in learning through play to teach our pupils the value of focus, perseverance and deep learning. This can involve:

- Commenting – this particularly supports children who may have specific communication difficulties. We reinforce and model speech through talking about what is happening. For some children it is important that this is not overdone.
- Pondering – this is an unthreatening way of posing a question and helps the pupils see that we are interested in finding out specific things too. It involves 'I wonder why? I wonder if, I wonder whether?'
- Imagining – encouraging children to imagine if...
- Connecting – Holding the child's learning in mind and referring back to it ('It's just like when you...')
- Thinking aloud – the adult stating what he/she thinks to model being a learner ('I did something like this before...')
- Talking about feelings – Research tells us that in order to manage feelings children have to confront them (Gerhardt, 2010) and name them and this is a very important strategy we use at PWSS to help children cope with feelings which can, at times, be overwhelming.
- Reflecting back to children – thinking about what the child has said and thinking about it with the child to show their ideas and thinking is valid and worthy.
- Supporting the child to make choices and decisions – the language of choice is integral to our communication at PWSS to support learners to feel in control and active participants in their learning.
- Staying quiet – this involves time for staff to wait, watch and wonder whilst also giving the pupil time to work things through independently.
- Extending children's learning – this involves adults exploring ways to use provocations for play which will encourage curiosity in pupils, encouraging them to explore and to problem solve. This can involve the adult supporting pupils to make new discoveries, explore new resources and ask each other questions. (Fisher, 2016)

At PWSS our ability to interact and intervene to support and challenge our learners is evolving but this process is underpinned by our knowledge that for every interaction or intervention we reflect on the key question: what did the pupil gain from the interaction?

Observations

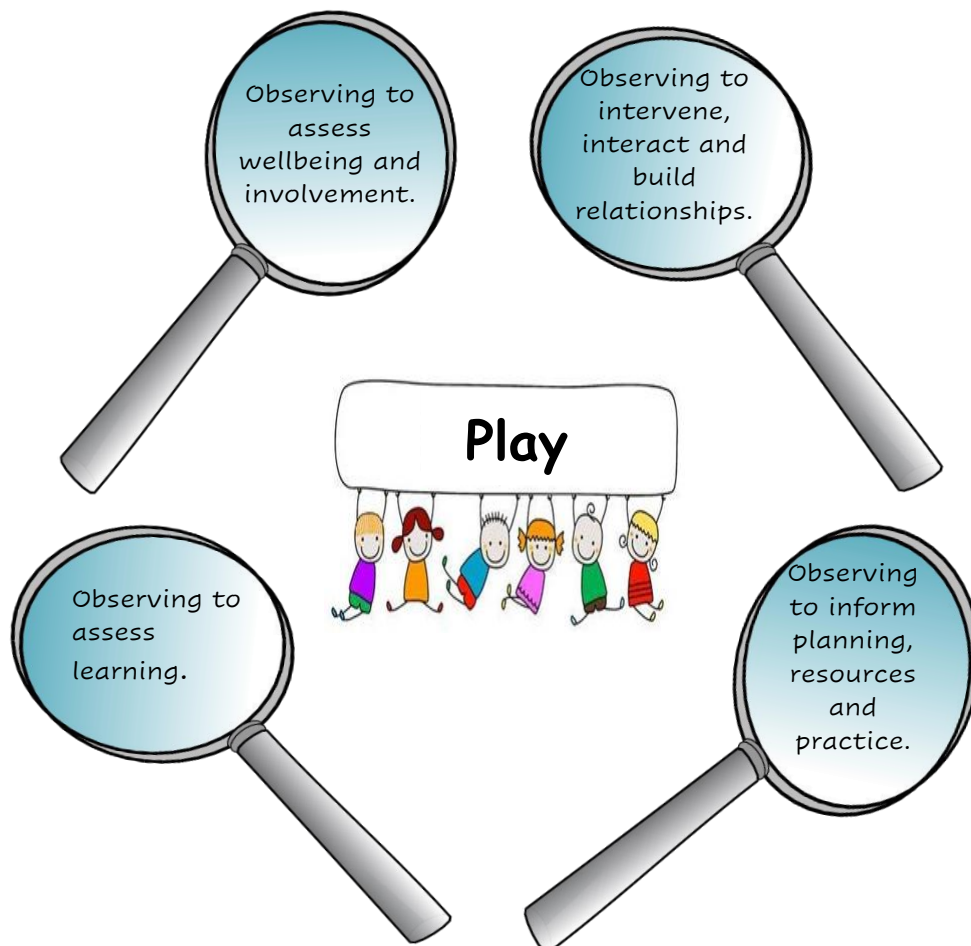
Observing pupils in different situations is central to everything we do at PWSS. This is our most valuable tool in assessing pupil's wellbeing and engagement as well as building a picture of what works best for them as individual people and learners. Observations allow us to build information and understanding of what works well for a pupil, his/her strengths and interests as well as areas of difficulty and triggers for distressed or anxious behaviour. Staff are very skilled at reflecting on what is observed both orally and in writing to build a strong image of each pupil's story.



At PWSS we observe:

- To assess pupils' wellbeing, creativity, social skills and reflection in line with our guiding principles.
- To understand where our pupils are developmentally and to find out what they know and can do
- To gather information about our pupil's interests and skills
- To support the provision and modifications of planning and resources to suit or pupils' needs.
- To match our adult-led, adult -initiated approaches to teaching in order to best support our pupils' learning and development.

Observations fall into four broad categories:



At PWSS we use the Leuven scale for wellbeing to support us to assess wellbeing which incorporates qualities such as self confidence and self-esteem, openness and receptivity, flexibility, vitality, enjoyment, relaxation and self-defence and assertiveness. Fisher (2016) explains that:



'The uniqueness of young children means that their needs – emotional, social, cognitive and physical – will only be met by practitioners who know them well, who are alongside them and their developmental journey day in, day out, and who remain 'in sync' with their individual needs'. P.54

At PWSS, because we work closely with our pupils in a small group setting, this enables us to observe them continually. We naturally consider our pupils' level of wellbeing and involvement as part of the playing, teaching and learning process. It is very important to capture experiences and information when they happen, enabling timed interventions should these be needed. However, we record focussed observations monthly using the Leuvan scale and our own PWSS form (see appendix). The SHARE model (Arnerich, 2018) (see below) is designed to support staff to observe children playing so that this observation becomes a natural part of every-day teaching and learning whereas the Leuvan Scale is used for more formal observations which track patterns of wellbeing and engagement over time. The SHARE model encourages reflective practitioner observation and at PWSS we have also adapted this model for pupils to use when reflecting on learning and on specific incidents where a restorative conversation is needed.

The spark: what started the moment?

What happened? Describe the moment and what went on.

Assess the meaning behind the behaviour.

The response: what did you do to extend or scaffold the moment?

The end result: what happened after your response?

The observation process for observing wellbeing

Staff use the Leuvan Wellbeing and Involvement Indicators to assess their pupils, starting at level 3 and working either up or down the scale depending on what they see. Staff take a short 10-minute period to 'snap shot' engagement and involvement, recording what they see the pupil doing, what the pupil is saying and the verbal and



physical gestures which support the level of involvement or engagement of the pupil. We reflect on these observations as a team to consider what positive change the play sessions have had and, if appropriate, what needs to happen next to extend this experience or make it more meaningful for the pupil. We look for evidence that children's social skills and self-regulation skills are developing and discuss ways that these may need more support through child-led play, adult-initiated play and adult-led sessions.

Ephgrave explains that:

'When children are deeply engaged, their brain is developing and new synapses are forming – ie. they are making progress.' (Ephgrave, 2018)

Staff at PWSS continually strive to ensure that the environment, resources and interactions facilitate this deep engagement so that our pupils are well supported to overcome any difficulties or challenges to their engagement and enjoy learning. Our suite of observations is an integral part of the planning, teaching and reflection process to ensure we meet the emotional, cognitive, social and physical needs of our pupils.

Assessment

Assessment of play at PWSS closely links with our planning and our observations. We understand the importance of being very clear about the social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills and capabilities we want our pupils to develop. However, we know that the children drive the play and by carefully facilitating play, intervening, interacting and modifying the resources we can let these skills and capabilities develop naturally through their play.

Assessments at PWSS are carefully matched to individual learners to ensure that their preferred learning style is used wherever possible. This means assessments are often practical, oral or supported by an adult to enable the child to best show his/her capabilities. Assessments of learning through play are either:

- reflective conversations amongst staff based on what is observed.
- reflective conversations with the pupils to consider what the learner was doing, thinking/learning and what he/she would do differently next time.
- during play sessions with pupils where the adult plays with the pupil and gains understanding of the pupil's ideas, knowledge and skills whilst playing with them.

It is vital that pupils are very much a part of the reflection process as outlined in Building the Curriculum 5 A Framework for Assessment:

'Children and young people can develop their confidence through thinking about and reflecting on their own learning. They should have regular time to talk about their work and to identify and reflect on the evidence of their progress and their next steps, including through personal learning planning. Through frequent and regular conversations with informed adults, they are able to identify and understand the progress they are making across all aspects of their learning and achievements.' BTC 5, 2011



To achieve this, we use learning walks and learning pictures to reflect on learning. Learning walks enable the pupil to talk about what they did/played, what the story was, what worked well, what problems occurred and what they would change if they played again. This encourages the pupils to think reflectively about their learning but also has the benefit of raising the status of play in everyone's eyes by making it very clear that we learn through play and it is valuable enough to be talked about in detail.

Learning pictures are used to encourage the pupil to recall their play in the same way as learning walks. However, the pupil is also encouraged to write and draw his/her own response as well as being part of the process of creating next steps with teachers. This is designed to ensure he/she has ownership of play and learning.

We also use See-saw to share play experiences with parents, encouraging our pupils to use the photos posted as triggers for conversations about their play and their learning. By sharing this learning with parents raises the status of play in both the pupils and parents' eyes.

At PWSS we use the Boxall Profile and the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) bi-annually to measure where our children are in terms of wellbeing and to consider where pupils need specific support to develop their social and wellbeing skills. These assessments are also used to measure overall progress in wellbeing across time, so that development can be evidenced and tracked and next steps can be carefully considered.

Staff also use a general assessment folder to collate pictures of the process of play or the end result of the play depending on the types of play shown. Photographs of pupils' play are also displayed in the classroom to raise the status of this play and to encourage the pupils to celebrate their learning. This also gently reminds the pupils that learning through play is fun and joyful, as they remember play experiences and are motivated to reflect and share their feelings about them. This is powerful evidence of the wellbeing, creativity and social skills which are at the heart of our pupils' play journey.

Planning

'If the children have genuine choice, if it is genuinely child-initiated play, then we do not know what the children will choose to do and we cannot, therefore, pre-plan the activities or the learning outcomes.' Ephgrave, 2018

Planning for play at PWSS is led by the children as they play. In the small group setting at PWSS staff play alongside and/or with pupils and this enables us to observe where the pupils are cognitively, socially, physically and emotionally. In turn, this enables us to use what we observe and assess to inform our planning and the development of next steps for each child. Staff know that in order to develop the core features of our play: creativity, wellbeing, social skills and reflection, the play must be open-ended, child-led and part of a skilful observation and assessment process so that planning, in the form of next steps and new possibilities, carefully meets the needs of the pupils.

Planning at PWSS can be retrospective as staff add information and reflection on play to their evaluations and next steps which are part of the observation and assessment process outlined in this policy. These next steps not only inform termly, weekly and daily planning but are used as part of our individualised target setting process to



ensure that learners' specific needs are met. It is important to note that adult-initiated activities and adult-led activities are planned as part of termly and weekly curricular planning.

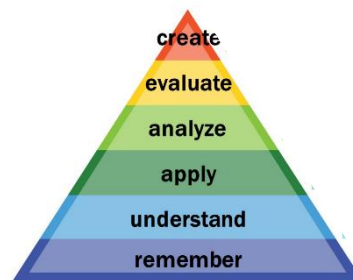
Attainment

At PWSS we know that children's wellbeing, social and emotional development provides the foundation for their learning journey. Our nurture-based, trauma informed approaches respect the 'Maslow before Blooms' philosophy, meaning that learners need to be in the right state of emotional readiness for successful cognition to begin to take place. According to Berger (2020):

'putting Maslow before Bloom isn't antithetical to learning – research demonstrates that it's a way to support better learning'.



Maslow



Blooms

At PWSS we use play to support the development of the strong relationships which are central to supporting our learners to have confidence in their own abilities, develop self-esteem, independence, self-efficacy, executive function skills and the emotional regulation they need to tackle different kinds of learning activities, with the challenges and frustrations, successes and disappointments these may offer.

The use of child-led, adult-led and adult-initiated activities allows learners to build these skills through play as well as through adult teaching, sharing the control of learning between adult and learner. This sense of autonomy and independence sets the foundation for our learners' attainment. It is important for our pupils that the activities and play available to them are developmentally appropriate to enable them to develop and recover skills which they may not have been able to develop in their previous placement.

It has been noted, for example, in Northern Ireland, that a play-based, child-centred 'Enriched Curriculum' appeared to be providing 4–5-year-old children with a higher-quality learning experience. Compared to children in the more 'traditional' classes, the children experiencing play-based learning were given more opportunities to act independently, were engaged in more challenging



activities and were more learning disposed, as well showing higher levels of emotional, social and physical well-being (Walsh et al, 2006). At PWSS we know that 'more traditional' methods are not always best suited to our learners and we believe opportunities for play should be available no matter the learner's age so that he/she is able to play at his/her own level, with adults carefully building on this to support progression.

Glasgow City's Project: Raising Attainment through Active Play (2016-2019) was a 10 week play project created to improve children's physical play as well as supporting children's emotional, social and cognitive development. Some of the many positive findings of the project were that:

- 78% of learners were more motivated to learn and lead games.
- 60% of learners had improved focus in class leading to increased attainment.
- 58% of learners felt they had improved relationships with teachers.
- 92% of learners showed improved peer relationships or gained new friends.
- 85% of learners showed an improvement in teamwork.

At PWSS we use physical play to develop movement, co-ordination and fitness but, equally importantly, to build friendships, allow the pupils to lead and invent games, working together to solve problems and sustain the play. The idea that this leads to improved attainment is one we see often at PWSS, as learners are more settled and focussed after this kind of play. In fact, this play is also used as a brain and movement break to support the needs of our learners.

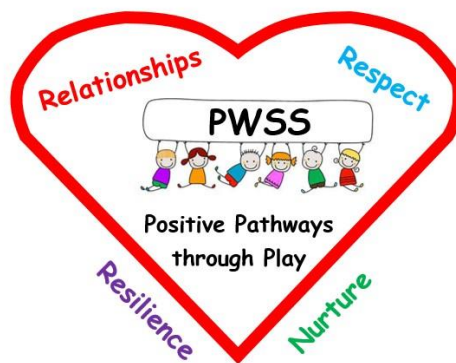
Building the Curriculum 2 supports this philosophy:

As children progress, their confidence grows and their skills as independent and cooperative learners develop. They are able to make decisions about their play, at times to initiate it and organise it, and to ask questions and find information. Their experience of a range of learning broadens. They become less reliant on adult support as part of their emotional, personal and social development and become increasingly interested in their friends. They become more able to imagine, concentrate, listen and talk for longer periods. They readily become absorbed in play. They need encouragement from staff to extend their skills, to persevere in solving problems and to widen the scope of activities. (BTC 2, 2007)

At PWSS we know that engaging learners through play provides them with the safe base and strong relationships they need to improve their readiness to learn in different ways, so that they are able to engage with Numeracy, Literacy and Health and Wellbeing activities which will raise their academic



attainment as well as their confidence in themselves as lifelong learners. We also understand the importance of considering the bigger picture in terms of skills development as evidenced by research from the US which highlights that by the end of elementary (primary) school, children whose early school experiences had been academically directed earned significantly lower academic grades compared to children who had attended child-initiated classes (Marcon, 2002). Differences in attainment were not evident until years later and it was hypothesised that this may have been due to the skills developed when the children were much younger. It is vital that our learners have the same opportunities to develop these learning skills, and in some cases revisit them in our safe, supportive setting, putting in place the foundations for a positive impact on attainment in their future learning journey.



A final note

At PWSS we know that our pupils not only love to play, but in fact **need** to play to ensure that they have the opportunities they need to develop lifelong skills. This is central to our vision: Promoting Positive Pathways through Play, ensuring our pupils have every opportunity to thrive and to gain the social, emotional, physical and cognitive skills they will need to be confident, fulfilled adults.