

# Whole School Playful Learning Policy

## St Finians National School

### 1. Introductory Statement and Rationale

#### (a) Introductory Statement:

- This policy forms the basis of infant teachers' long and short-term planning, so will influence teaching and learning in individual classrooms.
- It also informs new or temporary teachers of our approaches and teaching methodologies in infant classrooms.

#### (b) Rationale:

What is Aistear?

Aistear is a curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. It describes the types of learning that are important for children in their early years. As a curriculum framework, Aistear can work as a guide for primary schools and teachers in planning practical learning programmes for children in the infant years. Aistear is to be used as a methodology, in addition to the Primary Curriculum to plan engaging and challenging experiences for the children in the classroom.

#### **The Importance of Play in Our School:**

Play can make a unique contribution to the development of the child. It is the child's way of making sense of the world; a learning tool that engages, motivates, challenges and pleases. Its purposes, and the character of its activity, provide the means by which the child can develop his/her awareness of self. It can:

- Provide rich oral language experiences and afford the opportunity to experiment with different registers of language.

- Provide opportunities to approach new knowledge through the dimension of imaginative activity and experience.
- Allow children to approach new learning in a setting and context that is comfortable to him/her.
- Increase the child's motivation and interest in developing their perception of the world.
- Provides meaningful opportunities for children to use previous related knowledge in a playful manner.
- Help children make connection between seemingly unconnected pieces of learning across the curriculum.
- Facilitate the child's emotional, cognitive, social, intellectual and imaginative development in a holistic manner.
- Foster the child's creativity, invention, insight, discovery and problem-solving, through exploring the intuitive and the spontaneous.
- Allow the child, through the medium of play, to experience, understand and practice the life skills used in the real world.
- Promote empathy, with the ideas, feelings and attitudes of others.

## **2. Vision and Aims:**

### **(a) Vision:**

We seek to use the Aistear framework to provide information for teachers to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children can grow and develop as competent and confident learners. We seek to use the Aistear methodology as part of early intervention in the infant end of the school up to second class.

First and second class teachers may provide opportunities for playful learning by including more STEM-focussed activities in the structured play session.

In line with embedding the Primary Language Curriculum(PLC), it is envisaged that classes above second will begin to adopt a more playful approach to teaching language across the curriculum.

There are many ideas for this in the resource materials for the PLC.

We intend for all children to be exposed to a wide range of vocabulary in a practical setting in order to improve language fluency and comprehension across both languages.

**(b) Aims:**

We endorse the themes and aims of the Aistear Framework:

| Themes                        | Aims  |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Well-being</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children will be strong psychologically and socially</li> <li>● Children will be as healthy and fit as they can be.</li> <li>● Children will be creative and spiritual.</li> <li>● Children will have positive outlooks on learning and on life.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Identity and Belonging</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children will have strong self-identities and will feel well-respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories.</li> <li>● Children will have a sense of group identity, where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.</li> <li>● Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for their identity, rights and views of others.</li> <li>● Children will see themselves as capable learners.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Communicating</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children will use non-verbal communication skills.</li> <li>● Children will use language (listening, speaking, signing, drawing and writing).</li> <li>● Children will broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of experiences through language (listening, speaking, signing, drawing and writing).</li> <li>● Children will express themselves creatively and imaginatively.</li> </ul>  |

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|--|---|
| <p><b>Exploring<br/>and<br/>Thinking</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children will learn about and make sense of the world around them.</li> <li>● Children will develop and use skills and strategies for observing, questioning, investigating, understanding, negotiating, and problem-solving, and come to see themselves as explorers and thinkers.</li> <li>● Children will explore ways to represent ideas, feelings, thoughts, objects and actions through symbols.</li> <li>● Children will have positive attitudes towards learning and develop dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness and risk-taking.</li> </ul> |
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### **Short term Aims:**

- To engage in full classroom planning for play during the academic year.
- To develop a suitable stock of resources for themed play.
- To assist re-telling at review time, all teachers will display photos taken during Aistear session on the interactive whiteboard. Teachers will also refer to theme photos/labels displayed in classroom to prompt discussion and assist language development.

### **3. Types of Play:**

**Teachers will plan four types of play in each Aistear session. \*See Appendix 4 for sample-themed plans that can be used to support these different types of play.**

**Creative Play:** involves children exploring and using their bodies and materials to make and do things and to share their feelings, ideas and thoughts. Activities can include dancing, painting,

playing with junk and recycled materials, working with play -dough and clay, and using their imaginations.

**Language Play:** involves children playing with sounds and words. It includes unrehearsed and spontaneous manipulation of these, often with rhythmic and repetitive elements. Activities should encourage children to play with language-enjoy patterns, jokes, stories and non-sense words.

**Physical Play:** involves children developing, practising and refining body movements and control. It includes whole-body and limb movements, coordination and balance. Exploratory play involves children using physical skills and their senses to find out what things feel like and what can be done with them. Manipulative play involves practising and refining motor skills. This type of play enhances physical dexterity and hand-eye coordination. This type of play involves manipulating objects and materials. Constructive play involves building something using natural and manufactured materials. This type of play can become more complex and intricate.

**Pretend Play:** involves children using their imaginations. It includes pretending with objects, actions and situations. Children use their developing language to move from thinking in the concrete to thinking in the abstract. They make up stories and scenarios. Children act out real life events and they also take part in fantasy play about things that are not real, such as fairies and superheroes. Children try out roles, occupations and experiences in their pretend play. Small world play involves children using small-scale representations of real things like animals, people, cars and train sets as play-props. **\*See Appendix 5 for examples of role play vocabulary.**

**Games With Rules: See Appendix 2.**

**Play at the Senior End of the School:**

In June 2023, we decided as a staff to introduce some Nurture morning stations in each classroom from Junior Infants to sixth class, beginning in September 2023. This was to echo the settling-in time that was already happening in infant classes and which we found was a calming, positive way

for all children to begin the school day. Sand, sand boxes and play dough were provided to each class. We hope to extend this going forward to more open-ended play, with guidance from the New Primary Curriculum as it becomes embedded.

#### **4. Children With Different Needs:**

It is the policy of our school that all children have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the full range of experiences offered in play. In planning for play, consideration should be given to the range of needs of the children in the school, so that all children will be enabled to participate to their fullest in the play sessions.

- Teachers support and ensure the participation of children with different needs by being aware of the level and pace at which the children are learning.
- All children are enabled to make an important contribution regardless of academic achievement.
- We adapt and modify activities so that all children can participate.
- Special Educational Needs teachers compliment and support the work done in this area with their students.
- The role of the Special Needs Assistant is to assist the child or children they are assigned to during the play session
- Children with exceptional ability are encouraged and supported to reach their full potential during the play session.

#### **5. Linkage and Integration:**

**Linkage:** Linkage in the play session will occur where a lesson based on one particular strand may also draw on another strand. For example; a group of children reflecting on the drama that they created in role play.

**Integration:** integration across curricular areas will occur where the teacher draws on another subject topic as a stimulus for the play session or uses play to aid consolidation of a particular topic.

Aistear methodologies can be used to integrate all areas of the curriculum. For example, a play session about The Opticians might include:

- Socio-dramatic play where children use pre-taught vocabulary.
- An investigation area where children record items as ‘near’ or ‘far’ using magnifying glasses.
- A Story Sack where children use props to sequence and retell a familiar story.
- A creative area where children design glasses and use problem-solving skills when discussing how to cut and assemble them.

## **6. Assessment and Record Keeping:**

Aistear provides lots of information on and examples of assessment-in-action in different types of early childhood settings. The framework uses five assessment methods to gather evidence of children’s learning and development across Aistear’s themes. This evidence helps practitioners to build rich portraits of children as learners in order to celebrate their achievements and to help them take the next steps in their learning.

Records of assessment will be kept in the form of observation notes, pupil profiles or pupil scrapbooks.

### **Assessment Methods:**

- Self-Assessment: using samples of work.
- Conversations: one-to-one, paired, group and whole-class.
- Observation: teacher as observer and teacher in role.
- Setting tasks: work tasks and activities.
- Testing/Questioning: reporting and reflecting on play using photos and video clips.

### **What to Assess and When:**

- Dispositions: curiosity, concentration, resilience, perseverance.
- Skills: walking, cutting, writing, problem-solving.
- Attitudes and Values: respect for themselves and others, care for the environment, positive attitudes to learning and to life.
- Knowledge and Understanding: classifying objects using colours and size, learning 'rules' for interacting with others, finding out about people in their community, and understanding that words have meaning.

## **7. Organisational Planning**

**An Aistear session must include the following stages:**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Planning:</b> group discussion about the visual timetable.<br>Paired or group planning of play using the future tense.                                     | <b>5-10 minutes</b>                         |
| <b>Playing:</b> engaging with activities/material at assigned play area<br>Tidy up.   | <b>25-30 minutes</b><br><b>5-15 minutes</b> |
| <b>Reviewing:</b> can include oral reporting (supported by photos on interactive whiteboard), guided and free writing (assisted by playtime board vocabulary) | <b>10-20 minutes</b>                        |

**\*\*See Appendix 3 for examples of questions that can be used to develop planning and reviewing.**

## 8. Health and Safety

- Activities must be assigned to an appropriate area of the classroom. There must be a safe distance between play areas.
- Playtime resources are to be stored on shelves or on a portable trolley.
- Teachers are to consider the health and safety of all children when selecting appropriate props and resources for playtime.
- Rough behaviour is not tolerated even within the context of role play. Children will be made aware of this before play begins.

## 9. Individual Teachers' Planning and Reporting

During short and long-term planning, teachers will consult this whole school plan and the curriculum documents for curriculum subjects being integrated through Aistear,

Teachers will use Aistear as a methodology to aid curricular integration. Where suitable, Aistear will be used in a thematic way to integrate suitable curricular subjects. Each teacher will have a long-term plan for the year and will tailor this to the needs of his/her own class in the short-term planning.

**Teachers will avoid the use of the term 'Aistear' on the timetable. Aistear is a methodology for playful learning. The phrase 'Integrated Learning' will instead be used.**

The NCCA Aistear template will assist in recording learning, evaluating progress in learning and in informing future teaching.

**\*\*See Appendix 2 for the role of the teacher during play.**

## **10. Staff Development**

- Teachers will have access to reference books, resource materials and websites relating to Aistear. Staff will be encouraged to observe Aistear sessions in infant classrooms.
- All teachers will be responsible for cataloguing resources and will arrange opportunities for resources to be assessed for purchase.
- Staff will become familiar with the Aistear Toolkit: <http://www.ncca.ie/aistear toolkit>
- Our school culture, encouraging shared expertise and good practice, will be upheld.

## **11. Parental Involvement**

- Parents will be made aware of the NCCA Aistear Toolkit information leaflets for parents. These will be displayed in the school and discussed at the new Junior Infant meetings.
- Parents have an important role to play by discussing their child's playtime experiences with them. Parents will be kept informed of the current theme each month and photos of children at play in each area will be visible to parents, fostering discussion opportunities between the child and adult.
- Parents may be asked to assist teachers with the resourcing of a play topic, through providing suitable props, costumes or toys, where possible.

## **12. Success Criteria**

We will review the whole school plan in the future under the following headings:

- How individual teacher planning, preparation and teaching reflects this plan
- How the Aistear play methodology is used within the classroom.
- How resources can be improved or updated
- How vocabulary, language fluency and comprehension is developing within classes.

Means of assessing the outcomes of the plan:

- Revisiting the aims of this plan upon consultation with the staff
- Teacher/parent feedback
- Children's feedback
- Reports or feedback from the inspectorate
- Teacher observations and assessment results

## **13. Implementation**

### **(a) Rules and Responsibilities:**

The plan will be supported, developed and implemented by the following staff:

- Audit and recommendation of play resources: all infant teachers.
- Purchase of resources: infant teachers, approved by principal.

## **14. Review**

This plan will be reviewed bi-annually. On these occasions, we will refer to the tasks in our action plan and ensure they have been completed in accordance with the agreed time-frame. All staff will be consulted during the review process. Infant teachers will be involved in updating the topics as is necessary.

## **Appendix**

- 1. Games with Rules.**
- 2. Teacher's Role in Aistear.**
- 3. Planning and reviewing objectives.**
- 4. Sample scheme of work (Junior and Senior Infants)**
- 5. Suggested vocabulary for role play areas.**
- 6. List of Resources.**

## **1. Games with Rules**

Games with rules is the fifth type of play used in the Aistear framework. It may not be possible to plan for this type of play during an Aistear session as the nature of the activities often require constant adult supervision. It is advised that 'Games with Rules' are explicitly taught in the following areas:

- Maths through 'Ready, Set, Go'
- English: through the Jolly Phonics games.
- Orchard Toys Games to develop language skills, turn-taking, counting skills, etc.
- Throughout other areas of the curriculum in various ways.

## **2. Teacher's Role in Play Sessions**

Whilst the tendency to play is universally acknowledged as being innate, increasingly, it is recognised that for play to flourish as a truly enjoyable, cognitive and socially adaptive human ability, adult support and direction is necessary. Where possible, learning support staff may be asked to assist class teachers in observing and supporting play sessions alongside the mainstream teacher.

The role of the mainstream teacher:

- Planning for play: resources, space and what the children will learn. Themes and specific vocabulary to be taught will be noted in short-term planning. **(See Appendix 4 for sample Schemes of Work)**
- Supporting Play: observing, documenting, facilitating and participating in play. Teachers will remember that they are equal participants and will not take control of the play session. The session is to be child-led and teachers will join in rather than direct play sessions. Teachers will not interrupt the play session to question or assess children. Teachers will alter the amount and type of support as the children's confidence and competence in play develops.
- Reviewing Play: Reflecting on the children's play; what they learned and planning going forward. **See Appendix 3 for sample review questions.** Teachers will record observations and short-term reflections on play sessions.

### 3. Planning and Reviewing Objectives

Sample of Teacher's Questions which develop planning skills and use of future tense:

- What are you going to do in your area today?
- What toys are you going to choose? / What equipment are you going to use?
- How are you going to make that?
- Why are you going to choose that?
- Who are you going to play with?

Sample of Teacher's Questions which develop skills and use of past tense:

- Who did you play with today?
- What area did you play in?
- What did you do in that area?
- What did you play with? / What equipment did you use?
- What was your favourite part of the playtime? Why?

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### Reviewing Play:

- Reviewing happens at the end of the play session.
- The child considers four questions when reviewing: Who? What? Where? When? And How?
- Photos taken during play will be displayed on the interactive whiteboard to encourage reluctant speakers and to focus children’s attention during discussion.
- The teacher should challenge ‘easy answers’, model correct grammar and model a clear speaking voice. The teacher will draw attention to vocabulary on the playtime board as it arises in conversation.
- Teachers will aim to foster a balance between individual, group and whole-class discussion.
- Teachers will aim to foster a balance between reflecting, listening, speaking, writing and questioning.
- Teachers will prompt children to consider what may happen in future play sessions, to make choices and consider the consequences of their choices and decisions.

## Sample Schemes of Work

### Junior Infants

| Month/<br>Theme | Socio<br>-dramatic   | Sensory | Small world/<br>Imaginative | Creative | Physical |
|-----------------|--|---------|-----------------------------|----------|----------|
| September       | Free Play to establish rules for play.<br>Use of timer for disputes.<br>Building communication to deal with conflicts. |         |                             |          |          |

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|---|--|--|---|--|--|
| <b>October</b>  | Free Play to establish rules for play.<br>Use of timer for disputes.<br>Building communication to deal with conflicts. |  |   |  |  |
| <b>November<br/>Homes</b>   | The Home   | Water: Washing dishes, babies.<br>Sand: Construction vehicles.                     | Doll's house  | Play dough<br>Duplo<br>Lego<br>Draw own homes<br>Fabric & Fibre: The 3 Little Pigs                                     | Construction area:<br>Blocks/Lego/<br>Mobilo/<br>Stickle Brick |
| <b>December<br/>The Post Office</b>   | The Post Office  | Sand/Water   | The post office   | Writing/designing<br>Christmas cards/<br>Wrapping presents/<br>Name tags for gifts                                     | Design a post Office/post box<br>With Jaggo                    |
| <b>January<br/>Doctor's Surgery</b>   | Doctor's surgery   | Washing babies, syringes, Giving babies medicine.                                  | Doctor's surgery  | Designing<br>Stethoscopes using play dough.<br>Play dough activity mats-chicken pox/medicine bottles, making bandages. | Jaggo/Lego   |
| <b>February<br/>The Farm</b>  | The farmer's market  | Soil: digging for vegetables using trowels   | The farmhouse/farm vehicles                               | Making animals with Playdough/<br>design a chicken coup/<br>pig pen  | Jaggo/Lego:<br>Design a farmhouse and Vehicles                 |
| <b>March or<br/>April<br/>*depending<br/>On Easter<br/>The<br/>Restaurant</b> | The restaurant   | Washing dishes and pots  | Small world restaurant                                    | Making foods and gingerbread people with playdough.  | Jaggo: build a Town  |
| <b>April</b>  |  |  |   |  |  |
| <b>May<br/>The Garden Centre</b>  | The garden centre  | Soil: Planting bulbs, Potting plants<br>Water: Watering flowers with watering cans | Natural materials:<br>Flowers/twigs etc.<br>Fairy gardens | Making crepe paper<br>Flowers<br>Making flower pots<br>Making flowers using<br>Construction straws                     | Jaggo/ Lego<br>Design a garden                                 |

|                                   |                              |                           |             |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|---|--|
| <b>June</b><br><b>The Airport</b> | Check-in desk at the Airport | Sand: making sand castles | The airport | Cutting brochures<br>Design passports/<br>Postcards<br>Junk Art: design a plane | Jaggo: design a Plane/<br>Holiday home |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|---|--|

### Senior Infants

| Month/Theme  | Socio-dramatic Play              | Sensory Play                                       | Small World/<br>Imaginative Play       | Creative Play  | Physical Play                                   |
|--|----------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| <b>September</b><br><b>School</b>  | The Classroom                    | Sand/water<br>Numbers/letters                      | Dolls house as classroom               | Junk art<br>Design a schoolbag/<br>classroom/<br>Drawing or mapping school | Jaggo-make a classroom or desk                  |
| <b>October</b><br><b>Launderette</b>   | The Launderette                  | Washing dolls clothes                              | The Launderette                        | Junk art/<br>Play dough<br>Design clothes                                  | Jaggo   |
| <b>November</b><br><b>The Dentist</b>  | The dentist's surgery            | Washing teeth<br>Flossing<br>Making plaque         | Dentist's surgery                      | Designing a dentist's chair<br>Writing appointments etc                    | Jaggo-<br>a dentist's Chair<br>A mouth of teeth |
| <b>December</b><br><b>The Christmas Post office/ The Jolly Christmas Postman</b> | The post office                  | Sand   | The post person's route/town/cars      | Wrapping presents<br>Writing cards<br>Writing addresses and letters        | Jaggo   |
| <b>January</b><br><b>The Arctic</b>  | The Igloo<br>Fisher-person's hut | Fake snow<br>Ice melting to uncover Arctic animals | Animals<br>Dolls<br>Figurines<br>Igloo | Design an igloo<br>Interlocking shapes<br>Junk art                         | Design an igloo                                 |

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| <b>February</b><br><b>The Vet's Surgery</b>                                     | The vet's surgery  | Washing animals<br>Syringes<br>Brushing animals   | Animals<br>Figures<br>Doll's house as<br>Vet's clinic | Designing a pet's bed<br>Junk Art<br>Making animals<br>Playdough   | Making beds for<br>animals                   |
| <b>March or April</b><br><b>(depending on Easter)</b><br><b>The supermarket</b> | The supermarket    | Sand  | The supermarket                                       | Junk art<br>Make a trolley<br>Write a shopping list<br>Design a cereal box                               | Make a trolley<br>Design your own<br>Product |
| <b>April</b>  | See above          |   |   |  |  |
| <b>May</b><br><b>The Florist</b>  | The Florist's shop | Water tray<br>Watering cans/<br>laminated flowers | The town/<br>fairy garden/<br>link with story         | Natural materials:<br>Making daisy chains<br>Rose petal pictures/<br>Stained glass<br>flower window pane | Jaggo  |
| <b>June</b><br><b>Travel agents</b>   | The travel agents  | Sand: the beach                                   | The travel agents<br>Play at the beach                | Design a passport/<br>Seaside scene<br>Design a suitcase<br>Pack a suitcase                              | Jaggo or Lego                                |

**\*\*Open theme week in June-children vote for their favourite theme from during the year**

**First Class:**

- No suggested themes by month.
- Teachers may review previous year's monthly records and choose appropriate topics.
- STEM based work can form the basis of some groups with investigative stations with magnets or different building materials for example.
- A creative writing or design station may be set up, led by the children's interests at that time.





