

**Glasgow City Council****Education, Skills and Early Years City Policy Committee****Report by Executive Director of Education Services****Contact: Heather Douglas Ext: 74493****Play Pedagogy in Glasgow City Council ELC and Primary****Purpose of Report:**

To update the Education, Skills and Early Years Committee on the significant impact of Play Pedagogy and Enquiry based learning across Education Services.

**Recommendations:**

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the extent of play pedagogy and enquiry-based learning training and support available for ELC and primary staff across Glasgow

Ward No(s):

Citywide: Local member(s) advised: Yes  No  consulted: Yes  No **PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING:**

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## Section1 – Introduction

### 1.1 Defining Play Pedagogy

Play Pedagogy is an approach to learning and teaching that integrates children's play experiences with curricular learning, fostering independence and building on children's intrinsic motivation to play, explore, and learn. It engages children in meaningful activities that develop holistic skills, preparing them to adapt and thrive as lifelong learners in a changing world. Through play pedagogy, practitioners introduce and model key knowledge, concepts and skills, plan experiences to apply and consolidate learning, and introduce provocations to inspire new learning. Child-led opportunities are facilitated in high-quality environments that promote curiosity, creativity and confidence and enable learners to lead their own learning. Play pedagogy supports progress across all curricular areas, including literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing, and ensures children can learn in a way that benefits their development.

### 1.2 Play, the Rights of the Child & Child Development

Play is essential to children and young people's quality of life and is a child's right. Article 31 of the UNCRC states that "every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities." The practice of high-quality play pedagogy encompasses many other rights including the right to be heard (Articles 12,13,14,29), the right to be safe and healthy (Articles 19, 24, 27, 39), and the right to a quality education (Articles 13, 15, 17, 28, 29). Glasgow education services strive to ensure all children across Glasgow have their rights respected and supported in all our establishments, policies and practice.

Evidence from research is clear that play has an essential role in all learning. Learning through play is one of the most important ways that babies and young children can grow, develop, and increase their knowledge of the world. It helps children to develop their social, emotional, and physical capacities. Through play, children and young people of all ages develop problem-solving skills, imagination and creativity, language and observation skills, and memory and concentration. Research and guidance tell us that all babies and children develop their individual skills, knowledge and attributes at different rates according to who they are. Planned professional learning opportunities will continue to support staff in Glasgow to take account of how children and young people learn and make progress through play.

### 1.3 Curriculum and National Practice Guidance

The Early level of [Curriculum for Excellence](#) enables the planning of a continuous curriculum experience for learners across ELC and into primary school. [Realising the Ambition: Being Me](#) provides guidance for practitioners in ELC settings and Primary schools to ensure children receive high quality experiences through a child-centred pedagogy. It emphasises the importance of play from the beginning

of ELC, across the whole of the Early level and beyond. In Glasgow we continue to transform our 3-18 curriculum, whilst ensuring this builds on the critical foundations developed from birth to three, with a relentless focus on learning and teaching through Glasgow's Pedagogy.

In Glasgow, Sustainable Development Goal 4 'Ensure Inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning' is a driver for us to adapt national frameworks, local policy and guidance into the contexts of our classrooms and playrooms to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners. For play pedagogy, this guidance and policy includes Realising the Ambition, [Getting It Right For Every Child](#), [Scottish Government's Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030](#), [The Early Years Framework \(2008\)](#), [How Good Is Our School \(4th Edition\)](#), and the [Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors](#).

Education Scotland is the national body for supporting quality and improvement of learning and teaching in Scottish education. The [Education Scotland Early Level Play Pedagogy Toolkit](#) aims to support all who work across Early Level of Curriculum for Excellence. In Glasgow it is used by ELC practitioners, teachers, leaders and policy makers to inform the planning for quality early education.

#### 1.4 The Glasgow Context

- 110 ELC settings, approximately 2000 staff
- 143 primary schools
- 21 stand-alone ASL establishments and 35 co-located ASL provisions
- 30 secondary schools
- Everything we do in Glasgow is informed by our values of compassion, ambition, trust and equity as we work towards our 5 Grand Challenges as set out in All Learners, All Achieving.
- Glasgow City Council is committed to closing the attainment gap and giving our children and young people the widest range of opportunities to achieve. We are committed to tackling the effects of poverty and disadvantage and the potentially negative impact this has for children and young people. The Education (Scotland) Act 2016 places a duty on local authorities to provide education in a way that is designed to reduce inequality of outcomes for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage
- Whole School Nurturing Approaches: Nurture is an intervention that supports the development of positive mental health and wellbeing for all, focusing on positive relationships and resilience. In Glasgow we want all children and their families to feel that their needs are understood and met and in doing this, to ensure that nurturing approaches are embedded holistically, in every establishment.

## Section 2 – Play Pedagogy in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)

2.1 Glasgow City Council Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings provide high quality spaces, interactions and experiences in line with national guidance. Child-centred play pedagogy requires us to take the lead from the children. This approach actively responds to the individual and constantly changing needs of a young child.

## 2.2 Quality Improvement Framework – Quality Indicator Play and learning.

Care Inspectorate and HMIE inspect the quality indicator play and learning. This indicator focuses on children’s right to play, demonstrating that they should have fun, experience joy and have high-quality learning experiences indoors and outdoors. It is essential that children are meaningfully and actively involved in leading their own play and learning.

Inspection Grading using the new shared framework April 2025-March 2026

<b>CHILDREN PLAY AND LEARN Play, Learning and Developing</b>	<b>GCC</b>	<b>Funded Partners</b>
4 Good	13	12
5 Very good	8	2
6 Excellent	2	1

## 2.3 Nurturing my potential – birth to 5

The GCC good practice framework ‘Nurturing my Potential’ has been developed to support practitioners working with babies and toddlers in their first 1000 days. Promoting Playful Literacy and Numeracy and Mathematical development are two of the sections that explain in detail the impact of children’s learning and development in the early years.

## 2.4 Nurturing my Confidence, creativity and curiosity

This course is designed to empower educators to reflect on their practice by relating it to theory, research and policy. It provides time and space to work with colleagues from across the city to discuss high quality Early Years Pedagogy. The overall aim of this course is to empower early years educators to confidently create and embed a rich curriculum which positively impacts all our youngest learners to develop a wide range of creative skills and attributes for life.

## **Section 3 – Play Pedagogy supporting effective transitions from ELC to school**

3.1 Glasgow’s [ELC to Primary Transition Guidelines](#) are informed by international, national and local research and policy including Realising the Ambition. Realising the Ambition sets out the key features of positive transitions practice from an early learning and childcare setting to school which include: “collaboration between practitioners and teachers which is focused on planning a continuous ‘early level’ curriculum experience” and “play pedagogy in the early stages of primary school, that is built on a clear and shared rationale and distributed leadership.” Glasgow aims to get transitions right for every child. The ELC to Primary Transition Guidelines are designed to be used by all ELC and primary settings in Glasgow to support this aim and to develop consistency and quality across the city.

## Section 4 – Play Pedagogy in our Primary Schools

4.1 Primary schools in Glasgow are engaging with the national practice guidance, Realising the Ambition: Being Me to plan engaging and motivating experiences for learners through play pedagogy in P1 and beyond. There is continued work across the city to establish pedagogical continuity and consistency in approaches through our robust Glasgow’s Pedagogy professional learning offer.

4.2 Spaces for play pedagogy:

Recent evaluations show that learners benefit from accessing play spaces across classrooms, open areas, outdoor spaces, and other rooms within school buildings to engage in a wide range of play opportunities. Spaces for play are planned for and enhanced in response to learners’ needs, interests, and to enable progress in learning across the curriculum.

4.3 Learning and teaching through play pedagogy:

Visits to schools and recent HMIE inspections show that a balance of adult-led, adult-initiated, and child-led learning experiences are being planned in schools to facilitate play pedagogy across the curriculum. Practitioners are planning responsively and intentionally, using observations to assess and understand the needs of learners. Learners are supported through sensitive interactions.

HMIE reports on the implementation of the national practice guidance and on the facilitation of play pedagogy within QI 2.3 Learning and Teaching.

QI 2.3 Learning and Teaching	Primary School inspections Aug 2024-March 2026
3 Satisfactory	3
4 Good	14
5 Very good	5
6 Excellent	0

Some recent examples of HMIE inspection report comments on play pedagogy within 2.3 Learning and Teaching:

[St Angela’s Primary School Inspection](#) – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026

“At P1, all children enjoy daily opportunities to learn through play. They experience a balance of teacher-led and child-led learning as part of the school’s agreed approach to play. Teachers use resources well to promote children’s creativity, curiosity and enquiry. Staff should continue to plan high-quality experiences that give children time to lead their own learning through play and exploration.”

[St Brigid’s Primary School Inspection](#) – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2026

“Teachers at the early stages have engaged well with national guidance and professional learning to support children’s learning through play. They use this professional learning very well to provide engaging and stimulating learning spaces. Teachers ensure an appropriate balance of child-initiated and teacher-directed play. They use observations of children’s learning very well to plan responsive and purposeful, early level play experiences. These experiences

support very well high-quality interactions amongst children and between children and teachers. As planned, teachers should now consider how older children can experience the principles of play-based learning. This should provide all children with play-based enquiry experiences appropriate to their age and stage.”

#### Merrylee Primary School Inspection – 10<sup>th</sup> February 2026

“Teachers of the younger classes have embedded a strong play-rich approach that actively supports and extends children’s learning. They provide high quality learning for children through an effective balance of child-led and adult-initiated experiences. Children apply and consolidate their learning in purposeful activities. Staff create stimulating spaces that encourage, support and challenge children successfully. Teachers and support staff demonstrate skilled interactions with children during direct teaching activities and independent play. Staff use observations very well to plan next steps for children’s learning.”

#### 4.4 Professional Learning

Schools have engaged with professional learning through a programme facilitated by Glasgow City Council to support the development of play pedagogy. To date, 117 schools have opted in to the play pedagogy programme and have benefitted from staff training, collaboration events, and supportive visits to schools by members of the play pedagogy team. Through recent evaluation of this work, schools commented positively on the support they have received:

- “Play pedagogy training has supported me to create more learner-centred, engaging experiences within the classroom. I have developed greater confidence in using purposeful play to promote independence, communication, problem-solving and collaboration. As a result, learners are increasingly motivated, engaged and able to apply skills across different areas of learning.”
- “Play Pedagogy visits this year have supported me to further develop learner-centred approaches within the classroom. Through observing good practice and engaging in professional dialogue, I have increased opportunities for child-led, experiential learning and adapted the learning environment to promote independence, curiosity and collaboration.”
- “It was great to have in person training at key moments throughout the session to facilitate collegiate discussion. I found speaking with people on a similar journey refreshed my commitment or led me in a slightly different direction. It was always a very supportive environment.”

Schools also engage in a range of professional learning offers from other services and providers outwith the local authority including Education Scotland, Strathclyde University, and Play Scotland. The new Glasgow’s Pedagogy professional learning offer for Play and Enquiry Based Learning will continue to support schools to develop high-quality approaches and support consistency across the system.

#### 4.5 Impact for learners

On visits to schools there is evidence of the positive impact of play pedagogy approaches on learners’ engagement, motivation, and confidence in their learning. Learners are developing a range of holistic skills, making progress through the

curriculum, and applying their learning in different contexts. Through recent evaluation of this work, schools commented on the impact for learners:

- “Play-based learning has had a positive impact on learners’ engagement, confidence and independence. Learners are increasingly willing to explore, collaborate and communicate their ideas during learning experiences.”
- “Transition from nursery to P1 has been smooth. Children have been able to explore and demonstrate learning in a variety of ways that they may previously not have been able to.”
- “The children have developed excellent communication skills through play. They work much better together and have found they mix more and do not stick to friendship groups. They are more aware of what and how they are learning and many are able to articulate this.”
- “Children are settled. They’re enjoying being in school and exploring the environments. Results are showing they are achieving the level.”

The Glasgow’s Pedagogy professional learning offer will continue to support Glasgow’s commitment to raising attainment and improving life chances for all children and young people.

## **Section 5 – Play Pedagogy: meeting the needs of our ASN learners**

5.1 Play Pedagogy supports Glasgow’s ambition to be a world class learning city, founded on nurture principles, and ensuring inclusive and quality education for all learners.

5.2 Play Pedagogy supports educators to meet a diverse range of needs while acknowledging that all babies and young children develop their individual skills, knowledge and attributes at different rates according to who they are. ELC settings, mainstream schools, ASL schools and co-located provisions in Glasgow use Realising the Ambition, alongside other guidance including the [Milestones to support learners with complex additional support needs](#), to plan developmentally appropriate experiences for learners.

5.3 The ASL play network is facilitated by the Inclusion team in Glasgow and brings together staff from ASL schools, co-located ASL provision, and mainstream schools to share practice and develop resources. Work is continuing to develop a range of online resources that will be shared on Go Glasgow to support planning and implementing play to meet the needs of learners across the city.

5.4 Planning Personalised Pathways guidance supports practitioners across the city to plan for learners with complex additional support needs. This guidance states that for learners with complex additional support needs, opportunities to learn through play are critical to learning about life and the world around them. Learners with complex additional support needs are being supported in schools to develop play skills through experiences that build on what motivates and engages each learner.

5.5 Glasgow’s Educational Psychology Services (GEPS) and Inclusion

GEPS are developing professional learning resources to support practitioner understanding of inclusive play across Early level. These online modules will explore definitions of play, the benefits of play for all children, and how to ensure a culturally sensitive and neuro-affirming approach to providing play opportunities for all our children. Future opportunities are planned which could include in-person training on

inclusive play and a focus on inclusive play outdoors. At the upcoming Nurture conference, a workshop on 'Taking a Neuro-affirmative Look at Play' will be delivered to ELC and primary practitioners.

## Section 6 – Glasgow Pedagogy - Play & Enquiry based learning



6.1 The Glasgow's Pedagogy Team delivers training on each aspect ('button') of the Pedagogy Wheel and provides resources for schools to support the work of Education Services' *All Learners, All Achieving Grand Challenges*.

6.2 The Play and Enquiry Based Learning button of the Glasgow's Pedagogy wheel has been developed to support staff to evaluate and plan for improvement, and to support quality and consistency in approaches across the city.

6.3 The Play and Enquiry Based Learning offer includes a full day training module delivered by the Glasgow's Pedagogy team that is attended by each school's 'Glasgow's Pedagogy' lead, a self-evaluation toolkit to be used by staff in schools, and four TLC (Teacher Learning Community) modules to work through as a school or department:

TLC 1 – Play and Enquiry Based Learning: Purpose and Culture

TLC 2 – Play and Enquiry Based Learning: Spaces

TLC 3 – Play and Enquiry Based Learning: Experiences

TLC 4 – Play and Enquiry Based Learning: Interactions

6.4 Through recent evaluation of this work, schools commented on the training offer:

- “Exploration of the TLCs was particularly beneficial. This helped to prompt thinking about how to support the development of play and enquiry-based learning. The concepts covered were consistently linked back to Realising the Ambition and Education Scotland policy.”
- “Access to materials such as the self-evaluation toolkit will be hugely beneficial for my establishment. I also enjoyed discussions and networking with others to share examples of good practice.”

6.5 Further sessions and the launch of the supporting resources will continue to support schools across the city to evaluate, plan, develop and improve approaches to play and enquiry-based learning.

## **Section 7 – Support for Senior Leaders**

### **7.1 New Heads Induction**

ELC Heads are invited to attend a 2-day induction programme when they take up post within GCC. They are provided with key information and guidance to ensure high quality play is at the forefront of the practice within their setting.

### **7.2 Mentor programme**

ELC Heads are provided with a mentor when they take up post. This is an opportunity for them to moderate the practice within their setting.

### **7.3 Continuing Professional Learning**

An extensive programme of CPL opportunities is provided within ELC and primary for Senior leadership teams, class teachers, child development officers and support for learning workers.

### **7.4 Quality Improvement**

ELC Area Service Managers and Quality Improvement Officers continually track and monitor what is working well across all sectors. Good practice is shared across the city and with other local authorities.

### **7.5 Education Scotland Leading Play Pedagogy in Primary one for senior leaders** [Play Pedagogy in P1 - Information Session Padlet](#)

*This resource focuses on P1, with examples mainly drawn from that stage, but the underlying theory from Realising the Ambition applies across ELC and the early primary years. Schools will need to interpret and adapt approaches for their own contexts. While the resource is most suitable for schools at an early stage of developing play pedagogy, it can also support settings where P1 practice is already strong, including those extending play into P2 or managing staff changes. A shared theoretical foundation across stages promotes consistency, but it is for each school to decide whether whole-school or targeted participation is most appropriate.*

## **Section 8 – Partnership Working**

### **8.1 SCMA – Childminders**

Scottish Childminding Association have a new series of 5 CPL's which cover Play Pedagogy, some are available now and the final few will be ready for the end of this year for Interactive and e-learn delivery training plan for the Integrated Childminding Service in Glasgow.

Five courses in the "The Playful Childminder" series:

- The Playful Childminder: Leading children to play
- The Playful Childminder: Fun in the fresh air
- The Playful Childminder: Planning for rich experiences
- The Playful Childminder: Elevating play for Experienced Childminders
- The Playful Childminder: Understanding the psychology of play

### **8.2 West Partnership**

The West Partnership Principles of Effective Learning Through Play & Enquiry, developed in collaboration with Education Scotland, provide a framework for embedding high-quality play pedagogy. They focus on responsive, intentional planning that values children's ownership of learning and aligns with UNCRC rights.

<https://www.westpartnership.co.uk/effective-learning/>

### **8.3 Local Authority Play Leads Network**

GCC is represented nationally sharing practice with other local authority leads across Scotland. Playfest 2026 will be delivered online in September.

Collaborating and sharing practice with other local authorities ensures a strategic focus while adhering to national standards.

### **8.4 Play Scotland – Play Pedagogy award**

The Play Pedagogy Award was created and developed by Play Scotland, working closely with Education Scotland, local authority partners, practitioners and schools across Scotland, to support schools to embed and sustain a whole school approach to play pedagogy. It is designed to support schools to build on what they are already doing well, rather than creating lots of additional paperwork, and it links closely with Curriculum for Excellence, GIRFEC, UNCRC Article 31 and HGIOS.

In Glasgow, 14 schools are currently involved in the Play Pedagogy Award or due to join the next cohort.

(Appendix 3)

### **8.5 Education Scotland – Education Officer support**

Glasgow have benefitted from collaboration and support on play pedagogy from Allan Fleming, Education Officer (ELC) which has included training inputs for leaders and

teachers, as well as joint visits to establishments. This collaboration has supported consistency and quality in approaches.

### **Section 9 – Next Steps**

To continue to embed the approach consistently across ELC and primary.  
To quality assure the teaching and learning approaches used.

## **10 Policy and Resource Implications**

### **Resource Implications:**

*Financial: Delivered within existing and targeted programmed funding.*

*Legal: No specific legal implications*

*Personnel: Delivered through existing staffing and partnership collaboration.*

*Procurement: Not applicable*

**Council Strategic Plan:** Specify which Grand Challenge (s) and Mission (s) the proposal supports. Where appropriate the relevant Commitment can also be listed.

Grand Challenge 2

Mission 3

Raise attainment amongst Glasgow's children and young people.

- Build on the significant progress we have made in improving attainment; supporting education staff and improving early education.
- Support play and outdoor education.

### **Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:**

*Does the proposal support the Council's*

*Equality Outcomes  
2025-29? Please  
specify.*

*What are the  
potential equality  
impacts as a result of  
this report?*

(no significant impact, positive impact or  
negative impact)

*Please highlight if the  
policy/proposal will  
help address socio-  
economic  
disadvantage.*

**Climate Impacts:**

*Does the proposal  
support any Climate  
Plan actions? Please  
specify:*

*What are the potential  
climate impacts as a  
result of this  
proposal?*

*Will the proposal  
contribute to  
Glasgow's net zero  
carbon target?*

**Privacy and Data  
Protection Impacts:**

Are there any potential  
data protection impacts  
as a result of this report  
Y/N

If Yes, please confirm that  
a Data Protection Impact  
Assessment (DPIA) has  
been carried out

## **11 Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

- Note the extent of play pedagogy and enquiry-based learning training and support available for ELC and primary staff across Glasgow