Blackhall Nursery Barefoot Policy

Policy Statement

At Blackhall Nursery, we recognise that children learn best through active, meaningful and sensory-rich experiences. Within the setting children are supported to be barefoot both indoors and outdoors, where appropriate, as part of our commitment to promoting wellbeing, physical development, sensory exploration, curiosity and child-led learning.

Through a carefully managed risk-benefit approach, we recognise barefoot experiences as a valuable contribution to high-quality early learning and childcare in line with Realising the Ambition, Curriculum for Excellence, Health and Social Care Standards and the UNCRC

We believe that being barefoot enables children to experience their environment fully, supports healthy physical development, and provides opportunities for children to make decisions about their own comfort and wellbeing.

Rationale

Research and national guidance highlight the importance of movement, play and sensory experiences in young children's development. Barefoot experiences can:

- Support balance, coordination, posture, and gross motor development.
- Strengthen muscles in the feet and lower limbs.
- Increase sensory awareness and exploration.
- Promote independence and body confidence.
- Encourage children's agency and choice.
- Enhance engagement in play and learning experiences.

This approach reflects the principles of:

Realising the Ambition

Children require environments that support movement, exploration, wellbeing and learning through play. High-quality spaces enable children to engage fully with their surroundings using all their senses.

Curriculum for Excellence

The policy contributes to the children’s development through active learning, personalisation, choice, challenge, enjoyment and wellbeing.

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Aims

We aim to:

- ✓ Promote children's physical health and wellbeing.
- ✓ Encourage independence and decision-making.
- ✓ Support sensory and exploratory play.
- ✓ Provide a safe environment where children can choose to be barefoot.
- ✓ Foster positive attitudes towards movement and body awareness.
- ✓ Ensure children's rights are respected and promoted

Procedures

Indoor Environment

Children may choose to remove their shoes and socks while indoors.

The setting will ensure that:

- Floors are checked daily and maintained in a safe condition.
- Spillages are dealt with immediately.
- Indoor learning environments are regularly risk assessed.
- Staff remain vigilant regarding potential hazards.
- Children are encouraged, but not forced, to wear shoes.

Outdoor Environment

At Blackhall Nursery, we recognise that outdoor barefoot experiences provide valuable opportunities for children to connect with nature, develop body awareness, build resilience and engage in rich sensory learning experiences.

In line with *Realising the Ambition: Being Me* and *Curriculum for Excellence*, children are encouraged to explore their environment through meaningful, child-led play experiences.

Children may choose to be barefoot outdoors where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Examples include:

- Exploring grass, soil, sand and mud.
- Water play experiences.
- Sensory pathways and natural materials.
- Gardening activities.
- Nature-based and loose parts play.

Research suggests that walking barefoot can support:

- Balance and coordination.
- Muscle strength and foot development.

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- Proprioception and spatial awareness.
- Sensory processing and regulation.
- Confidence and resilience.
- Connection with the natural environment.

Risk-Benefit Approach

We recognise that all play involves some level of risk and that children learn through experiencing challenges and developing the skills to manage risk appropriately. Staff will undertake dynamic risk-benefit assessments to ensure that outdoor barefoot experiences provide positive developmental benefits while maintaining children's safety.

Before children access outdoor spaces barefoot, staff will:

- Complete daily safety checks of outdoor areas.
- Inspect for glass, sharp objects, animal waste or other hazards.
- Consider weather and ground conditions.
- Assess individual children's needs and vulnerabilities.
- Monitor children throughout the experience.
- Ensure footwear is readily available should a child wish to put shoes back on.

Children will not be required to participate barefoot and may wear their footwear at any time.

Inclusion and Children's Rights

Children have the right to make choices about their play, learning and wellbeing. We will listen to children's views and respect individual preferences, cultural considerations, sensory needs and medical requirements.
Where children require specialist footwear or where parents have identified health concerns, these individual needs will be discussed and accommodated appropriately.

Health and Safety

The safety of children remains paramount.

The setting will:

- ✓ Conduct routine risk assessments.
- ✓ Check indoor and outdoor environments daily.
- ✓ Remove hazards immediately.
- ✓ Maintain accident and incident reporting procedures.
- ✓ Ensure qualified first aid provision is available.
- ✓ Follow all City of Edinburgh Council and setting’s health and safety procedures.

Should an emergency evacuation be required, staff will follow established emergency procedures while prioritising children's safety.

Inclusion and Individual Needs

We recognise that some children:

- May prefer to keep shoes on.
- May require specialist footwear.
- May have sensory, medical, cultural, or physical needs that make barefoot participation unsuitable.

Individual circumstances will always be respected, and reasonable adjustments will be made to ensure all children can participate fully and safely.

Parent Partnership

Information about our barefoot approach will be shared with families. Parents and carers will be informed of the developmental benefits of barefoot play and the measures in place to ensure children's safety.

Families are encouraged to provide practical footwear that children can remove and replace independently when participating in barefoot experiences.

Monitoring and Review

The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored through:

- ❖ Ongoing risk assessments.
- ❖ Staff observations.
- ❖ Children's voice and feedback.
- ❖ Parent and carer feedback.
- ❖ Self-evaluation and quality improvement processes.

The policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if national guidance or local authority procedures change.

Related Documents

- Realising the Ambition: Being Me (Education Scotland)
- Curriculum for Excellence Principles and Practice
- Health and Social Care Standards
- UNCRC

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