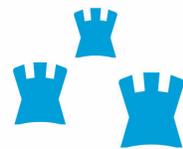


# **Dublin City Council Policy on Children's Play**

**‘The best things you can give a child are  
roots and wings’**

Quote from Policy of Children and Culture of Hillerod, Danmark



**Dublin City**  
Baile Átha Cliath

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# Dublin City Council Policy on Children's Play

## Introduction

Dublin City Council values children as an integral part of the community in Dublin City. The Council recognises the benefit of play in meeting the developmental needs of children.

This policy addresses our responsibility to the children of the city. Creating a healthy environment in which children can play is an appropriate and valuable function for Dublin City Council.

The policy underpins the principle of a child friendly city, a concept that is growing in usage in Europe. The city would be made up of child friendly neighbourhoods. This idea extends from the family friendly neighbourhoods proposed in 'Dublin – a city of possibilities'.

For children this means safe, attractive neighbourhoods where they can play, socialise and move from place to place, as do the other members of their community. In this neighbourhood play is accepted as an important and central part of life.

We must strive to have residential areas, parks and suitable open spaces that are safe and enjoyable for children to play in and move through. Play is the major way that children learn how to socialise and deal with the world. It helps them to become a healthy adult and active member of their community.

Play provision must be inclusive and accessible to all children. Playgrounds must be designed, installed and maintained to the highest safety standards. Varied and imaginative surroundings can help to introduce children to nature and the environment around them.

Above all play opportunities must be created with the genuine involvement of children, their parents, and their communities. Partnership with other relevant agencies will enhance this provision.

Dublin City Council has many years of experience of providing play facilities. It is now time to recognise and develop this experience into a quality service dedicated to the positive development of children as part of our communities.



## What is Play?

Play is what children do in their free time, when not being directed by adults.

“Play is the main channel through which knowledge of the world flows” (Hostler, 1959)

“The right to play is the child’s first claim on the community. Play is nature’s training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing deep and enduring harm to the bodies and minds of its citizens” (Lloyd Georges, 1926)

“Play is to the child work, thought, art and relaxation and cannot be pressed into any single formula. It expresses a child’s relation to himself and to his environment and without adequate opportunity for play, normal and satisfactory emotional development is not possible” (Lowenfield, 1935)

“Play has the greatest value for the child when it is really free and his own” (Isaacs 1968)

## Guiding Principles on which this Policy is Based.

- Children are recognised as a central and valued part of our community in Dublin.
- Dublin City Council as the planning authority is the key player in determining how our city grows and develops.
- Dublin City Council is a key provider of children’s play facilities.
- Play is crucial to the healthy social, physical, intellectual, creative, and emotional development of children.
- Play is “freely chosen, personally driven and intrinsically motivated” (Hughes).
- The more variety and diversity in children’s play the better for the children’s development.
- Engaged and involved children will participate in and contribute to their community greatly and be more likely to continue to do so as adults.

## **Legislative Background**

The importance of access to quality play opportunities for children is underpinned nationally and internationally.

### The UN Convention on Human Rights.

In 1989 Ireland signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which specified that:

“The State recognised that right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in the cultural life and the arts.”

### National Development Plan

“The Regional Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan will cater for the needs of disadvantaged children by initiating play and development opportunities for them”. (See 10.22)

### National Children’s Strategy

The National Children’s Strategy sets out the rights of children in Ireland. It seeks to address the many ways in which we can improve children’s lives. One of these is children’s access to play opportunities.

It states:

1. Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood. (Chapter 5, Group 1, Objective D)
2. Children will benefit from and contribute to vibrant local communities. (Chapter 5 Group 3, Objective M)
3. Children will benefit from a built and natural environment, which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing. (Chapter 5 Group 3, Objective N)

### The Dublin City Development Plan 1999

The City Development Plan is the statutory document which sets out the blue print for the physical layout of the city. It contains policies, objectives and standards on a wide range of topics including recreation amenity, land use, and the public realm. The review of the Development Plan is a legal process, which is currently underway.

### I.A.P.s and Local Plans

I.A.P.s and local plans are prepared for neighbourhoods and local areas on a holistic basis. They include community consultation and build on the ‘City of Possibilities’ strategy produced by the Dublin City Development Board in 2002.

## National Play Policy

Launched in March 2004, the National Play Policy is a comprehensive document laying out requirements to provide and responsibility for the delivery of children's play. Out of fifty-two Actions listed in the Policy twenty-one are assigned to local authorities.

Actions relevant to local authorities include the development of a play policy(18), the participation of children in decision making relevant to them(2), the use of creative landscape for play(13), and the standards and maintenance of playgrounds(38 & 39).

## **Present Restrictions on Children's Play**

### Space

If we look at where children play today it is easy to see some of the changes that have taken place. The range of places in which children can play has reduced. There are less wild places to explore, few fields left in suburban areas, less open space in the inner city. Some children are lucky enough to have a garden to play in. Most children traditionally played in the street. Parked cars often fill the space used for play in the past. The increasing levels of traffic over recent years have made streets more hazardous for children's play.

### Physical activity

TV, video and computers games have created a situation where children spend more time in sedentary activities than ever before. 78% of children are spending one to three hours per day in front of a screen. (Physical Activity in Dublin Children aged 7-9yrs. J Hussey, J Gormley, C Bell, 2001)

These hours alone with the screen reduces their interactions with their peers, and their physical activity at a very crucial time for young bones, muscles and minds.

“Activity levels and physical fitness levels of Irish children are lower than that of other children in Europe. Over 40% of Irish children undertake less physical activity than is desirable and about half this number is woefully inactive.”

(Dr. Tony Watson, Director Growth and Development Centre, University of Limerick, 1999.)

### Diet

Children's diet has changed drastically over the last twenty years with children eating large amounts of processed snacks and sugary drinks. This is causing many children to become over weight, which makes physical activity less attractive. Reduced physical activity will in turn exacerbate a weight problem. The fact that children do not want to partake in physical activity could mean less social interaction playing with other children. Less play with other children may effect general wellbeing.

“In terms of dietary habits, it was noted in both Irish studies that a significant proportion of Irish children consumed a high level of snack foods. These are widely considered as high fat foods.” (Preventing Cardiovascular Disease by the Irish Heart Foundation

2002.) One of the recommendations of this document is 'Encourage play and physical activity'.

#### Fear

Parents today may feel that children are in danger while playing out on the streets. This has meant children not moving far from home and increasingly parents driving children to and from activities. This decreases opportunities for play and interaction with friends.

#### Vandalism and Litigation

Because of increased levels of vandalism, insurance problems and litigation many of the old play situations have been taken away and it is only in very recent years that new high quality play equipment is being installed. Fear of litigation creates a cautionary approach to choice of play facilities.

## **The Aim of the Policy**

**Dublin City Council aims to create a city that is child friendly and actively supports and encourages the development of a wide variety of good quality opportunities for children's play.**

## **Objectives of the Policy**

### **1. A Child Friendly City**

A child friendly city is one in which there is a positive attitude to children, where their voices are listened to, and their needs attended to.

**1a) Dublin City Council will positively consider children's play opportunities when planning developments and changes for the city.**

### **2. Child Friendly Neighbourhoods.**

The City Development Board's plan, 'Dublin a city of possibilities', includes as one of its strategies the City of Neighbourhoods.

"In 2012, Dublin will be a city of interdependent neighbourhoods which will be nurtured, created, enhanced and sustained as the fundamental building blocks of the City" Another of its strategies is the Family Friendly City in which the role of all family members are valued and supported.

One clear and positive way children can be valued and supported is by creating healthy, safe, and imaginative play opportunities in each neighbourhood.

Each neighbourhood should be examined and planned as a whole entity by all stakeholders, particularly children, to evaluate and facilitate children's play opportunities. This exercise should take into account population, children's ages, available space, and present use of same.

***2 a) Dublin City Council will develop, in consultation with children, the community and relevant agencies, action plans for child friendly neighbourhoods that will provide a variety of play and cultural opportunities for children.***

### **3. Open Spaces**

Open spaces and parks of various sizes in a neighbourhood are advantageous for children's play. Dublin has many beautiful parks and provides open space in residential areas.

Dublin City Development Plan states the standard applicable to public open spaces in residential developments is as follows:

- a) a minimum of 10% of total site area  
a minimum of 20% of total site area in lands zoned Z12 and Z15, and so designed as to be accessible to the general public. (Ref.14.7.0)

The Department of Environment and Local Government produced a Parks Policy for Local Authorities, which recommends open space per head of population for parks. The following is required for a population of about 10,000:

- A neighbourhood park for 16 hectares (40 acres) and  
Two local parks each of 2 hectares (5 acres) (Ref. 3.6)

However this policy does not include requirements for play space specifically.

Play space is needed in the immediate area around where children live, in particular for younger children, that parents can oversee. Older children will venture further to avail of open space or facilities. Routes between these areas must be safe, attractive and could also be used as informal play spaces.

In Britain, where there is wider involvement in public play provision, recommendations have been developed for the public space to be designated for play. The National Playing Fields Association developed the 'Six Acre Standard' which includes a hierarchy of play spaces and could be a useful guideline when considering provision in Dublin.

It includes;

- Local Area for Play, (LAP), small area of open space suitable for children under 5 years of age and located within one minute of home.
- Local Equipped area for Play, (LEAP), a larger area with at least 5 types of equipment, mainly for 4-8 year olds and located within five minutes walk of home.
- Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play, (NEAP), this area would cater mainly for 8-14 year olds, be located within 15 minutes walking distance of home, and offer a minimum of eight types of equipment or recreational activities.

The review of the Dublin City Development Plan is addressing the efficacy of existing policies and standards and has identified the need for specific local areas for play policies and standards.

***3b) Dublin City Council will provide for a range of suitable play opportunities using a hierarchy of local open spaces, as part of the Dublin City Development Plan.***

#### **4. A Safe Environment**

Increased levels of traffic in Dublin City have made streets more dangerous and less child friendly than ever before. Traffic has consumed the traditional children's play space on

the street. There is no evidence that the numbers of vehicles on the roads will decrease so space needs to be created for children to use.

***4a) The Council, in recognising that most children play in the street, will ensure that the public domain is safe and attractive through designs that minimize speed and give the pedestrian priority within residential areas.***

Parents today may feel that children could be in danger while playing out on the streets. The effect of this is that children are encouraged to stay close to home and increasingly parents drive children to and from school and other activities. This further decreases children's physical activity.

***4b) Dublin City Council will strive to ensure that play areas and routes to school are safe and clean, thus encouraging use by all members of the community, which in turn will create a safer environment.***

## **5. Equal access**

All children need access to a wide range of play opportunities. We need to meet the needs of children with disabilities, children who are socially excluded or from minority groups. Every child likes to try out new ways of playing and needs opportunities of meeting new friends in a social environment.

Children with disabilities need to have their play integrated with other children rather than being segregated from their peers. All parts of modern playground equipment may not be accessible to children with disabilities but it is important to have elements of the equipment that they can use unaided. We need to consciously include children with disabilities when designing and installing play areas.

***5a) Dublin City Council is committed to providing play opportunities to all children, including children with disabilities, and irrespective of gender, race, religion, social class or culture.***

***5b) Priority will be given to areas of disadvantage that lack facilities and demonstrate particular needs.***

## **6. Environmental Play**

When children lived in rural or less developed suburban areas years ago there were always places to discover and explore. Research has shown that children, given the choice, would rather play with natural materials like sand and water, and in natural places like woods, hills and long grass. Today children do not have this freedom in the city and indeed many children are growing up with less understanding or appreciation of nature. They often do not have trees that they can climb, tadpoles to collect or the birth or death of animals to deal with.

*6a) Dublin City Council will be pro-active in creating and retaining growing zones or wild gardens where children could grow, explore, and learn from the natural environment. The council will co-operate with schools, youth projects, etc. who are working to improve children's access to knowledge through nature.*

## 7. Learning through Play

Through play children learn most of what they need to become healthy adults.

The acronym 'SPICE' is used to illustrate the various ways of learning that are happening while children are playing. It can also be used as a way to judge the value of different activities.

- S – Social – children playing alone or with other, learning to socialise, to interact with other people. Taking turns, sharing items, meeting other cultures.
- P – Physical – children climbing, swinging, running etc generally learning to use their limbs, muscles and building up their strength.
- I - Intellectual – children learning to use their mental ability and reason to solve problems, find solutions to how things work and understand how to use the items around them.
- C - Creative - children learning to make things, use their artistic abilities to produce pictures, music, dance, etc.
- E – Emotional – children learning to get on with each other, dealing with feelings like being liked or disliked, fear, confidence, successes and failures.

We can use this method to evaluate different play facilities that exist in Dublin at present. If we look at the modern playground from this point of view we can see that children will learn physically, socially and less so intellectually by using the equipment. Children cannot manipulate or change this equipment except perhaps in their imagination.

Emotional or creative learning takes place less on traditional play equipment because it does not always encourage interaction between children or adults or facilitate forms of creativity.

Another model of a play facility would be a play club run by parents who have received some training or experienced play leaders. Facilities like these have the possibility of offering a broader range of learning opportunities for children.

In a club with competent leaders and a good range of activities a child will learn through the full range of competencies. Well-trained leaders can create a safe situation where children can choose from various activities. This helps them to explore complex social situations, where they fit within them and how they cope with them. They can try out their creative skills and abilities through reading, art, music or dance. This will also flex their physical abilities and stretch their intellectual competence.

Many of the services that Dublin City Council provides create rich environments in which children can learn through play. Included in these would be the recreation centres, children's libraries, art galleries, museums, swimming pools, sport centres and the traffic school.

***7a) The Council will encourage and strive to provide play opportunities that cater for the full range of learning possible through play.***

***7b) The Council will continue to introduce children to learning, culture, and recreation through its development of services for children in its recreation centres, children's libraries, art galleries, museums, swimming pools, and sport centres etc..***

***7c) The Council recognises the value that trained playworkers can add to a play situation broadening children's experiences. The Council will actively pursue the introduction of trained playworkers.***

## **8. Playgrounds**

The major investment that Dublin City Council is putting into play is through conventional playgrounds placed in parks, flat complexes and housing estates around the city.

### ***8a) High Standards***

***Dublin City Council play equipment and safety surfaces will be manufactured and installed to most recent legal requirement, (presently ISEN 1176 and 1177). The design will be suitable to the age of the children for whom it is planned and the equipment for the younger and older ages will be segregated. The equipment should offer a good range of activities including climbing, sliding, balancing and swinging.***

Play opportunities must be as inventive as possible. Equipment that challenges children will hold their interest as children learn through testing themselves in new situations. Their natural inclination is to go that step further or climb that bit higher. An element of challenge and managed risk built into the design of equipment will help children to acquire new skills. Unnecessary risk must be eliminated.

### ***8b) Design***

***Dublin City Council will strive to provide challenging, innovative and varied play equipment that expands children's abilities and skills.***

### ***8c) Maintenance***

***Dublin City Council will centralise its inspection and maintenance of its playground equipment. Trained staff will carry out weekly inspections on all playgrounds and will***

*ensure maintenance is carried out. All accidents must be recorded centrally, which will become a bank on information and expertise on safety and controlling risks. All playgrounds will be inspected on completion and annually by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents or another qualified agency.*

#### **8d) Location**

*The location of playgrounds will be chosen in consultation with the community so as to ensure its full use, safety and create a positive sense of ownership among the surrounding residents.*

Play equipment should be:

- ❖ In full view of as much of the community as possible
- ❖ Part of general community space to stress its importance
- ❖ In a space separated from cars and traffic that can be reached safely by children.
- ❖ Away from a situation that could cause disruption or irritation to residents
- ❖ Easily accessible for maintenance

Some features that could add to the provision:

- ❖ A sense of enclosure for the children using the playground, one that can be seen through for example, low fencing, planting.
- ❖ The play area can be greatly enhanced by plenty of interesting and imaginative landscaping encouraging the wider interest of children. Children's serious involvement in the planning, landscaping and planting of a site is time consuming but worthwhile in the long term.
- ❖ Feature including hills, trees and shrubs, boulders etc. can add interest.
- ❖ Quiet spaces or features that create a sense of mystery or encourage imagination can add a wealth of play opportunities.
- ❖ If two or more playgrounds were to be placed in same vicinity it would be advantageous to use different styles of play equipment which would add value for children.

## **9. Space for Teenagers**

The bulk of this policy deals with children of less than 12 years. Teenagers are usually not considered or included when choosing play equipment.

Teenager's favourite occupation is 'hanging out' and talking. This is their form of social learning. Unfortunately play equipment often becomes the place to hang around, on occasions leading to damage. Other places where teenagers 'hang out' can be outside shops, or on corners outside houses or flats and this has the potential to cause disruption or fear to the community.

In Britain new initiatives have taken place that have attempted to address this problem. Thames Valley Police in England have introduced one such initiative and produced

information regarding others. In consultation with young people and the community separate space has been given to teenagers away from where it could be a nuisance. Simple structures have been used that are easily observed, cleaned and maintained yet they have a sense of enclosure that young people like. The young people were involved in the process all the way through and appreciated this space as their own. The initiative seems to have worked well and it has significantly reduced repair bills and some negative behaviour in the surrounding area.

***9a) The Council will, in consultation with young people and communities, explore innovative ways to create outdoor recreation space suitable for teenagers.***

## **10 Consultation**

Consultation is widely recognised as a valuable and necessary exercise to develop involvement and ownership within communities. Methods by which large organisations like Dublin City Council could consult with children are only beginning to be developed.

It would be a grave mistake if we were not to consult with children when it comes to play provision. They are the ones who will use the public space and the equipment. They will value it or not as the case may be. They know best what will give them a thrill, stretch their abilities or make them laugh.

***10a) The Council will consult with children, parents, and communities before making decisions of play provision and will do this in an imaginative, empowering and inclusive manner.***

## **11 Co-ordination of Services**

Dublin City Council has been involved in children's play for many years. Many new playgrounds have been installed around the city in recent years, both in parks and housing schemes. Playcentres, libraries, swimming pools, parks and sports facilities have offered many different types of play opportunity for children over the years.

This vast amount of experience can be enhanced with co-ordination and cross fertilisation. We can learn from what has worked well and develop methods of best practice. We may also learn from new ideas tried elsewhere, for instance by other local authorities or projects dealing with play.

Proper planning and design are key delivery mechanisms for the creation of neighbourhoods that are safe attractive and challenging for children and play opportunities. The planning and architects departments will therefore be actively involved in the

*11a) The Council will develop systems of co-ordination and best practice using the experience of various departments in Dublin City Council in order to provide the best possible service to children. To this end the Play Development Officer will develop a cross-departmental team involving all relevant departments of Dublin City Council. This will include Housing, Social, & Community Affairs, Parks & Landscaping Division, Planning Department, City Architects, Department of the Director of Traffic, Environment & Cultural Department including the Library Division, and the Arts Office.*

## **12 Partnership**

It is in the interests of the whole community that children have a safe, stimulating, and challenging childhood. Statutory agencies including the Area Health Boards, schools, Gardaí, and interests groups, but particularly parents are all essential stakeholders in creating a healthy environment in which children can learn and develop through play.

*12a) Dublin City Council will work in partnership with relevant statutory and voluntary agencies when planning for and providing for children's play.*

*12b) Apart from the children themselves, the interest and involvement of local parents is the most essential element in success when providing play equipment or play activities.*

*Parents will be invited to contribute by:*

- ❖ Involving themselves during the planning stages of play provision.*
- ❖ Fundraising towards the playground or play area.*
- ❖ Developing a gentle sense of ownership and supervision where equipment has been installed.*
- ❖ Organising some play activities using the facilities.*
- ❖ Reporting any hazardous situations in playgrounds*
- ❖ Reporting accidents or injuries that happen in the playgrounds or play areas.*

## **13 Play Development Team**

The presence of the Play Development Worker in an area can generate more awareness of the issue of play and increased levels of parents involvement in children's activities. New methods of consultation on the play facilities have encouraged more interaction and ownership.

*13a) The Council will employ a Play Development Officer and five Play Development Workers, one for each of the Dublin City Council Area Committee Areas.*

*13b) The Play Development Team will work to raise awareness of the value of play, its various elements, and the advantages of parent's involvement in their children's play. They will work with communities to create better opportunities for play, including free play, creative activities and group lead activities.*

***13c) The Play Development Team will develop resources, provide practical support, and training within communities and for groups that want to increase play opportunities for their children.***

***13d) The Play Development Team will develop a City Play Forum of interested people to encourage an exchange of information and learning.***

***13e) The Play Development Team, will monitor new developments in play and set up and maintain a method of evaluating changes or improvements in play provision.***

***13f) The Play Development Team will organise city wide events to celebrate our children's play.***

## **14 Training**

Children do not need training for playing but adults will often benefit from training if they are to create opportunities for a wide range of play. Indeed it would be considered essential if they are working with children in a community situation.

Play can happen at many different levels from children using open space on their own, to more organised activities in a playscheme type situation and therefore training needs to be equally flexible.

Training would be advisable for parents who may want to organise a few days out for the children on their street, or for those who may want to start a play club. Playwork training is also needed on an ongoing basis for staff working full time with children.

Training needs to be flexible, modular, accessible and fun. Subjects that should be covered in such training would include, what play is, it's advantages for children, planning activities, child protection etc.

This could mean training that could be part time or full time and modules could be built up to achieve a professional qualification. Staff employed by Dublin City Council must be trained to the highest level possible.

Playwork is beginning to be recognised as specific skill that requires the appropriate training. It is in the interest of Dublin City Council and the communities we serve to support the development of this training.

***14a) The Council will develop a package of flexible introductory training sessions that the Play Development Team can offer members of communities, which can build towards further training if required.***

*14b) The Council will support the development of training and accreditation for play work in conjunction with other relevant agencies.*

## **15 Funding Play Development**

*Dublin City Council will endeavor to fund play areas and equipment through a range of measures.*

These could include:

- Refurbishment/Regeneration Programmes
- Government Grant Schemes
- City Council revenue budgets where possible,
- Partnership initiatives with organisation such as the Dublin Docklands Authority
- Development Contribution Scheme
- Public Private Partnership ventures
- Commercial sponsorship
- New initiatives that may become available.

## **Appendix**

### **Dublin City Council's present children's play and cultural provision includes:**

Housing, Social and Community Services have installed playgrounds in flat complexes as part of Area Regeneration or Precinct Improvement Programmes. This work involves community workers, planners, and architects and is carried out in consultation with communities. Up to 28 new playgrounds have been installed in recent years.

The Parks & Landscape Services Division of the Environment and Culture Department has provided playgrounds with modern equipment in most of their 35 major parks around the city. There are presently 31 playgrounds in parks around the city.

Between Housing, Social and Community Services and Parks and Landscape Services Division there are 24 playgrounds in the planning stage for sites around the city.

The Community Development Section manages 5 Recreation Centres, including the Municipal Rowing Centre, most with full time staff that provide a range of quality play activities.

The Community Development Section has supported and grant aided summer projects for 30 years, averaging about 65 projects every summer catering for about 12,000 children and young people.

The Community Development Section supports and funds over 50 Summer Activities for local children, which are organised by local volunteers. These may consist of week long activities, fun days, or trips etc. Support is given by way of grants, information and expertise.

The Sports Section provide 7 swimming pools around the city and administer the booking of the many playing pitches in the parks.

The Community Development Section manages Sports Development Officers who aim to increase participation in sport and recreation in specific areas around the city. The Young People's Facilities and Services Fund provides the funding for the Sports Development Officers.

Public Libraries provide children's sections in 21 branches around the city where children will find books, music, and children's activity programmes. Many libraries offer access to computers and the internet.

The Hugh Lane Gallery operate a summer art club for 6 to 18yrs and a monthly art programme that takes place on Saturdays.