Play England policy summary

The Children’s Plan: Building brighter futures

“We will work with communities to create new and safer places to play and safe routes to play areas, and to provide positive structured activities for younger children”

Play in the Children’s Plan
The Children’s Plan, announced by the Children’s Secretary, Ed Balls to the House of Commons on 11 December 2007, includes £225 million of new government funding to create more and safer places to play. This investment, to be spent over three years, will allow for at least 3,500 playgrounds to be rebuilt or renewed, and made more accessible to disabled children.

The plan promises a wide-ranging national play strategy for mid 2008, to include training for 4,000 playworkers. A Play Pathfinder programme will pilot 30 new, staffed adventure playgrounds or supervised play parks and look for innovative approaches to promoting and supporting playable space and community involvement in play provision. The plan encourages the development of more Home Zones, greater use of 20mph speed limits and the promotion of outdoor play where children can learn how to manage risks.

The national play strategy will be cross-departmental, led by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and have significant engagement of the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Department of Health (DH), which will produce the first ever child health strategy next year.

Introduction
Following the debate in the House of Commons, DCSF published The Children’s Plan, Building brighter futures, which sets out the government’s strategy for children, young people and their families over the next ten years. The plan was based on consultation with parents, teachers, professionals, and children and young people themselves. The plan is underpinned by five principles:

• Government does not bring up children – parents do – so government needs to do more to back parents and families.
• All children have the potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents can take them.
• Children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life.
• Services need to be shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries.
• It is always better to prevent failure than tackle a crisis later.

Happy and healthy
Secure the well-being and health of children and young people

DCSF is committed to publishing a national cross-departmental play strategy by summer 2008 and has allocated over £225m over the next three years to:

- Offer every local authority capital funding that will allow at least\(^2\) 3,500 playgrounds nationally to be built or renewed and made accessible to children with disabilities.
- Create 30 new adventure playgrounds or supervised play parks for 8- to 13-year-olds in disadvantaged areas, supervised by trained staff.
- Enable 4,000 playworkers to achieve recognised play qualifications.

Active childhood
DCSF has announced that it will work with communities to create new and safer places to play and safe routes to play areas, and to provide positive structured activities for younger children. The plan recognises that children want places to play, and parents want their children to enjoy the same freedoms they had when they were growing up. The plan states that: ‘Supervised and unsupervised outdoor activities are important for children’s development and also to reduce obesity, build social and emotional resilience, develop social skills, strengthen friendships, help children learn how to deal with risks – and of course because children enjoy them’ (DCSF 2007: 28).

Extended schools
Extended schools, which all schools will become, offer access to a range of out of school opportunities. The plan states that:

‘By opening facilities for longer hours, extended schools are maximising the use of playing fields and providing greater opportunities for children and young people, including disabled children, to take part in a wide range of play and enriching activities before, during and after the school day’ (DCSF 2007: 28).

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\(^2\) Although the Children’s Plan says ‘up to’ 3,500 playgrounds, the Sectary of State said in Parliament ‘more than’ 3,500. [Hansard 11 December 2007: Column 163.]

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm071211/debtext/71211-0004.htm
To take extended schools forward DCSF has announced that they will promote further investment in outdoor play facilities on school sites through the school capital programmes, such as Building Schools for the Future.

**Local delivery**
The government outlines that local authorities and communities have a lead role in promoting play. DCSF announced its commitment to working with the DCMS and CLG to look for ways to support councils and the third sector to work with local communities. The department’s aim is to provide better physical environments, focusing in the first instance on disadvantaged communities, and ensuring new spaces to play are accessible to disabled children. DCSF wants to see strong participation of children, families and communities in the design of new spaces. This is part of the community empowerment agenda and will be critical to ensuring spaces meet local needs and wants.

In addition, a Play Pathfinders programme will be established to test innovative approaches to promoting and supporting play spaces. The programme will include 30 new, staffed adventure playgrounds or supervised play parks. The plan outlines a proposal to pilot new volunteering schemes that will support play. Drawing on lessons from these pathfinders and evaluations of existing approaches, DCSF intends, to extend capital funding to every local authority in England not already covered by the play pathfinders to support the delivery of stimulating local places to play.

**National play strategy**
The government also promises a cross-departmental national play strategy, led by DCSF. The play strategy will aim to support individuals in communities to take a professional role by providing funding to enable 4,000 play workers to achieve recognised play qualifications, and within that to enable a core of professionally qualified new graduate leaders to emerge.

DCSF has also proposed to work with CLG on reviews of statutory planning guidance, and in partnership with registered social landlords to improve the quality of play environments in some of the most deprived areas. Again DCSF has stated that they will work with CLG to produce guidance for planners on good play space. CLG will highlight to chief planning officers the importance of outdoor play for children.

Government also suggests that they will improve training for planners, highways officers and green space managers. In addition, government states that they ‘will work with local authorities and others to make child-friendly public space a feature of eco-towns and major new housing developments in the Growth Areas, Growth Points, and the legacy for the Olympic Park’ (DCSF 2007: 30).

**Safe and Sound**
**Safeguard the young and vulnerable**

The Children’s Plan states that keeping children and young people safe from harm is everyone’s responsibility. DCSF recognises that children need also to be able to learn, have new experiences and enjoy their childhoods. Government wants to encourage families to strike the right balance between keeping children safe and allowing them the freedom they need. It aims to support families is by:

- encouraging local authorities to create 20mph zones where appropriate
- strengthening the complaints procedure for parents whose children experience bullying.

Government is encouraging local authorities to create 20 mph zones where appropriate because they can reduce child pedestrian deaths by 70 per cent. Government suggests
that local authorities can also support child-friendly public space through speed limit reduction and traffic calming in residential areas and places where children play.

While The Children’s Plan acknowledges that 20 mph zones greatly reduce the risk of death and serious injury, it is not eliminated. In order to make streets themselves spaces for play, the DCSF is suggesting that Home Zones have the potential to transform the quality of life in local communities by restoring the balance between traffic and people living in a street.

Home Zones are residential areas where the streets are designed to limit vehicles to very low speeds. The aim is to improve the quality of life by making these areas places for people (including children playing) instead of simply corridors for motor traffic. Home Zones can bring communities together, making streets more sociable and better places to live. The government is therefore encouraging councils to support applications for Home Zones.

Key areas for reform
A comprehensive programme to improve children’s safety will be set out in the Staying Safe Action Plan due to be published in early 2008. One of the key areas for reform is to promote understanding and management of risks and risk taking in children’s lives and development.

Promoting understanding and management of risks
The Children’s Plan notes that bringing up children is the responsibility of families and carers. It also recognises that government has a role in helping parents and carers strike the right balance between protecting their children, managing risk and allowing them to learn and explore new situations safely.

The Staying Safe consultation document³ outlined the importance of all those within the children’s workforce, understanding children’s safety issues. It made several proposals to improve awareness and understanding through communications, including communicating to parents about both the potential benefits as well as the dangers of different types of risk their children are likely to encounter.

Government reports that the responses submitted the to the Staying Safe consultation were generally in favour of giving parents more information about safety and encouraging the public to be more involved in keeping children safe. The Children’s Plan states that: ‘We will promote better understanding of management of risks to children’s safety by launching a new communications campaign to provide parents with information about risk and harm faced by children, with a focus on high-risk households, and to encourage the general public to play a role in keeping children safe’ (DCSF 2007: 43). Further information on this will be announced in the Staying Safe Action Plan in early 2008.

Safeguarding children and young people
Government wants all employers and stakeholders, including those in the voluntary sector, to understand the implications of the new Independent Safeguarding Authority for their paid staff and volunteers. It is proposed that the new Independent Safeguarding Authority will be established in early 2008 (an outcome of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006). In response to views given in the Staying Safe consultation, the Children’s Plan commits the government to consider in the Staying Safe Action Plan describing how voluntary sector organisations can practice safe recruitment and employment, as part of their wider work in keeping children safe.

Excellence and equality
Individual progress to achieve world-class standards and close the gap in educational achievement for children from disadvantaged families.

The government recognises that the curriculum should help children move seamlessly from nurseries to schools, from primary to secondary education, and then on to work or further and higher education. School should ensure all children secure the basics, while allowing flexibility to learn new skills and develop the social and emotional skills they need to succeed.

In chapter three, The Children’s Plan notes that young children often experience difficulties in the transfer from a pre-school setting into school, or the transition from the Early Years Foundation Stage in a reception class into the first year of Key Stage 1. The plan states that:

‘This is a period when children are developing fast and where changes in routines can be unsettling. The change can currently represent a sharp shift in style – with much more formal methods of teaching replacing a play-based environment’ (DCSF 2007: 62).

In response to this the government has announced that the new review of the Primary Curriculum, to be led by Sir Jim Rose, should to ensure there is a smoother transition from play-based learning in the early years into primary school Key Stage 1.

On the right track
Keeping children and young people on the path to success

Positive activities and experiences are a vital part of happy and enjoyable teenage years. The government has already announced investment of £60 million for improving youth facilities in advance of funding released from unclaimed assets. But DCSF wants further and faster transformation of the lives of young people. In the Children’s Plan, government have announced that they will:

- Invest £160 million over the next two-years to improve the quality and range of places for young people to go and things for them to do.
- Develop an entitlement for all young people to participate in positive activities that develop their talents including piloting a new offer to take part in cultural activities in and out of school.

Making it happen
A vision for 21st century children’s services

The government’s vision is for a professional children’s workforce that is graduate led and, where appropriate is qualified at least to level 3 and reflects the diversity of the population. The government has made good progress in this area and now wants to extend it the play and the out-of-school childcare workforce.

To ensure that the right structures are in place to support the professionalisation of the workforce the government has proposed re-examining the remit and scope of the organisations undertaking sector skills council and workforce reform. The government has also announced it will be exploring the scope for bringing within the remit of the Children’s Workforce Development Council some groups that are currently supported by other sector skills councils to reinforce the concept of a single workforce.
By 2010 DCSF want to see:
• All schools providing access to a range of extended services. DCSF notes that schools are expected to offer a range of activities including ‘study support and play, support for parents, family learning and more specialist support, swift and easy referral to specialist and targeted services, and wider community access to ICT, sports, adult learning and the arts.’

By 2020 DCFS want to see:
• All children able to enjoy an active childhood, with safe places to play independently
• All young people participating in positive activities to develop personal and social skills and promote wellbeing.

www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/?pid=childrens_plan

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