

Soft Start



September 2021



What is a soft start?

- A short period of time and space first thing in the morning for children to choose a settling-in task to prepare them for the day ahead.
- Child-led choice of indoor and/or outdoor free play activities



Why a soft start?

- It prepares children's brains to meet the mental, emotional and social challenges of the learning for the day ahead.
- It provides opportunities for play, emotional growth and social connection between children as well as with their teacher.
- It provides a more balanced starting point to the day for all children.
- As adults, we need time and space each morning to mentally prepare ourselves for the day ahead and with a soft start, we are providing opportunities for our children to have the same preparation.



What activities are offered?

- Depends on the age of the children, interests, development needs and class curriculum themes.
- A choice of play opportunities are initially offered and, in time, the activities incorporate the children's own suggestions and ideas.
- A variety of indoor and outdoor choices:
 - **younger children** - role play, small world play, reading, drawing, construction, craft area, woodwork, puzzles, reading, Smartboard activity, maths games, climbing trees, wheeled toys, mud kitchen etc.
 - **older children** - drawing, reading, maths games, sewing, knitting, origami, skipping, yoga, playdough, teacher directed iPad activities, construction, small world play, whittling, chess, finger knitting etc.



Benefits of Soft Start

- By providing opportunities for self-directed play, this supports children's own health and well-being.
- Children begin their day feeling less rushed and more relaxed, allowing them to settle more quickly into formal learning.
- Play provides opportunities for the development of many soft skills, including:
 - Creativity, curiosity and imagination
 - Emotional regulation and social skills
 - Independence
 - Problem-solving
 - Teamwork and co-operation



Children's views of Soft Start

I like going to the Lego and I like helping to tidy up after (P1)

You can burn off some energy and have some fun before you sit down. I like going outside and to the computers (P3)

It's calming and you don't worry about having to start work straight away, especially if it's work you know will be tricky for you (P6)

You see a new side to your classmates during soft start that you wouldn't usually see when just doing teacher activities (P7)

I get to play with the costumes and my friends (P2)

I don't like going in to work, work, work first thing. I like to get my brain started by playing first (P4)

It gets you ready to start work. You are more awake and ready after soft start (P6)

You get a bit of free choice and it eases you into the day and work. You also get to try new stuff you might not usually do at school (P7)

It starts my brain running doing soft start first (P6)



Learning through play isn't the absence of teaching. It's teaching through conversation, questions and interactions.



Further information on the benefits of play

- Play Strategy for Scotland - Scottish Government - [Play strategy for Scotland: our vision - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)
- Play Scotland - www.playscotland.org - Delivering and celebrating children right to play
- Play in Early Childhood - a short film from Harvard University on the importance of play: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=pjoyBZYk2zI>
- Top tips playing and being well - explains for parents how playing helps children deal with change and stress: https://issuu.com/playwales/docs/top_tips_-_playing_and_well-being?fr=sOGI4ZjEyMTMONzE
- How Every Child can Thrive by Five: TED Talk [Molly Wright: How every child can thrive by five | TED Talk](#)
- Children's Right to Play - position paper from British Psychological Society - [PP17 Children's right to play.pdf \(bps.org.uk\)](#)