Transcript: Grounds for Learning - Building support

Narrator: Having watched these films, hopefully you’re now feeling inspired and have some ideas that you want to take forward. Like any change, developing your play provision will benefit from some careful planning and thinking.

In this final clip we look at some simple ideas to help ensure success. Getting everyone in your school enthusiastically behind play is really important; often the best way to do this is to let them observe children at play. In some schools, teachers have used their planning and CPD time to observe play at lunchtimes to look for links between what children are doing through play and what teachers are delivering in class. It’s also important to get your parents on board, they can be a great source of materials and skills, but it’s also vital that they understand the value of play for their children. Most schools have found that the best way to do this is to let parents see their children at play, this can be through displays at school or pictures on your website, but, if you can, let them watch their children playing first-hand. Some school have done this by organising Saturday morning family play sessions, while others have invited groups of parents to join in play thirty minutes before the end of the school day. Children will be enthusiastic supporters of improved play but it’s important that you help them to take ownership and responsibility for looking after and tidying away materials. This teaches them useful life skills but it’s also important practically, ensuring that staff aren’t landed with lots of additional work.

One of the best ways of building support across the school is to capture all the great experiences that your children are having in a short play policy. A well written statement will help all parents and staff to understand what you’re doing and why.

One of the most important things that adults can do to support play is to observe closely and understand what’s going on.  Use your observations to identify what’s working well and why and to plan changes you could make to improve play. It’ll be really helpful if there are regular opportunities, ideally every month for Playground Supervisors to meet with teachers and management staff to discuss progress and plan changes. Think about how you can maintain an element of variety and freshness in play opportunities. One way of doing this is to have occasional themed weeks, for example focusing on cardboard boxes, wheeled toys or water play. Keeping things fresh also involves some simple maintenance so take time to plan this and identify how often you need to check, clean, sort and replace materials.

Storing your play materials well is really important, a secure outdoor shed is great if you have one but some materials can be stored effectively outdoors in open bays while others can be kept in locked trunks or even in plastic crates that can be kept indoors. If children have ready access to materials that are well-organised and attractively presented, then they are more likely to be used and valued.

David Hughes, Headteacher, Thornlie Primary School: It could be frustrating for people seeing this playground thing, well how could we, we could never do that, we don’t, we’ve got a square of concrete and we’ve got no money but here’s an important message, let’s just make a start, we make the path by walking, it’s one footstep and I would totally recommend to anybody to make that start, work with your children, open your eyes, use your ears, use your senses and do what you need to do.