



Dear Families of Silchester

I am delighted to write to you about an exciting new initiative that we are introducing at Silchester School this year called **Let's Play!**

At Silchester, we believe that every child deserves a great playtime, every day. We know that play is a hugely important part of childhood and, this year, we are placing an even greater focus on ensuring that our playtimes are fun, engaging, inclusive, creative and full of opportunities for children to flourish.



Before embarking on this journey, we wanted to hear directly from our children and families about what they value most about play. I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who took the time to complete our recent Play Survey. The response was fantastic and the feedback has given us a clear picture of what our community values most.

What did the survey tell us?

The key messages that emerged were incredibly positive and consistent. Having analysed the feedback, the survey has helped to highlight the following and according to our community survey...

The most highly rated benefits of play are:

- Using imagination and creativity
- Having fun

Children's favourite types of play include:

- Nature play
- Playing with friends
- Climbing and adventurous play

The values most associated with play are:

- Curiosity
- Creativity
- Friendship

What makes play enjoyable?

- Spending time with friends
- Having freedom to choose
- Using imagination

Areas of the school that families would like to see developed further include:

- More climbing and adventure opportunities
- More nature-based play spaces
- More opportunities for creative and imaginative play

We were delighted to see such a strong emphasis on creativity, friendship, curiosity and exploration, as these are all qualities that we value highly at Silchester School.

Why are we focusing on play?

When people think about school improvement, they often think about classrooms, lessons and learning. However, playtime is actually a hugely significant part of a child's school experience.

In fact, children spend approximately 20% of their time at school playing. This amounts to around 231 hours every year, the equivalent of 37 school days or 7.4 weeks annually. Across the whole of a child's primary education, this adds up to around 1.4 years spent at play.

When we look at those figures, it becomes clear that play deserves just as much thought, care and attention as any other part of school life. If children spend such a significant proportion of their school experience playing, then we have a responsibility to make that experience the very best it can be.

When we look at many modern childhood experiences, screentime etc. it is easy to see how opportunities for adventurous outdoor play have changed over time. At Silchester, we want to ensure that our children continue to have access to rich and varied outdoor experiences that support their development and wellbeing.

Play is not simply a break from learning. It is a vital part of learning. Research and the experiences of schools that have invested in improving play opportunities show some remarkable outcomes.

Schools report:

- Improved behaviour and fewer playground conflicts
- Happier children and improved mental wellbeing
- Greater levels of physical activity
- Stronger social and emotional development
- Increased independence and self-regulation
- Improved creativity, imagination and collaborative skills
- Better engagement with classroom learning
- Improved attendance
- Reduced accidents and incidents during playtimes
- More productive afternoon learning sessions
- Increased staff wellbeing



Perhaps most importantly of all, schools consistently report that children are happier and more enthusiastic about coming to school.

As parents, we all want our children to be happy, healthy and successful. High-quality play can make a significant contribution to each of these areas.

What will 'Let's Play' look like?

This week, we have started by introducing different zones and equipment on the playground to include dressing-up, small world play, toys, craft, music and sports. So far, as you can see, it has been fantastically received!

Over time, we plan to extend these zones to include many other different aspects of play like opening the forest school area at lunchtime, den building, construction etc. To enable this expansion, we are excited to share some building developments that will be happening in the school grounds.

Thanks to obtaining a grant from the diocese accessed via our voluntary aided church school status and an incredible donation from our fantastic PTA, we will shortly be able to improve our school grounds with the following projects:

- Renovating Augusts Garden to create a nature space for relaxing in the shade of the tree.
- Putting in a new climbing frame lumber stack with safety surface.
- Adding two covered sandpits to the playground for all.
- Adding a gate to both improve security and enable children to access forest school and the front of the school during playtimes.
- Putting in a new child-friendly surfacing in the continuous provision outside space so that all children can enjoy it all year round.



Some of these changes may be small and happen quickly. Others will develop over time as we gather feedback, trial new ideas and continue to listen to our children and families.

Our children will be at the heart of this journey. Their ideas, interests and experiences will help shape the future of play at Silchester School.

Our Let's Play Charter

One of the aspects of this initiative that we are most proud of is that it is being shaped by our children.

Our Year 6 Let's Play Leaders have worked together to develop a Let's Play Charter, which has already been shared with pupils across the school. The Charter is designed to help us create playtimes that are fun, inclusive and enjoyable for everyone.

The Charter also reflects our core school values of **Compassion, Courage and Respect**, ensuring that the way we play together is just as important as what we play.

We are incredibly proud of our Year 6 leaders for taking on this responsibility and helping to shape the culture of play across the school. As Let's Play develops, they will continue to act as ambassadors for positive play and are already supporting the younger children and helping to resolve problems.



How can you help?

As with any successful school initiative, the support of our families will make a huge difference.

One of the key principles of Let's Play is helping children develop confidence, resilience and independence through their play. This includes giving children opportunities to experience appropriate levels of challenge and risk. Whether it is climbing, balancing, building, creating, exploring or trying something new, children learn valuable life skills when they are able to take managed risks in a safe and supportive environment. While we always prioritise children's safety, we



also recognise that learning how to assess and manage risk for themselves is an important part of growing up, hence why we are encouraging it!

You may also help by supporting our efforts to expand the range of resources available for play. Many of the most engaging play opportunities come from simple, everyday items that can be given a new purpose through children's imagination and creativity.

If you are having a clear out at home, we would love to receive donations as detailed in the poster below:

Over the next few weeks, we will place a Let's Play Collection Box at the front of school. If you have any items that you think could be given a new lease of life through children's play, please do drop them in.

Together, we can create a rich, imaginative and inspiring play environment that reflects the creativity, curiosity and enthusiasm of our wonderful children.

Looking ahead

This aspect of school improvement aligns perfectly with our commitment to developing happy, confident, resilient and curious learners.

The survey findings reminded us that the things children value most are often wonderfully simple: friendship, imagination, creativity, freedom and fun.

Through **Let's Play!**, we hope to nurture all of these things and ensure that every child experiences a playtime that they genuinely look forward to each day.

This is the start of an exciting journey for our school, and we look forward to sharing regular updates, celebrating successes and involving our community as Let's Play develops over the coming year.

Thank you, as always, for your ongoing support.

Rachel Moir

Rachel Moir
Head of School

