Marvellous Messy Play

Messy play, also known as sensory play, offers a wealth of benefits for children's development and is highly valued within our provision at Hambledon Nursery School.

We are passionate about offering a huge variety of malleable play provision which is provided daily. The malleable materials change between those offered in morning to those within the afternoon session, so that what children experience is constantly fresh and exciting and captures their interest.

At Hambledon Nursery we support messy play based on research that has shown that children who experiment with messy play are developing cognitively; the wires in the brains are making special connections, often engaged for longer periods of time than in other areas of the classroom. Messy play is a powerful, first-hand sensory experience, that fosters focus and attention because children tend to engage with it in deep concentration.

Messy play activities primarily support a child's physical development, that all important hand eye coordination, manual dexterity and fine manipulative skills, all of which aid the development of muscles within the hand, aiding in their development towards gaining pencil control.

Malleable activities include water play, sand, playdough, dry rice, pasta, and shaving foam and offering utensils and vessels are very important within this learning zone so that the children can access them freely and choose what they select under their own initiative.

When we observe and support children engaged in messy play, we try to give them an enormous amount of freedom. Freedom to explore, to experiment and discover. Sometimes we ask ourselves, how far can this play go? We have had many instances of whole-body swimming through shaving foam, jelly in hair and mud between toes!

Let’s dive deeper into understanding some of the advantages of messy play:

Fine and Gross Motor Skills Development: Messy play encourages children to use their hands, fingers, and whole body to explore different textures, substances, and materials.

Sensory Exploration and Stimulation: Engaging in messy play allows children to experience various sensory inputs. They can feel different textures (smooth, rough, sticky), hear sounds (like squishing or pouring), and even smell different scents (such as scented playdough).

Creativity and Imagination: Messy play encourages creativity and imagination. When children are given the freedom to explore and create with materials, they can invent their own stories, build imaginary worlds, and come up with unique ideas.

Language and Communication Skills: During messy play, children often engage in conversations with peers or adults. They describe what they’re doing, ask questions, and express their thoughts.

Emotional Regulation and Confidence: Messy play can be both exciting and challenging. Children learn to manage their emotions when faced with new textures or unexpected outcomes.

Social Interaction and Cooperation:
When children engage in messy play together, they learn to share, take turns, and cooperate. They negotiate roles and collaborate on projects (like building a sandcastle).

Cognitive Development: Messy play involves problem-solving. Children figure out how to shape clay, mix colours, or build structures. They learn cause-and-effect relationships (for example, pouring water into sand makes it wet) and develop their cognitive skills.