

Early Years Policy

October 2019

Overview

The Bettridge School Early Years Curriculum is drawn from the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) documentation. The Development Matters in the Early Years materials are used to support and enhance the EYFS documentation.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following: curriculum policy; assessment policy and the Keeping Children Safe in Education policy.

Safeguarding is an essential part of our policies and practice at Bettridge School. The prime areas: Physical Development, Communication and Language, and Personal, Social and Emotional Development, including teaching children how to stay safe is integral to each pupil's curriculum. In a variety of contexts, pupils are taught core British Values. Pupils and staff respect others and celebrate diversity. This ethos underpins all areas of the curriculum. Pupils are taught to express their feelings and communicate their concerns. Staff work with pupils who have communication difficulties to ensure they can express their feelings and needs so their voices are heard alongside their more verbal peers. A Total Communication approach is used across the school to provide greater access to the curriculum and supports Safeguarding.

The four guiding principles shape and underpin all practice within the classes following the Early Years curriculum:

1. Each child is a **unique child**. We recognise that each child is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. We recognise that each of our children develop in individual ways and practitioners prepare next steps that are appropriate to individuals.
2. Children learn to be strong and independent through **positive relationships**. Strong relationships between home and school are incredibly important to the learning and progress made by the children. We actively seek to build these relationships as early on in a child's school life as possible. We also ensure that children have positive relationships with the staff in their class and seek to develop these over the course of the school year.
3. Children learn and develop well in **enabling environments**, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs. There is a strong partnership between school and parents/carers. The curriculum is delivered through learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom. Staff ensure that the learning environments are appropriate for learners, and that these are reviewed regularly, this includes the use of learning labs.

4. **Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.** We ensure that children have access to learning opportunities presented in a variety of ways and we encourage appropriately challenging activities, learning through play, sensory activities and structured work tasks across the Prime and Specific areas of learning. We recognise that these areas are closely linked and that they often rely on each other to enhance learner progress.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

When planning and supporting activities, staff reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- **Playing and exploring** - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go'
- **Active learning** - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements
- **Creating and thinking critically** - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things

Staff actively encourage opportunities for effective learning to take place for the children in their classes using these characteristics. Staff promote increasing opportunities for child-led learning to take place within the learning environments, and learning labs are available for children to access as appropriate to their needs.

Areas of the Curriculum

There are seven areas of learning and development that must shape educational programmes in Early Years settings. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected. Three areas are particularly crucial for igniting pupil's curiosity, enthusiasm and readiness for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive. These three **prime areas**, are:

- **Communication and Language** – ensuring that children are given the experience of a language rich environment, they are given the confidence to speak and use their voice in a variety of situations as well as the confidence to express themselves
- **Physical Development** – providing children with opportunities to be active and to develop their control, coordination and fine motor skills; this also encompasses promoting healthy eating and making good choices about food and drink.
- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development** – promoting our children to develop a positive sense of themselves as an individual; forming positive relationships with others around them; developing play skills, their feelings and behaviour as well as their respect for each other.

Staff also support children in four **specific areas**, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied. The specific areas are:

- **Literacy** involves making links between letters and sounds, providing our children with the tools to be able to read and write. Children have access to a wide range of reading materials to spark their curiosity.
- **Mathematics** involves providing opportunities for children to explore number names and the concept of numbers and counting leading to opportunities for them to calculate simple addition and subtraction problems; the ability to name and describe simple shapes, patterns and measures
- **Understanding the world** involves guiding our children and helping them to make sense of their physical environment and their community through giving them opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people and places, technology and the environment.
- **Expressive arts and design** involves enabling our children to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials, as well as providing opportunities and encouragement for sharing their thoughts, ideas, and feelings through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role-play and design technology.

Within the classes following the Early Years Curriculum, we focus initially on the prime areas as these provide the basis for successful learning in the other specific areas. These prime areas reflect the key skills and capacities children need in order to develop and learn effectively as they progress through their school life.

We use the Development Matters in the Early Years materials. This is non-statutory guidance material which supports practitioners in implementing the statutory requirements of the EYFS.

We follow a 3 year thematic cycle with overarching themes in our early years/key stage one classes. These are reviewed regularly and are influenced by needs and interests. Staff ensure that activities are challenging and that there is a mix of adult led and child led activities. Staff ensure that learning environments are suitable to the needs of the children within their class, and that these are reviewed regularly.

Sessions

Children in their pre-reception year largely have 15 hour placements. These can be used flexibly to suit the needs of the child. Some families may recognise that 3 hours each day is what their child needs; while others may want their child to have two full days and one morning/afternoon. We meet with parents ahead of their child starting Bettridge (physically or over the phone) to discuss their child's access to sessions.

Use of space

We believe that children learn by playing and exploring, being active and through creative and critical thinking which takes place both indoors and outside.

Classes have timetabled slots in the specialist classrooms within the school (for example: the sensory room, the hall, the soft play area). These may be used for small group, whole class or individuals.

Each classroom has its own outdoor learning area to enable staff to take learning outside of the classroom. Pupils in our younger classes have sole access to the smaller playground equipment at the front of the school.

Assessment at the end of Reception – Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP)

In the final term of the Reception year, an EYFS Profile will be completed for each child. The Profile provides a comprehensive picture of a child's knowledge, understanding and abilities, their progress against expected outcomes and their readiness for the next phase of their educational journey.

Bettridge School works closely with the other SEN settings on moderation. A cluster group of SEN settings meets regularly to challenge, support and moderate each other's practice