



EARLY YEARS POLICY

Rationale

At Blenheim Primary school we believe that learning in the early years should be primarily first hand, experiential and active. We will give young children opportunities and space to explore and discover in a secure environment. We recognise that although all children follow sequential patterns of development every child is unique, having their own competencies which need to be brought out and built upon. Young children's learning should be embedded in what is familiar involving play as an essential and rich part of the learning process. Learning should always be a pleasurable and rewarding experience; taking place in a social context. We encourage children's independence and autonomy with them taking responsibility for their learning as much as possible in an atmosphere of security and self- discipline. We also believe that young children learn best when their well being levels are high.

Aims and Objectives for the Foundation Stage

We aim to:

- Provide a caring and secure environment, where each child is valued as an individual.
- Provide equal opportunities for all children, incorporating different cultures, religions and special needs
- Develop every child's confidence and self-esteem to help them become caring and social individuals.
- Provide a flexible and stimulating curriculum across the seven areas of learning.
- Plan challenging learning experiences that have been informed by observation and assessment.
- Provide a range of opportunities that are both adult and child initiated within the classroom and outdoor classroom environment.
- Provide secure and safe learning environments indoors and out.
- Work in partnership with parents

Foundation Stage Curriculum

We adhere to the Statutory Framework of the EYFS (2012) and the four guiding principles that shape and guide practice within our Early Years setting. These are:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments
- Learning and Development

A Unique Child

At Blenheim we recognise that every child is a competent learner who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. We recognise that children develop in individual ways and at varying rates.

Inclusion

All children and their families are valued and treated fairly at Blenheim regardless of race, gender, religion or ability. Children are treated as individuals and have equal access to all provisions available. All children are encouraged to achieve their personal best and planning is adapted to meet the needs of all groups and abilities. Early identification of special needs is crucial to enable staff to support the development of each child. Concerns are always discussed with parents at an early stage and the schools SENCO (special educational needs coordinator) is called upon for further information and advice.

Positive Relationships

At Blenheim we recognise that children learn to be strong, confident and independent from being in secure relationships. We always aim to develop caring, respectful, professional relationships with the children and their families.

Parents as Partners and the Wider community

At Blenheim we recognise that parents are children's first and most enduring educators and we value the contributions and support that they give their child and us. This process is developed and strengthened by:

- Induction Meetings where our aims are presented to, and discussed with, the parents.
- Our Induction Process, offering both parents and children the opportunity to spend time in the Foundation Stage before starting school.
- Always operating an open door policy for parents with any queries.
- Offering two parent evenings throughout the course of the year.
- Displaying the children's fantastic work in the classroom and ensuring that parents/carers are made aware of this.
- Holding workshops for parents throughout the year, offering support with the EYFS new curriculum, Reading, phonics (Read, Write, Inc), Mathematics and discussing with parents successful transition in to Year 1
- Sharing the children's 'Learning Journey's' with the parents and valuing the on-going contributions to these from parents.

- Developing a range of activities throughout the year that encourage collaboration between the child, school and parents. (Parent events and Open sessions, parent groups).

Before a child starts at Blenheim Primary School or nursery, parents will be home visited and asked to complete a '**starting school sheet**'. This document provides the teacher with valuable information regarding the children's level of development, likes/dislikes, health concerns and family background. Sharing this information allows the parents to raise and share any concerns that they may have regarding their child starting school or nursery and begins to form the close link between the teacher and the child.

We have developed strong links with the large number and variety of Pre-schools and Nurseries that feed into Blenheim. The Foundation Stage Staff meet with all providers to discuss each individual child and their transition into school or nursery, at their setting and through Cluster meetings throughout the year.

Enabling Environments

At Blenheim Primary School we recognise that the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending the children's development. This begins by observing the children and assessing their interests, development and learning, before planning challenging but achievable activities and experiences.

The Learning Environment

The Foundation Stage classrooms are organised to allow children to explore and learn securely and safely. There are areas where the children can be active, be quiet, creative etc. The Foundation Stage has its own outdoor classroom area. The free flow between the inside and the outside has a positive effect on the children's development. Being outdoors offers opportunities for doing things in different ways and on different scales than when indoors. The children can explore, use their senses and be physically active and exuberant. The foundation stage at Blenheim is undergoing a redevelopment of its outdoor space, to transform in to a 'forest schools' area which will enhance all areas of the children's learning, and be an invaluable addition to not only the FS stage but to the whole school.

Learning and Development

We plan a relevant, stimulating and challenging curriculum that is based upon our observations and assessments of all the children. By assessing the children's needs and stages across the seven areas of the curriculum we allow them to achieve and exceed the Early Learning Goals.

All seven areas of learning and development, in combination with the Characteristics of an Effective Learner, are important and inter-connected.

Three areas (**Prime Areas**) are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive.

The **Prime Areas** are:

- **Personal, Social and Emotional Development.**
- **Communication and Language**
- **Physical Development.**

Children are supported through the four **Specific Areas** through which the three Prime Areas are strengthened and applied.

The **Specific Areas** are:

- **Literacy**
- **Mathematics**
- **Understanding the World**
- **Expressive Arts and Design**

The way in which the child engages with other people and their environment underpin learning and development across all areas and support the child to remain an effective and motivated learner. The **Characteristics of Effective Learning** are:

- **Playing and Exploring**
- **Active Learning**
- **Creating and thinking critically.**

Observation, Assessment and Planning

Foundation Stage staff (Teachers and Teaching Assistants) use observations as the basis for planning. Foundation Stage Staff are skilled at observing children to identify their achievements, interests and next steps for learning. These observations then lead the direction of the planning and ensure that the children's interests are explored and developed. This fostering of the children's interests develops a high level of motivation for the children's learning. The Planning objectives within the Foundation Stage are from the Development Matters Statements from the Early Years Foundation Stage document. We make regular assessments of children's learning and we use this information to ensure that future planning reflects identified needs. Assessment in the Foundation Stage takes the form of both formal and informal observations. At the end of their foundation year in school the children's progress is recorded on to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. Each child's level of development is recorded against the 17 Early Learning Goals. Their development is also tracked using the Pupil Tracker at the start of the year and at regular intervals throughout their first year at school.

The Open XS cluster

The Foundation Stage leader (cascading to all FS team) meets with fellow colleagues from schools in our cluster (Rosebank, Quarry Mount, Brudenell and Little London) and discusses ways to build upon current good practice. This very successful initiative has provided opportunities for the Foundation Stage staff to work together in a very productive and efficient way. Through this, we have recognised our strengths, and set yearly targets, which will directly benefit the children. This is an on-going tool that we use to channel and plot the development of our good practice. It also enables us access to differing levels of experiences that can aid us in our every-day practice. The staff between our cluster schools also meet monthly to moderate the children's learning and development.

Resources

Provision of learning resources will be reviewed at least every term to ensure that equipment is in good condition and replaced or updated as necessary and as resources allow. If any member of staff or helper becomes aware of any health and safety issue they should stop children using that equipment or area and inform the class teacher as soon as possible. The class teacher will then inform the head teacher. Specific areas are checked through our on-going 'Daily Health and Safety check' to ensure that all areas are clean, safe and appropriate for use by all of the children.

Staffing

Teaching staff

The ratio of teaching staff is kept as high as finances allow. TA's within the unit are used to support children's learning, working alongside teaching staff. They are expected to work under the direction of the class teacher, following verbal and written directions given to them on daily or weekly planning sheet. At all times they should help support children achieve learning intentions in as independent a manner as is possible at their stage of development. TAs are expected to report back to teaching staff noting success as well as concerns either verbally or through the feedback column on the weekly planning sheets and observation assessments.

Admissions

Children are admitted to school following the procedures outlined in our Schools Admissions Policy (See the Policy for more details). All the children, regardless of when their birthday is within the specific academic year, will begin school at the start of September. We offer a staggered entry in September to enable us to suit a child's individual needs.

Ofsted 2015 stated that we:

- ...Provide a bright and stimulating place in which children thrive.
- All this takes place in a warm and caring atmosphere where children are treated as individuals.
- They receive lots of praise and encouragement and this raises children's self-esteem and confidence. As a result, they behave well.
- The early years provides a wide variety of learning experiences. Adults interact well with children and look for ways in which to extend children's skills.