



## **Ethos and Curriculum at Nest Nursery**

We follow the Forest School approach, which is an inspirational process that offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a natural outdoors woodland environment.

We have also devised 8 curricular goals in consultation with our parents and staff within which the Forest School approach is embedded. These goals are carefully differentiated according to the development stages of the children in each room. They are tailored to offer more challenges as the children get older. The goals describe what children should be doing by the time they leave that room.

We ask ourselves the following question: Are our children happy, thriving and learning?

Our starting point is to ensure that all children are happy and settled and have strong, warm attachments to the adults. We are always on hand with cuddles and reassurance if children need them. There are plenty of adults to attend to the children's individual needs, all staff know the children really well, and Key People build strong, supportive relationships with their key children and their families, working collaboratively to make sure that each child's emotional, physical and developmental needs are met. Our happy, settled children make the most of all the activities we have on offer.

Play is at the heart of everything we do. Play comes instinctively to children. Children challenge themselves through play, explore how the world works, work through emotions to achieve self-regulation (Appendix 1, No. 6) and learn that other people have thoughts and feelings, too. Through play, children develop the characteristics to be able to thrive in all their future endeavours as a life-long learner. Everything we do at Nest Nursery is designed to promote the freedom to play, and to develop Executive Function (Appendix 1, No.6) through this as well as the following characteristics; -

Resilience - Imagination - Focus - Curiosity - Willingness to try new things - Self expression - Critical thinking - The love of achieving a goal – Independence

Our Continuous Provision and Weekly plans offer open-ended, non-prescriptive play in each area of our setting and allows children to fully explore their environment, follow their interests and become fully immersed in their chosen activity. We respect the importance of being able to concentrate without interruption, so do not call them over to adult-led activities, instead adults continuously assess children's development whilst observing them at play and sensitively intervene when appropriate for example to scaffold a child's learning to help them achieve their aims (Appendix 2). Children engage in and reflect on their learning through their Special Books and displays which include the child's voice.

We meet all children where they are and gently challenge them to extend their learning through open-ended, carefully chosen resources, and by engaging in sustained shared thinking (appendix 3). To encourage children to be part of the process, practitioners use language such as "I wonder what would happen if..." or "I wonder why that has happened?"

We know that through play, children are developing the characteristics and building the foundations for success at school and beyond. We believe in depth in learning over breadth, e.g. instead of counting to higher numbers we deepen understanding of each number in different forms and contexts. Talking to the children, playing with them, and tuning into their thought processes are all far more important to us than writing down hundreds of observations. We note down the most important events on Family, but spend a much larger proportion of our time playing and interacting with the children. Our practitioners intervene sensitively having assessed what level of support a child needs, if any. We use Prompting, and Modelling skills (Appendix 2) and offer help to the child if necessary. We aim to bring children to a point where they can self-scaffold in order to succeed independently.

Some children favour playing indoors while others prefer to stay outside. That's why our children are able to



continue to access indoor play, where we influence our inside weekly plan to include elements of Forest School learning.

We understand the importance of children's emotional wellbeing. (Appendix 4)

We are constantly reflecting on our practice, attending training and talking to each other about good practice. Staff professional development is encouraged and invested in. We aspire for our children to be life-long learners and our staff team are life-long learners, too!

Partnership with parents is high on our agenda. This is mainly through the Family App on a day to day basis and especially during a child's Focus Period, as well as conversations with parents when they drop off and collect their children. We also invite parents to support our observance of festivals and events related to the wide range of religions and heritages in our nursery.

We understand the importance of communication and language in the early years. We aim to close the gap for disadvantaged children by ensuring our children have access to a high-quality curriculum which develops their communication and language skills. We refer to the Curriculum Guidance 2021 P. 13. We use the Phonics programme 'Letters and Sounds' with three and four year olds. We limit the use of background music in order for the children to develop auditory discrimination skills. We have a carefully planned approach to Core Books and Core Rhymes and Songs which means that during the course of the year, children become highly familiar with those books and rhymes, with more progressively complex language structures, rhythms and tunes introduced as the year goes on

We understand that the Characteristics of Effective Learning describe the different ways children learn. We ensure our environment and our interactions with the children enable the COEL's.



## **Appendix 1 - Key Features for Effective Practice (Development Matters 2021)**

### **1. The best for every child**

- All children deserve to have an equal chance of success.
- High-quality early education and care is inclusive. Children's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly. All children promptly receive any extra help they need, so they can progress well in their learning.

### **2. High-quality care**

- The child's experience must always be central to the thinking of every practitioner.
- Babies, toddlers and young children thrive when they are loved and well cared for.
- High-quality care is consistent. Every practitioner needs to enjoy spending time with young children. Effective practitioners are responsive to children and babies. They notice when a baby looks towards them and gurgles and responds with pleasure.
- Practitioners understand that toddlers are learning to be independent, so they will sometimes get frustrated.
- Practitioners know that starting nursery, school, and all the other transitions in the early years, are big steps for small children.

### **3. The curriculum: what we want children to learn**

- The curriculum is a top-level plan of everything the early years setting wants the children to learn.
- Planning to help every child to develop their language is vital.
- The curriculum needs to be ambitious. Careful sequencing will help children to build their learning over time.
- Young children's learning is often driven by their interests. Plans need to be flexible.
- Babies and young children do not develop in a fixed way. Their development is like a spider's web with many strands, not a straight line.
- Depth in early learning is much more important than covering lots of things in a superficial way

### **4. Pedagogy: helping children to learn**

- Pedagogy is the technical term for all the different ways that practitioners help children to learn, and how they teach them. Practitioners need a wide range of different pedagogical strategies to draw on. It's a bit like being an actor who can play many different parts.
- Effective settings provide a balance between play activities, which children choose to take part, and practitioner-led group activities. Settings will use their professional judgement to work out the balance that works best for them. They will need to take account of the particular strengths and needs of the children they are working with. An important aspect of pedagogy is checking what children know and can do.
- Effective pedagogy is a mix of different approaches. Children learn through play, by adults modelling, by observing each other, and through guided learning and direct teaching.
- Practitioners carefully organise enabling environments for high-quality play. Sometimes, they make time and space available for children to invent their own play. Sometimes, they join in to sensitively support and extend children's learning.
- Children in the early years also learn through group work, when practitioners guide their learning.
- Older children need more of this guided learning.
- A well-planned learning environment, indoors and outside, is an important aspect of pedagogy.



## 5. Assessment: checking what children have learnt

Accurate assessment is essential to high-quality early years education and care. As practitioners, we make hundreds, if not thousands, of assessments every day we work with children.

When we decide which child needs our help to pour a cup of water, and which child can do it on their own, we are making assessments. When we give a child just enough help to pour from a jug, we are using assessment to decide on the best response. This is known as **formative assessment**.

These kinds of assessments inform the decisions that practitioners make, minute by minute. They are rarely written down or recorded. On other occasions it is very important to make a note of assessments.

Children have a very wide range of starting points when they come into the early years. So, it is important to assess their level of development on entry. This is done best when it's in partnership with parents and anyone else working with the child (for example, a health visitor, or a speech therapist). Without that initial assessment, it is not possible to check that each child is making the best progress they are capable of.

When we are noticing what children can and cannot do, and they are changing rapidly, we have to jot down notes. It will not be possible to remember all this information at the end of a busy day. So, practitioners will need to keep records. It may be helpful to think about this as keeping records on some of the children, some of the time, but not all of the children, all of the time.

Some children may require more detailed records than others. When parents and children are involved in these processes, assessments will be richer and more rounded. Formative assessment will lie at the heart of providing a supportive and stimulating environment for every child.' Ongoing information is needed to inform the type of assessment which sums up a child's learning, development and health at a particular age. There are two legally required **summative assessment reports** during the early years. They are the **Statutory Check at Two, and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile**.

**Summative** assessment supports children at other transition points, too. An example of this would be a child's move from a nursery setting into a Reception class.

- The majority of our assessment of children's learning is done through feedback in the here-and-now.
- Practitioners are skilled in modelling metacognitive thinking for children and this in turn helps children
- to develop a growth mindset.
- Assessment is about noticing what children can do and what they know. It is not about lots of data
- and evidence.
- Effective assessment requires practitioners to understand child development. Practitioners also need to
- be clear about what they want children to know and be able to do.
- Before assessing children, it's a good idea to think about whether the assessments will be useful.
- Assessment should not take practitioners away from the children for long periods of time.

## 6. Self-regulation and executive function

- Executive function includes the child's ability to:
- hold information in mind
- focus their attention
- regulate their behaviour
- plan what to do next.

These abilities contribute to the child's growing ability to self-regulate:

- focus their thinking
- monitor what they are doing and adapt
- regulate strong feelings
- be patient for what they want
- bounce back when things get difficult.



Language development is central to self-regulation: children use language to guide their actions and plans. Pretend play gives many opportunities for children to focus their thinking, persist and plan ahead.

Both executive function and self-regulation are linked to the **characteristics of effective teaching and learning**, which is central to how children develop as learners. Children learn to 'have a go' in playing and exploring, concentrate and keep on trying through difficulties in active learning and make links and develop strategies when they are creating and thinking critically. (EYFS Framework, pg.16) This shows that when you support children to develop these characteristics, you also help them develop their executive function and self-regulatory skills.

Self-regulation is also developed in everyday learning when children plan and talk about their activities. You can build on this by encouraging children to talk through their plans in play, their learning strategies and review what they have done. Stories or characters can also be used to help children remember different learning strategies. (Education Endowment Fund Toolkit, Self-regulation strategies)

Finally, language development is fundamental to how children develop their self-regulation as it allows children to talk through their play and how they plan and reflect on it. As you scaffold and model self-regulation you can use language to help demonstrate how to focus, control emotions, adapt, be patient and overcome difficulties.

## **7. Partnership with parents**

- This includes listening regularly to parents and giving parents clear information about their children's progress.
- The help that parents give their children at home has a very significant impact on their learning.
- Some children get much less support for their learning at home than others. By knowing and understanding all the children and their families, settings can offer extra help to those who need it most.
- It is important to encourage all parents to chat, play and read with their children

## **Appendix 2 - Scaffolding**

The idea behind scaffolding is that each child has two levels of development:

- what they can do on their own
- what they can do with the help of another person.

For example, a child may not be able to complete a jigsaw on their own. But they might be able to do the puzzle if a practitioner provides sensitive challenge, support and guidance. The practitioner could perhaps draw the child's attention to how turning a piece might be needed for it to fit, or highlight the colours of different pieces. Vygotsky called the space where the child's skills are emerging the 'zone of proximal development'. When young children are learning to tackle new problems, scaffolding is an effective approach. It means giving children just enough help to do something which they could not do alone. Over time, the help is gradually reduced until children can solve the problem themselves. For example, at first a baby can reach for socks and grab them, but cannot pull them onto her feet. The practitioner can guide the baby's hand and encourage the baby to help in pulling the sock on, too.

**Self-scaffolding.** Self-scaffolding represents the highest level of children's independence. Practitioners observe and give children plenty of time to try different ways of doing things, and for thinking. Self-scaffolders can plan how to approach a task; problem-solve as they go; and review how they approached a task.

**Prompting** - The aim is to nudge children into using a self scaffolding technique. For example: What do you



need to do first? How do you think you could join them together? What worked for you last me? Keep going, you can do this!

**Modelling** - Practitioners sometimes need to model or demonstrate what to do. For example: knead the dough like this or pull up on the zip like I'm doing. Children need to try the same step for themselves immediately afterwards, so they can practise and learn it.

### **Appendix 3 - Sustained Shared thinking**

A practice which is related to scaffolding is Sustained Shared Thinking. This is 'an episode in which two or more individuals "work together" in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend.

### **Appendix 4 - Professional Love**

Referring to Dr Jools Page's research on professional love.

'Parents can experience feelings of jealousy when they see the professional love between a practitioner and their child. This is where your communication with parents is so important; to be open about those feelings and clear that your intention is never to replace or better parents'. (Attachment in Practice, Booklet 2, pg.18)

It is vital that both parents and practitioners understand the role of professional love in order to work together for the best for every child, as a positive early years experience is greatly improved by strong parental partnerships.

### **Statutory Guidance 2021**

You should always start with the early years foundation stage (EYFS) framework. It contains educational programmes that sit under 7 areas of learning. These are high-level curriculum summaries that you must follow and work into a rich curriculum that meets the needs of the children.

### **Educational Programmes are the overview plan for the curriculum.**

Educational programmes must involve activities and experiences for children, as set out under each of the areas of learning.

**Communication and Language** The development of children's spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children's back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial. By commenting on what children are interested in or doing, and echoing back what they say with new vocabulary added, practitioners will build children's language effectively. Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive. Through conversation, story-telling and role play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.

**Personal, Social and Emotional Development** Children's personal, social and emotional development (PSED) is crucial for children to lead healthy and happy lives, and is fundamental to their cognitive development. Underpinning their personal development are the important attachments that shape their social world. Strong, warm and supportive relationships with adults enable children to learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others. Children should be supported to manage emotions, develop a positive sense of self, set themselves simple goals, have confidence in their own abilities, to persist and wait for what they want and direct attention as necessary. Through adult modelling and guidance, they will learn how to look



after their bodies, including healthy eating, and manage personal needs independently. Through supported interaction with other children, they learn how to make good friendships, co-operate and resolve conflicts peaceably. These attributes will provide a secure platform from which children can achieve at school and in later life.

**Physical Development** Physical activity is vital in children's all-round development, enabling them to pursue happy, healthy and active lives. Gross and fine motor experiences develop incrementally throughout early childhood, starting with sensory explorations and the development of a child's strength, coordination and positional awareness through tummy time, crawling and play movement with both objects and adults. By creating games and providing opportunities for play both indoors and outdoors, adults can support children to develop their core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, coordination and agility. Gross motor skills provide the foundation for developing healthy bodies and social and emotional well-being. Fine motor control and precision helps with hand-eye coordination, which is later linked to early literacy. Repeated and varied opportunities to explore and play with small world activities, puzzles, arts and crafts and the practice of using small tools, with feedback and support from adults, allow children to develop proficiency, control and confidence.

**Literacy** It is crucial for children to develop a life-long love of reading. Reading consists of two dimensions: language comprehension and word reading. Language comprehension (necessary for both reading and writing) starts from birth. It only develops when adults talk with children about the world around them and the books (stories and nonfiction) they read with them, and enjoy rhymes, poems and songs together. Skilled word reading, taught later, involves both the speedy working out of the pronunciation of unfamiliar printed words (decoding) and the speedy recognition of familiar printed words. Writing involves transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech, before writing).

**Mathematics** Developing a strong grounding in numbers is essential so that all children develop the necessary building blocks to excel mathematically. Children should be able to count confidently, develop a deep understanding of the numbers to 10, the relationships between them and the patterns within those numbers. By providing frequent and varied opportunities to build and apply this understanding - such as using manipulatives, including small pebbles and tens frames for organising counting - children will develop a secure base of knowledge and vocabulary from which mastery of mathematics is built. In addition, it is important that the curriculum includes rich opportunities for children to develop their spatial reasoning skills across all areas of mathematics including shape, space and measures. It is important that children develop positive attitudes and interests in mathematics, look for patterns and relationships, spot connections, 'have a go', talk to adults and peers about what they notice and not be afraid to make mistakes.

**Understanding the World.** Understanding the world involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community. The frequency and range of children's personal experiences increases their knowledge and sense of the world around them – from visiting parks, libraries and museums to meeting important members of society such as police officers, nurses and firefighters. In addition, listening to a broad selection of stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems will foster their understanding of our culturally, socially, technologically and ecologically diverse world. As well as building important knowledge, this extends their familiarity with words that support understanding across domains. Enriching and widening children's vocabulary will support later reading comprehension.

**Expressive Arts and Design** The development of children's arts and cultural awareness supports their imagination and creativity. It is important that children have regular opportunities to engage with the arts, enabling them to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials. The quality and variety of what children see, hear and participate in is crucial for developing their understanding, self-expression, vocabulary and ability to communicate through the arts. The frequency, repetition and depth of their experiences are fundamental to their progress in interpreting and appreciating what they hear, respond to and observe