

Early Years Education in Practice

Rationale

We have the highest aspirations for our children and aim to support and develop creative, enthusiastic, resilient and independent learners, equipped with the skills and knowledge for their future at Reepham Primary School and as life-long learners. To achieve this we use a balance between adult-led, adult-supported and independent play. We have whole class taught sessions following the same curriculum as the rest of the school. Alongside this have chosen to adopt a child-centred, 'Planning in the Moment' approach in Nursery and Reception, because research and our own experience over many years has shown us that this leads to the highest level of involvement, where the deepest learning takes place. (Ferre Laevers Involvement Scale)

We recognise that for this approach to be successful we need to have the following key elements in place:

- 1) A superb and enabling environment
- 2) A timetable that allows for long periods of uninterrupted time
- 3) Positive relationships with children, parents, staff and senior leaders
- 4) The well-being of all children
- 5) Highly trained staff with the knowledge and expertise to have the highest quality interactions with the children and the time to reflect on their practice
- 6) Rigorous assessment and monitoring to ensure no child falls behind
- 7) Smooth transitions

Below, we outline the way we aim to achieve all the above points.



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1. A superb and enabling environment

We have undertaken observations of the Levels of Involvement (Ferre Laevers) in different areas of our outdoor and indoor classrooms to establish the areas where the highest levels of involvement occur. We used this information, alongside research evidence, to create an environment where the highest levels of learning can take place. We keep this under regular review and adapt areas as necessary. We aim for each area to have continuous provision with a variety of carefully chosen resources, where creativity and high levels of challenge are on offer. We have planned the environment so that children are constantly coming into contact with opportunities to develop the Prime Areas of learning as well as the Characteristics of Effective Learning, their learning from whole class sessions and our school values, so that the essential skills and knowledge here become fully embedded by the time the children move onto Key Stage One.

Where possible, open shelving ensures that resources are easy to see and access and the areas are well-labelled so that they are easy to tidy away and so that children will always know where they can find things. We try to keep resources open-ended to encourage creativity and language development. For example, long lengths of material to drape and natural resources to 'cook' with in the home corner provide endless possibilities instead of dressing up clothes and plastic play food which are limiting. We aim to use authentic resources to relate to the children's experience of life.

Our indoor classrooms are large, open and light. We have used neutral colours, rugs, lighting, fabrics, plants and natural resources to give the classroom a homely and relaxed feel.

'If children feel secure in a homely environment, they will be able to think more constructively because they are less likely to have to resist the chemicals released in their brains by anxiety and stress.' (Jenni Clarke, Sustaining Shared Thinking, 2007)

'All the evidence points to the fact that human beings prosper more in natural sunlight than in artificial light...research by the Heschong Mahone Group (Heschong et al. 2002) which found that learners with lots of daylight in their classrooms progressed 20 per cent faster in mathematics and 26 per cent faster in reading in one year than those with the least exposure to daylight.' (Julie Fisher, Interacting or Interfering, 2016)



Construction and small world



Woodwork area



Creative area



Outside sandpit: making cement

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Outside, the classroom is also arranged into different areas. Again, we have provided open-ended and authentic resources where possible. For example, crates, guttering, long lengths of fabric and large wooden blocks to build with, and real pots, pans and utensils in the mud kitchen. We have invested in waterproof suits for wet and messy outdoor play so that the children can play outside in all weathers. We recognise that learning outside can look very different to that inside – it can be bigger, more active and louder! We also recognise that for some children, it is only when outside that they can reach the highest level of involvement (Ephgrave, Planning in the Moment with Young Children, 2018). Therefore our timetable tries to allow for equal access to inside and outside during child-initiated learning time.



Cooking at a camp site



After months of persistence – the moment they stopped the water with a dam!



Composing and recording hand bell music

Opportunities for developing Literacy skills are considered throughout the environment as Baseline assessments in Reception over number of years have shown that many children in our catchment who have not attended our Nursery need extra support in this area.



Home corner



Mark making outside



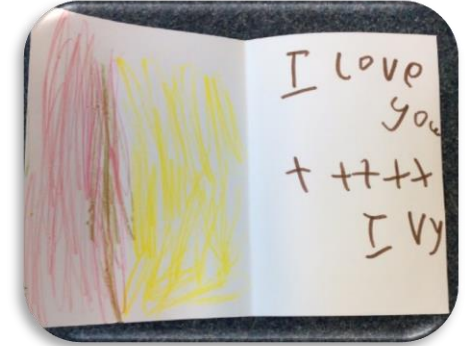
Writing signs to keep models



Writing as a Doctor in the home corner

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We teach the children to use technology for a purpose. For example, they might take a photo of a model for our Model Book, to give others ideas or use the i-pad to find out more about a minibeast they have found outside, so they can build a home for it.



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2. A timetable that allows for long periods of uninterrupted time

Our timetables

Nursery	
	Arrival Children arrive in the classroom and self-register.
08:30	This allows a gentle start to the day and gives parents the time to speak with staff members. It also means that from the very start of the day child-initiated learning begins. It is amazing to see the amazing things that can take place before 9am!
	Get Busy Time Independent and adult-supported play in Continuous Provision, inside and out.
11:00	Tidy up time
11:10	Topic and Book Time
11:30	Lunchtime
12:00	Transition for morning/afternoon children
12:15	Maths
12:30	Get Busy Time
14:30	Tidy up time
14:35	Story circle, review of learning, song/story time
15:00	Home time

Reception	
	Arrival Children arrive in the classroom and self-register.
08:40	This allows a gentle start to the day and gives parents the time to speak with staff members. It also means that from the very start of the day child-initiated learning begins. It is amazing to see the amazing things that can take place before 9am!
09:00	Maths
09:30	Get Busy Time Independent and adult-supported play in Continuous Provision, inside and out.
11:25	Tidy up time
11:30	Phonics
12:00	Lunchtime
13:00	Topic Learning/Book time
13:30	Get Busy Time
14:35	Tidy up time
14:35	Story circle, review of learning, song/story time
15:10	Home time

**See extract from Julie Fisher, p.17 below*

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3. Positive relationships with children, parents, staff and senior leaders

'In order to develop into effective learners within the school context it is clear that young children need love and security.'

David Whitebread, Cambridge University Senior Lecturer in Psychology of Education)

We invest significant time and effort into our transitions, which plays a huge role in building positive relationships right from the start (see number 7 below).

The Early Years team get to know our children and their families really well from the very beginning. We care deeply for the children in our care and feel privileged to begin their school education with them. We love watching them grow and develop as they move through our school.

As a team, Nursery and Reception class adults model expected behaviour in all our interactions with each other and the children. We have clear and consistent rules and from day one. We empower the children to manage their relationships with each other effectively, giving them the words to express how they are feeling and what they want. For example, rather than an adult intervening on behalf of the child if a toy has been snatched, we give the child the words to talk to their peer about how they feel and what they would like to happen. We have a strong restorative approach to enable children to make amends and move on from difficult situations with dignity.

Whilst children build self-confidence and develop the skills to resolve conflicts, they also know that they can seek reassurance, comfort and guidance from adults when they need it. This support equips children with the confidence and security to try new things and embrace mistakes on their journey of learning and development.

We aim to be available and approachable to parents. We realise that we are many parents' first experience of school since their own school days and are mindful to ensure the start of their long relationship with our school is a positive one. We recognise the pivotal role of parents in their child's education and as such we encourage parents to be involved as much as possible in their child's learning and development and in the life of our classroom.

We write a weekly newsletter to let parents know what has happened in the class that week, to suggest ideas for how to support their child's learning at home and to keep them informed of any forthcoming events. Like the rest of the school, we use Seesaw, an online Learning Journey system, and encourage parents to contribute to this. We invite our parents, grandparents and carers into the classroom for special events.

Through their subject-leader roles, school staff are familiar with the Early Years curriculum and our pedagogy. Deep dives, learning walks and lesson observations allow them to understand and support the development of our youngest children as they build the strong foundations that will set them up for the rest of their education. Similarly, senior leaders are keen to build relationships with our families from the start and invest in building relationships with the children and their families.





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4. Well-being of all children

We recognise that many factors contribute to children's well-being. Smooth transitions play a key part in this in Reception. See Point 7 for details on this.

We use the Leuven well-being scales to monitor children's well-being. We realise that high quality learning cannot take place when children are not well, happy and secure. As such we can quickly identify any child whose well-being is below the expected level and can seek help or put in place appropriate plans to support the child. For example, we may encourage a parent to come in to visit to share something with the group or class, post frequent videos of the child at play to strengthen the relationship between home and school , use mindfulness techniques or provide extra support during child-initiated learning or when the parent leaves in the morning.

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5. Highly trained staff with the knowledge and expertise to have the highest quality interactions with the children and the time to reflect on their practice

Our adults are there for the children: look around our rooms you will see adults smiling and comfortable, supporting and encouraging. We interact and engage with children sensitively and use our professional judgement to assess when to intervene and when to sit back and observe. As a staff we aim to be warm and nurturing in our approach.

We observe children, make an assessment and plan in that moment for if and how we can move that learning on. Sometimes we recognise that the child or group is so involved that there is nothing we can add to their play. But we look for teachable moments in every interaction we have, whether it be encouraging a child to persist when doing up their coat, counting ingredients in the home corner, exploring how the mud changes as they add water in the mud kitchen and more. ('Effective practitioners use interactions to **scaffold learning**', Vygotsky, Julie Fisher, *Interacting or Interfering*, 2016)

We recognise the Ofsted definition of teaching in the Early Years and understand the many different forms it can take:

- Communicating and modelling language
- Showing
- Explaining
- Demonstrating
- Exploring ideas
- Encouraging
- Questioning
- Recalling
- Providing a narrative
- Facilitating
- Setting challenges

Ofsted Inspection Handbook, September 2024

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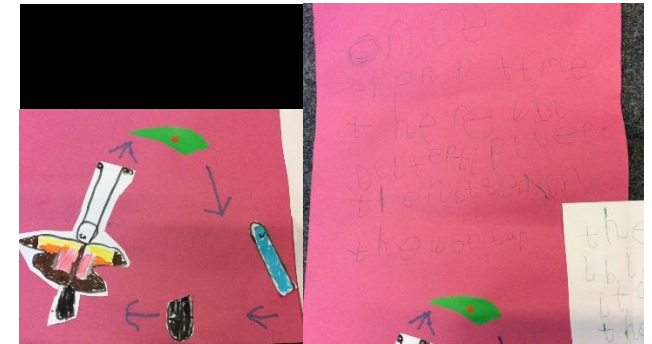
We look out for every opportunity to promote Literacy and Maths. We know writing for a purpose is highly motivating and therefore will lead to higher engagement and better outcomes so we are quick to exploit any opportunities for this (see J. Cigman – p.17 below)



A child noticed a teddy was missing. An adult explained about missing posters and supported the child to write, photocopy and display his posters.



Story scribing – hearing initial letter sounds for the first time!



Dylan drew some pictures of the life cycle of the butterfly. He didn't know where the caterpillar came from. An adult asked where we could find out. Dylan suggested the 'Very Hungry Caterpillar' book. The adult showed him how he could arrange his pictures into a lifecycle. The next day he wrote a story to perform to the class to go with his lifecycle.



This child made a jet pack to go to the moon. She wanted to put numbers on her jet pack. I wondered where she could find some numbers to help her. She was unsure. I showed her around the room the different places to find a number line. I encouraged her to have a go. She was very proud of herself. Later I asked again where we could find numbers. She showed me the cards in the various places around the room.



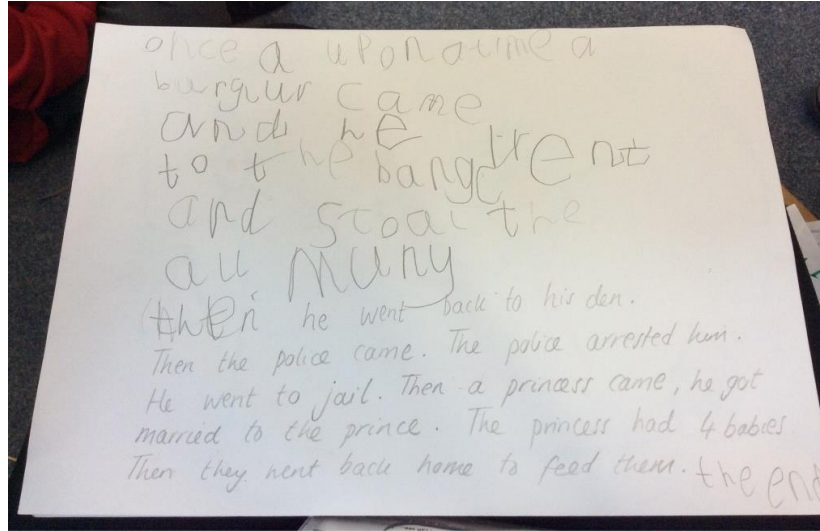
This child showed an adult how she had made a lolly from playdough and said she was going to set up a lolly shop. An adult suggested she could find out which flavour was the most popular so she knew which one to make the most of. The child was keen so the adult showed her how to record, using a tally.



These twins brought in some ammonites from home. After spending time talking with the boys about them, an adult encouraged them to think about their size. The boys ordered them quickly so the adult showed them how we could measure in centimetres. The boys wrote labels for the sizes so they didn't forget and the adult encouraged them to use the numbers to compare sizes.

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We are also skilled at using Story Scribing to encourage our children to write. Staff initially start to scribe children's stories as they are playing. These stories are then shared with the class and acted out in the Story Circle at the end of the day. Children quickly catch on to this and before long they ask for help to write their own stories. Staff know the children well and are skilled at encouraging the children to contribute to the story writing at just the right level for them. We also use this opportunity to model grammar, phonics and spelling. Before long, and with skilful adult intervention, the children soon begin take the pen to write a word or phrase and then don't want to give it back and carry on to write their own stories! Children will also scribe each other's stories too. We have found that the use of 'Talk for Writing' works well alongside this too, to develop children's understanding of story structure and to broaden their vocabulary. This is also supported by our bank of 'Core Texts' for the Nursery and Reception years, which children get to know inside out.





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6. Rigorous assessment and monitoring

Our day-to-day assessments as we 'Plan in the Moment' are underpinned by a rigorous and thorough system of assessment and monitoring. Within the first few weeks of children starting in our Nursery and Reception classes we complete a baseline assessment. We can then use this to plan next steps, to provide targeted and appropriate stretch and support in our lessons and to monitor progress. We have in depth Maths assessments that we use to set children's unique next steps. In Reception, we also carry out regular phonics assessments using the Read, Write Inc. assessment programme. We continually 'check and regroup' children as we spot their phonics skills and knowledge developing. Staff carry each child's unique 'next steps' for Writing and Maths with them so they can make sure they are challenging children appropriately. When writing with a child they also use Writing Assessment sheets to inform teaching and assessment.

In line with the whole school, we track children's progress and attainment in all 17 strands of learning termly. We use our knowledge of the children, recording of 'wow' moments and parental contribution on Seesaw and detailed half-termly assessments of Phonics skills and Maths to inform this.

Using our assessments, we are able to spot any children who are not or who are at risk of not making expected progress and put in place suitable interventions. We also analyse our long-term data trends to help us develop our teaching and learning.

Other assessment and monitoring tools we use are the Ferre Laevers Involvement Scale and the Leuven well-being scale.

7. Smooth transitions

We acknowledge that transitions take place in many different forms, moving from one setting to another, one class to another and at lots of different points during the school day. We know that careful management of all these transitions are essential for high levels of well-being and to ensure children are able to achieve their very best in their time with us.

Transitions into our school

We strongly encourage families to come and look around our setting before they choose us. We know it is essential that parents understand what we can offer their child and family. We start with the parents/guardians as the child's first educators, and the people who know their child the best. As such, we hold a 'This is Me' meet with parents/guardians to build up a unique picture of their child. From here, we then visit any previous setting the child may have been at to build relationships with the child in a familiar setting and to find out further information from practitioners. This means we have a good understanding of each child before they even have their first session with us.

Before children start in our Nursery and Reception classes we sent them a special letter with photos of their class adults and the school logo and class bird and with photos of children enjoying themselves in our setting. We also share photos of the classroom environments with them.



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In Nursery, we tailor transitions to suit each child and their family's needs. These can vary greatly from those children who are ready to get stuck in and go it alone from day one, and from those who need a parent to be present for several sessions before they are happy to be left for increasing periods of time. We are keen to personalise these arrangements as we recognise they are crucial to well-being and therefore ultimately, learning.

In Reception, we have a carefully planned sequence of transition activities that take place from April to the first two weeks in September. This programme has been put together and refined over time, with feedback from families. It means that by the time the children have their first session alone in the class they know the staff, the environment and the school and are comfortable. As with Nursery, we offer an adapted approach for any children finding it hard to settle. We also allow children to attend part-time for the first half term or term and to build up to full-time schooling.

Transitions from class to class

Transitions from Nursery to Reception happen almost seamlessly! This is due to our shared outdoor area, the similar set up of our environments, the language and routines of our classes and the familiarity with school staff. During the Summer term Nursery children are allowed to pop into Reception during Get Busy times so they can gradually become familiar with the classroom.

Children moving to Year One from Reception do so having followed the whole school transition programme in the Summer term of weekly story times in their existing class with their new teacher, followed by a weekly Maths lesson in their new classes with their existing teacher, and then a once weekly Maths lesson with their new teacher in their new classroom thereafter. We also have enhanced transition for children who may need this.



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Evidence to support this approach

From Julie Fisher, *Interacting or Interfering? Improving Interactions in the Early Years*, (2016), p.96

- From birth to age seven, young children benefit from a balance between adult-led learning and child-led learning that favours child-led learning
- Young children have an innate drive to follow their own interests until age seven (Bredekamp, 1987) when they become more ready to learn from the provocations of others (this does not mean that they cannot learn from others before then, but that they prefer to follow their own interests, drawing on others when they choose rather than when the adult dictates.
- Until age three/four, all learning should be child-led...Very little adult-led learning (other than stories/songs/rhymes/sharing time) should be introduced before the age of four unless it is specific to the needs of an individual child – e.g. how to hold a saw correctly, how to count in a game of skittles. Even small group adult-led cognitive (as opposed to social) learning is simply too abstract and too challenging physically (Goddard Blythe 2005) and mentally (Rojas and Chan 2005) for younger children
- When adult-led learning is introduced, children will respond to it far more readily, and with greater concentration, if they still have sufficient opportunities during the day to follow their own interests for substantial periods of time.
- Adult-led learning still needs the respectful and responsive practitioner who follows children's threads of thinking and builds on their ideas and observations, even if they bring the focus of attention back to the adult objectives in the end.

From Julie Cigman, *Supporting Boys' Writing in the Early Years, Becoming a Writer in Leaps and Bounds*, (2014), p. xxi

The Boys' Writing Projects – underlying principles

Principle 1. Effective literacy learning and teaching is rooted in research into how young children develop and learn. It acknowledges that boys are as competent and able as girls but that they often learn in different ways and at a different pace.

The role of the Early Years practitioner incorporates a range of complex skills needed to facilitate children's active construction and to teach children in the way that they learn best – through play. The skilled adult has a good understanding of how young children learn typically, how boys and girls might learn differently and how individual children learn best. They have a good understanding of how children learn language and literacy skills and aptitude. They are able to support the process of learning through child-initiated play and adult-led teaching: planning and identifying opportunities for learning, providing suitable and stimulating resources, and engaging in play, modelling reasons to write. They make learning enjoyable and motivating for children and help children to build 'learning power' (Claxton, 2005).

At the centre of the role of the Early Years practitioner is the ability to observe children in their play and to use the observations to set up enabling environments.



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Principle 2. Enabling environments for young writers offer flexible, non-prescriptive and responsive learning spaces, indoors and outdoors, that allow for the active and energetic learning styles displayed by many boys.

An enabling learning environment is stimulating and purposeful, and is appropriate for the learning styles and stage of development of all children. As part of an enabling environment, practitioners create sustained time for child-initiated learning. They provide accessible challenging, open-ended resources that can be used playfully, creatively and imaginatively, supporting the characteristics of effective learning that underpin writing development as well as all other areas of learning (DFE, 2012)