



When children pursue their own interests, in an enabling environment, supported by skilful adults, they make the best possible progress.

Planning

At Woodfield Primary School the cycle of observation, assessment, planning, observation is carried out on a moment-by-moment basis within the Early Years Unit. Each week we have up to 8 focus children. Interactions and activities involving these children are recorded to form their learning journeys. Spontaneous Planning sheets are completed for activities in which a group have become involved.

The reason we work in this way is:

“Babies and young children are experiencing and learning in the here and now, not storing up their questions until tomorrow or next week. It is in that moment of curiosity, puzzlement, effort or interest – the ‘teachable moment’ – that the skilful adult makes a difference. By using this cycle on a moment-by-moment basis, the adult will be always alert to individual children (observation), always thinking about what it tells us about the child’s thinking (assessment), and always ready to respond by using appropriate strategies at the right moment to support children’s well-being and learning (planning for the next moment).”

From National Standards document Learning, Playing and Interacting P.22 - 23

As a reflection of this it is felt that we should not plan ahead for our youngest children. Rather we should respond to their interests and efforts immediately. We can then record such interactions afterwards.

We have focus children rather than focus activities and the adult goes to the child. The child is not called from their play to come to the adult. We work this way because it has been identified that high level involvement occurs in child initiated activity.

The Role of The Adult

“Teaching should not be taken to imply a ‘top down’ or formal way of working. It is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities: communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations.”

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Our adults are there to teach. They observe carefully and will “teach” through modelling, suggesting, providing vocabulary or resources, explaining or encouraging. The adults know the children very well and have a sound understanding of child development. This ensures that they enhance and extend the learning at the appropriate level for each unique child. We

ensure that our adults receive training so that they can spot a 'teachable moment' while the children are engaged.

The children initiate their own learning and the adults support and guide them to extend the learning opportunities. Throughout the year we assess and review the progress of all the children. We introduce teaching of specific skills as and when appropriate to individual children and groups of children.

The adults are key in creating the emotional environment that supports children - ensuring that they feel confident and independent, ready to try new things in the knowledge that the adults will help them if necessary, without taking over.

Quality Interactions

"Early years provision is only as good as the quality of interaction between adults and children."

Sir Michael Wilshaw

The children become involved in activities of their choice. The adults observe the children carefully, join them, when appropriate, and engage in quality interactions (teaching) to move the learning on. In this way, if a child encounters a challenge, then they will not give up. Rather they will be supported to persevere, overcome the challenge and move forward in their learning.

Spontaneous Planning Sheets

Our weekly focus children are given extra attention, but all the children are busy and learning all the time. Our Spontaneous Planning Sheets are a record of activities that have occurred. It is important that the adults' input is recorded. On these planning sheets the symbol "T" indicates "adult". Adult input (teaching) is highlighted eg "T suggested..."

The adult role is to encourage, model, ask, ponder, help, offers resources etc.

Our 'planning sheets' are blank at the start of the week. They are then filled up gradually during the week following adult intervention in learning. When possible, photos are printed and added to the records. In addition, individual "Wow" moments are recorded for all children, as and when they occur, using the EExAT system.

With a system of focus children, an open-ended environment and records kept on spontaneous planning sheets and learning journeys, the children are learning effectively all the time.

Progress and Development

When children show high levels of involvement, that is when there is progress and development occurring. This is when the brain is at its most active. High level involvement occurs most often when children are able to pursue their own interests in an enabling environment, supported by skilful staff. Planning in the moment helps to make this possible.

An Enabling Environment

Children display the highest levels of involvement when they are pursuing their own interests in an environment that allows them to take risks and challenge themselves in their endeavours. We have a rich learning environment indoors and outside with a wide range of resources available to the children. The children select what they want to do in each area. The principle is that resources are accessible to the children and they are varied, open-ended and high quality. This gives children the opportunity to select resources to support their chosen activity.

Our environment supports all children to be fully engaged in purposeful play of their own choice and interest. As with the outdoor area, the indoor area should allow for learning in all areas of development, but the two areas should not mirror each other. There are many advantages indoors that should be exploited - it is dry, with a controllable temperature and no wind. Therefore, this is the ideal place for children to be calm and quiet, pursuing activities which require small equipment and using resources that will not survive the outdoor elements.

In the Early Years Unit, the children choose where to go and what to do from the moment they arrive - they initiate their own learning and adults join them and support them in their pursuits. This means that in all areas, a range of resources are available and accessible to the children at all times. Areas are stocked and tidy at the start of the day with a wide range of resources available.

When a class is organised in this way, the children are in control of their learning. They are able to select the area in which to play, the resources to use in that area and what to do with them. Obviously, their choices are limited by the resources available and it is therefore crucial to have appropriate areas with varied, high quality, open ended resources. It is also vital that the areas are well stocked, tidy and arranged to allow optimum access. We constantly review and reflect on the environment to see which areas are proving productive and which need altering.

'Less is more' is definitely the case with indoor equipment too:- with fewer, carefully selected resources, they are well used and easy to tidy up. If the resources are carefully selected, the majority can be used throughout the year - the children will use them differently every day. The resources are assessed and reviewed constantly with changes made as necessary.

We consciously do not have a maths area in our unit. Instead children will opt to build a symmetrical model, make a playdough cake with ten candles, sew a repeating pattern onto a bag, "cook" enough pasta to fill the four bowls, use a small

scoop several times to fill a large container with water or balance the ingredients accurately when making a cake. They will be experiencing maths in almost all areas of the indoor environment and we ensure that there is equipment in all areas to facilitate this. Because the children select and access resources themselves, they know where they are from and they know where to put them back when they have finished using them or at the end of the session.

We review our provision in terms of levels of involvement. If an area or a resource is not engaging children in purposeful play, then we remove it or change it. With regard to role play, we ensure that there is always a 'home corner' (either indoors or outside) as this is what is familiar to the children - this is where they can practise being the adults that they know (and in doing so, develop the vital life skill of empathy). Other role play is set up as and when an interest emerges. We endeavour to use 'real resources' within role play which enhances children's learning experience, whether this is real food in the kitchen or real packaging in the shop.

Recent brain development research is providing evidence to support the feeling that children, who seem obsessed with computers and screen technology, are actually 'addicted' to them and also that such activity does not engage the whole brain, rather a very small part of it. We therefore do not have PCs available within our classes. We have ipads, digital cameras, lightboxes, mobile phones and interactive white boards to support learning in all areas, but we are able to control their use more easily.

We ensure that there are a range of engaging books available to children in all areas of the unit. We also include books within provision areas of the outdoor area where appropriate.

'In the Moment Planning' in Practice

“Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all the areas of learning and development.”

(Revised EYFS)

This is a statutory requirement and is being interpreted in different ways by individual practitioners, settings and inspectors. The verb “plan” has been interpreted to mean “written plan” and/or “forward plan”. It is this interpretation that we would look to challenge. We would argue that the skilful practitioner is making several hundred “in the moment” plans every week. Each time they interact with a child, they are observing, assessing, planning for, and responding to, that individual child. Such interactions go largely unnoticed and unrecorded and yet they are the most important and powerful teaching moments.

So what then does this look like in practice? The aim is to organise the setting - including the time, the resources and the adults - to ensure that the majority of the children display deep level engagement for the majority of the time. If that happens, then we can be confident that they are making good progress. Adults will notice when support is needed, interactions will ensure that obstacles are overcome or that new directions and possibilities are available and learning will be meaningful and fun!!

As mentioned, an enabling environment is critical. When the children arrive, everything is available and accessible. From day one, the children are supported to explore the environment to see what is available, to select the resources they would like, to use them appropriately and to tidy the area when they have finished. Tidy up time is very short - most areas have been

tidied during the session. Because the children have got the resources out themselves, they know where to return them to!

The induction period is always critical - even more so when the children have so much autonomy and choice. Part time attendance in the first two weeks can ensure that the routines and expectations are established efficiently. Ground rules are essential when so much freedom is given - all the children need to feel safe. Clear and consistent expectations are key. For example, indoors the children will walk and use quieter voices - running and shouting can be done outside.

The sessions are organised to maximise the amount of "free-flow" time available. Thus the children arrive, self register and go off to play where they choose.

On Friday, the 'focus children' for the following week are given a form to take home for their parents to complete - asking about current interests of the child, any special events in the family and any questions the parents may have.

An A3 "Learning Journey" sheet for each of the three focus children is put on the planning board. These sheets are blank (except for a couple of words to indicate areas that the staff or parents would like to try and capture). During the week any adult who has a productive interaction with a focus child records the event on the learning journey. It is important that the whole cycle is recorded - i.e. the initial observation, the assessment, the planning, teaching and the outcome.

At the end of a child's focus week their parents are invited into school to meet with staff to discuss their observations and to spend time playing alongside their child in the unit.