# The Learning Environment and Activities Policy and Practice

**Aim**

To ensure that children opportunities and access leaning is stimulating, varied and promotes characteristics of effective learning principles. We offer play activities and resources that incorporate the EYFS seven areas of Learning and development.

We hope to give the children a sense of ownership in the setting by offering choices, following their interests and preferences and by offering a balance of adult lead and child initiated activities.

We operate an outdoor learning opportunities all year round and also welcome visitors to share their knowledge of a range of occupations, companies that deliver music, dance, drama, sports and those that share specialised resources.

**Structured Activities**

Our weekly targeted activity which is adult led allows us to target skills and new understandings based on children’s identified next steps and the moderation of our curriculum. We ensure a balance of child imitated and adult led activities. Our routines mirror that of our local primary school in supporting our school readiness programme.

We hold two weekly PE sessions, an orchard session based on forest school activities , disco dough, yoga sessions and a gardening club once a week. We also deliver Letter and Sounds phase 1 as part of the curriculum plans and introduce the children to Jolly phonics. We focus on Read Write Ink for literacy to offer familiarity when they start primary school. We also consider outside learning services such as Petite Pois- French classes, Eco Warriors – Early science and conservation issues.

**ECaT- Every child a Talker**

Every Child a Talker (ECaT) is a national project to develop the language and communication of children from birth to five years of age. The project was set up after concern about the high levels of ‘language impoverishment’ in the UK, and how this affects children’s progress in school and chances in life.

ECaT encourages the development of early language through everyday fun and interesting activities which reflect children’s interests and enable them to become confident and skilled communicators.

**Aims of ECaT are:**

* To support the identification of children 'at risk' of language communication delay and to support them as early as possible.
* To improve the knowledge and skills of people working with young children.
* To help parents to understand how communication develops and to provide them with the ideas to support its development.

 The four main areas of ECaT are broken down into:

* Listening and attention
* Understanding
* Speaking
* Social communication

These are the areas that we assess and track each child’s communication and language development throughout the year and each term the assessments are placed on the ECaT tracking grid. Every parent or carer is allowed to, have regular access to their child’s tracker and if you would like to discuss anything with the child’s key person at any time then please do not hesitate to have a chat with us.

Here is a link for the ECaT child monitoring tool we use to track children’s communication and language progress:

https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2011/10/ECaT\_child\_monitoring\_tool1.pdf

Language is important because it forms the foundations for interacting with other people – for communicating our needs, our thoughts and our experiences. From the moment of birth, babies are ready to communicate: they listen to and look at people and things in their environment and respond to what they hear and see. Even the youngest babies need a stimulating environment in which those who care for them respond sensitively to the different meanings of their cries, coos and gestures.  This early ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally is the basis on which language is developed. A child’s ability to develop language depends on being immersed in a rich environment of words, sounds, rhythm, and verbal and non-verbal expression from birth. However, we know that there are still many children starting school without the extended vocabulary and communication abilities which are so important for learning and for making friends. Disadvantaged children are especially prone to language delay, some having only a third of the vocabulary of other children. As children grow older, this early delay can lead to significant difficulties later on, particularly with reading and writing. ECaT is intended to help you give the right support to children from their earliest days so that if there are any difficulties they may be prevented from occurring in the first place or picked up early so that children are given the help that they need.

**Outdoor Play**

Outdoor play is an important part of our curriculum. Children have the opportunity for fresh air and physical activity on a daily basis throughout the year. Outdoor activities take place in the secure play area at the front of the building and the large field and the community orchard at the rear of the premises.

Our outdoor area is subject to risk assessment, controls in place, these include:

* higher ratio, where all children are under close supervision at all times.,
* A minimum of 2 adults with 8 children, this rises to 3 when we hit 12.
* Use of the grassed area, a member of staff will remain in the soft play area to manage the flow form indoors to outdoors and vice versa.

Where we have more than 12 children using the outdoor areas, we move from free flow to group times.

Outdoor play operates a free flow routine in the Spring and Summer months. In the Autumn term we operate a group session outdoors. Free flow is subject to staffing and weather conditions (particularly, if the conditions compromise the indoor heat) Like our indoor space we ensure that our continuous provision outdoors reflects learning and development opportunities linked to the EYFS Curriculum.

Please see our Health & Safety Policy.

**Clothing**

Children have a bag containing a spare set of clothing that accompanies them each session. Pre-school has Wellingtons, waterproof trousers, jackets and hats that children can use, although it is encouraged that parents/carers supply suitable footwear and clothing dependant on the weather for each child. The transition area has appropriate clothing and footwear which the children can access independently and where necessary with staff support. Children will be required to wear appropriate clothing in order to participate in outdoor activities.

**Activities and equipment**

* Water play – a set of large equipment including guttering, tubes and pipes that promote investigative play with water.
* Building and Constructing – a collection of large equipment to inspire physical problem solving and creativity, including crates, ropes, tubes, trays and trolleys.
* Den Play - a unique den frame, poles and covers for the children to create interesting and special places for their play.
* Gardening - a set of resources for digging, planting and growing which promotes opportunities for group play, mark making and observing change.
* Small world planters for creative and imaginative play.
* Literacy shed – providing opportunities for lots of different kinds mark making, reading in our cozy crates and developing fine motor skills.
* Digging pit - to explore size, weight and engage our senses and gross motor skills.
* Play games – including balls, hoops, beanbags and cones, which enable children to engage in physical development.
* Role Play - a group of resource collections that feed imagination and give children the opportunity to explore familiar experiences.
* Investigating Wind and Movement - a set of resources to encourage children to explore air, wind and movement using space and the freedom of the outdoors.

In addition, the outdoor environment will offer opportunities, music making and exploring natural materials and habitats.

The equipment will be stored safely in secure containers and accessed at the beginning of each session. Staff will ensure that all equipment is clean and safe to use on a daily basis.

**Staffing and Assessment**

Staff ratios will be dictated by the flow of children using the outdoor area, where possible a minimum of two members of staff will be on duty. Ratios will account for the statutory requirements. Activities and equipment are subject to risk assessments that are regularly reviewed. All staff are aware of the necessary controls that ensure safe practice. (These can be seen on request.)

Regular observations are undertaken that inform the evaluation process. The staff focus on the effective learning outcomes for the children, the equipment’s suitability for purpose and any associated hazards. Staff carry first aid equipment outdoors.

**Weather Conditions**

Children will have opportunities to experience seasonal weather changes throughout the year. In the interests of safety children will not be permitted to access to outdoor space in weather conditions that pose a risk to the children’s safety and well being, for example severe winds.

Staff will monitor the effects of the cold and heat and respond appropriately. Periods of time will be allocated for ’warm ups’ and ‘cool downs’. During the colder/hotter/ wetter months activities will have shorter time frame.

* Shaded areas will be incorporated in the design for the secure play area, drinking water will be available outdoors and the setting will use gazebos and parasols when appropriate. Sun creams should be applied before the session commences. In addition to a change of clothing parents/carers are encouraged to bring their child a sun hat.
* Appropriate warm and waterproof clothing will be available for those children using the outdoors. In addition to a change of clothing, parents/carers are encouraged to bring their child a hat and a pair of gloves.

**Equal Opportunities**

As part of the settings inclusive approach to children’s learning, we have a small bank of clothing so that children are not excluded from outdoor activities.

# Outings and Visits Procedures

* We have agreed procedures for the safe conduct of outings.
* Parents sign a general consent on registration for their children to be taken out as a part of the daily activities of the setting.
* Parents always sign consent forms before major outings and are given notice on events that are planned.
* A risk assessment is carried out before an outing takes place.
* Our adult to child ratio is high, normally one adult to three children.
* Children not accompanied by their own parent/carer are assigned to a member of staff to ensure each child is individually supervised and to ensure no child gets lost and that there is no unauthorised access to children.
* Outings are recorded in an outings record book stating:
* The date and item of outing.
* The venue and mode of transport.
* Names of staff assigned to named children.
* Time of return.
* Staff take a mobile phone on outings, and supplies of tissues, wipes, pants etc as well as a mini first aid pack, a snack and water. The amount of equipment will vary and be consistent with the venue and the number of children as well as how long they will be out for.
* Records are kept of the vehicles used to transport children, with named drivers and appropriate insurance cover.
* A minimum of two staff should accompany children on outings and a minimum of two should remain behind with the rest of the children.

**Displays for the Learning Environment**

We strive to ensure a visually stimulating environment that gives purpose and value to the children’s work. They seek to promote positive affirmations by celebrating their achievements in learning. It also acts to give aesthetic awareness and provide the children with a sense of ownership and pride not only in their personal achievement but also the achievements of others.

Displays enable children to develop their ideas through independent enquiry. They will contain high quality, stimulating and interactive visual aids that celebrate children’s efforts, participation and achievements.

**Methods**

* Contents will be based upon a ‘working wall approach’ including topic learning and displays that reflect a journey through the implementation of new educational programmes.
* Interactive elements, these should allow for further enquiry, make use of the children’s different learning styles and extend their knowledge beyond formal lesson planning.
* Include a behaviour management working display that focuses on previous programmes such as ‘Monkey Bob’ in exploring emotions, consequences and conflict resolution.

**Policy adopted October 2017, updated Sept 2018**

**Updated August 2021**

**Reviewed Sept 2022, Updated Nov 2022, reviewed Sept 2023 (NB WeLLcom training due Sept 2023 with the view to implementing the SALC screening tool by Jan 2024)**