

Heart of the Forest Community Special School
Early Years Unit
Policy
(Revised 2014)

Background Information:

The Early Years Unit was established in 2008 and started its life as a Nursery, becoming an Assessment Unit in 2009 for pupils from the age of three with identified Special Educational Needs in the Early Years environment.

The Early Years Unit now encompasses pupils on transition from age three to pupils at the end of KS1 at age seven.

The Early Years Unit Curriculum is based on the revised Early Learning Foundation Stage Practice Guidance, with transition after the Reception Year into an adapted Key Stage 1 Curriculum in subsequent classes as appropriate.

Where a transition to a National Curriculum based timetable is deemed not suitable for pupils, the teacher will continue to make provision under the EYFS guidance. The school is dedicated to Child Centred Learning and all pupils are continuously assessed, monitored and taught at a level appropriate to their needs and abilities.

Aims and Principles of the Early Years Unit

Our aim for high quality education in the Early Years begins by building on what the children already know and can do, providing carefully structured play based activities that are relevant and match the needs of the individual child.

We aim to provide our pupils with rich experiences designed to stimulate and educate, encourage exploration, investigation, independence and a desire to learn.

Our Curriculum provides opportunities for the child to take part in activities planned and supported by an adult, but also to initiate play and learning by themselves or with their peers.

We aim to provide a broad and balanced curriculum addressing the seven areas of learning in the Revised Early Years Foundation Stage Practice Guidance, and during transition to National Curriculum areas, showing awareness of cross-curricular opportunities for learning in all areas of our daily routines.

We place a strong emphasis on learning through play and interaction, with pupils feeling secure, confident, valued and cared for.

The Principles guiding the ongoing development of the Early Years Unit:

The Early Years Foundation Stage Practice Principles and the themes of the Every Child Matters document work together, interweaving and underpinning the specially adapted Curriculum in the Early Years Unit.

A Unique Child:

'Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured'

The Early Years Unit understands its responsibility to ensure positive attitudes to diversity and difference - not only so that every child is included and not disadvantaged, but also that they learn from the earliest age to value diversity in others and grow up making a positive contribution to society.

Positive Relationships:

'Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.'

We aim to meet the needs of each child as an individual regardless of difference and diversity.

All children are entitled to enjoy a full life in conditions which will help them take part in society and develop as an individual, with their own cultural and spiritual beliefs.

Enabling Environments:

'The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.'

We believe that all children should feel valued and confident and should be cared for in a warm and loving environment. We will work with parents/carers at all stages of their child's education and care to ensure our principles are put into practice.

Learning and Development:

'Children learn and develop in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and interconnected.'

In line with guidance from the EYFS and the SEN Code of Practice we will endeavour to:

- Be alert to the early signs of needs that could later lead to difficulties and respond quickly and appropriately, involving other agencies as necessary
- Extend and challenge all children's ability to learn
- Encourage children to recognise their own unique qualities and the characteristics they share with other children
- Maintain records suitable for sharing with parents, carers, colleagues and outside agencies involved with the child
- Should staff feel that a child is in need of further specialist support they will speak to parents/carers in the first instance to seek their opinion and to discuss how best the child can be supported. No outside agencies will be contacted without parental permission
- Ensure a smooth transition for the child to this setting from another setting by working closely with parents/carers and staff and agencies from the other setting .

Staffing, Equipment and Resources

The Early Years Unit is situated in purpose built classrooms, at one end of the school site.

The Early Years Unit admits pupils from the age of three into a Pre-school assessment placement, beginning with a part-time placement during transition from home or another Early Years setting. Pupils start with an opportunity to have 5 sessions per week over 15 hours, and increase as the pupil settles and becomes used to the routines in the class. Full-time placement starts in the child's Reception year.

A Key Worker is allocated to all pupils in the Early Years Unit. The Key Worker contributes to the pupil's progress files and can represent the pupil/school at multi-disciplinary meetings, reviews and Parent/Teacher meetings.

Staff work closely with parents/carers and outside agencies to provide the correct provision and support, ensuring parents' views and wishes and the needs of the pupil are paramount to the process.

The Early Years classes also support pupils in Key Stage 1 and provide transition towards a more formal curriculum for Key Stage 2. All pupils in EY classes have access to a broad and balanced curriculum based on Practice Guidance from the Revised Early Years Foundation Stage 2012, covering all seven areas of learning.

All classes have been carefully planned and designed to provide an appropriate and challenging curriculum and are well resourced. Some resources are shared between the classrooms to meet the specific needs of our pupils. Occasionally, some pupils in Reception or Year 1 may be in either classroom where there is a classroom management issue e.g. a cohort is larger than normal and pupils may be shared between classes to ensure class sizes are roughly equal and offer the best learning opportunities for the pupils.

Classrooms are fitted with hoist tracking and specially adapted personal care areas in order to provide appropriate care for our non-ambulant pupils. We have access to specialist areas in the school to provide alternative learning opportunities for our pupils e.g. Hydrotherapy Pool, Sensory Room and Sports Hall which has a full-size trampoline, in order to provide Rebound Therapy. Pupils have access to a wide range of therapies and services provided by in-house or outside agencies e.g. Speech Therapy, Music Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Visual and Hearing Impairment agencies and the Educational Psychology service.

Learning Through Play

"Children's play reflects their wide ranging and varied interests and preoccupations. In their play children learn at their highest level. Play with peers is important for children's development."

Our curriculum provides a balanced provision of structured activities and play-based learning, incorporating specialist curriculum activities where needed.

The emphasis is on play-based learning across the seven areas of Learning in the Revised Early Years Foundation Stage Practice Guidance 2012:

The Prime Areas of Learning:

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

The Specific Areas of Learning:

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

Structured activities provide the basis for development and learning of personal skills such as learning to sit with a group of peers, turn taking, sharing, and interacting with others. They also help develop the ability to concentrate and attend for longer periods over time, building connections and developing reasoning, problem solving and thinking skills. Through play, our children explore and develop learning experiences, which help them make sense of the world. They have the opportunity to practise skills, develop ideas and think creatively alongside other children as well as individually.

We look at, and record the ways in which children are learning in order to make better judgements about their dominant learning style and to provide better insight and information to parents/carers and to teachers and staff during transition to new classes or settings.

The styles of learning we record are:

Playing and Exploring: (Engagement)

The ways in which children learn by finding out and exploring, playing with what they know and being willing to 'have a go'.

Active Learning: (Motivation)

"Children learn best through physical and mental challenges. Active Learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods."

Active learning occurs when children are motivated and interested. Children need to have some independence and control over their learning.

Developing Creativity and Critical Thinking: (Thinking)

"When children have opportunities to play with ideas in different situations and with a variety of resources, they discover connections and come to new and better understandings and ways of doing things. Adult support in this process enhances their ability to think critically and ask questions."

Pupils in the Early Years classes are offered a wide range of resources and play experiences that offer challenge and invite exploration and investigation. Staff in the Early Years offer support and encouragement, using verbal and/or physical prompts when necessary, to allow pupils to gain confidence and knowledge as they encounter their learning journeys.

Links with other school policies

As part of the framework of the school, the Early Years Unit shares the ethos and Mission Statement of the school and has links to its policies, these include:

- Child Protection
- Health and Safety
- Behaviour Management
- Assessment, Recording and Reporting
- Equal Opportunities

(A complete set of school policies is held in the Administration Office)

Partnership with Parents/Carers

In the Early Years Unit we recognise the role of parents and carers as the primary educators of their children. We, therefore, make every effort to ensure we work alongside parents and carers and keep them informed throughout every stage of their child's education.

All pupils in the Early Years Unit have a Key Worker who will be responsible for the upkeep of pupil files, attending meetings and reviews and liaising with parents and other agencies about the child's education and welfare. We operate an 'Open Door' policy and welcome discussions with parents and carers about all aspects of their child's care and provision.

When needed, parents/carers are able to stay with their children in the early sessions to help reassure and settle them. It is also a good opportunity to share skills and strategies, feeding and behaviour advice with staff to ensure consistent approaches to a child's routines.

Prospective parents/carers are given an Early Years Welcome booklet which gives information about the Unit, Medical Forms, Permission slips, Uniform Order sheets and general information about the school. A member of staff from the Unit will generally make a home visit to discuss a child's needs and abilities and will fill in a Transition booklet giving basic information about your child's likes and dislikes, favourite toys etcetera.

Information about each child's day is recorded in a Home/School diary and sent home on a daily basis. Parents/carers may also record messages to staff to inform them of anything that they feel important to share with staff, e.g. the child hasn't slept well or eaten any breakfast.

Where a child is attending two settings in an Early Years environment, everything possible will be done to create a consistent approach to a child's care and individual targets.

Assessment and Record Keeping

Pupils are observed continually throughout all aspects of their daily routines and written or photographic records are kept of a child's attention, interactions, and engagements with things they encounter. Over time, these records show how a child is progressing through their individual targets and EYFS Profile statements, recording their growth in confidence and development of skills and abilities. These records are kept in Learning Journey documents and assessment folders and can be seen by a parent/carer at any time on request. These are confidential documents and are not available to other parents/carers, but may be shared with other professional agencies involved with a child.

At the end of the Reception Year, pupils are given a baseline assessment on the P-scales (a pre-National Curriculum level) using the B-Squared system.

A Foundation Stage Profile is also completed for Government Education Data. Parents/carers of pupils are invited to Structured Conversations to discuss their child's progress and IEPs.

Parents/carers of pupils with an EHC Plan (Statement of Educational Needs) are invited to an Annual review to review their child's Plan (Statement) and progress and are issued with an Annual Report and invited to a Parents' Evening towards the end of the school year.

Parents' Evenings and Open Evenings are informal meetings in order for Parents, Carers, Teachers and other staff and agencies to meet and discuss the children's achievements and the next steps in their school journey. Parents/carers are kept informed of events in school through termly Newsletters and leaflets of events.

Monitoring and Review:

It is the responsibility of the Early Years' teachers to follow the principles stated in this policy. There is a named Governor responsible for the EYFS. This Governor has the opportunity to discuss EYFS practice with the practitioners and provide feedback to the whole Governing Body, raising any issues that require discussion. The Head teacher and SLT carry out monitoring of the EYFS through observation

and discussion as part of the whole school monitoring schedule.

Signed:.....

Ratified on:.....