



Place Farm Primary Academy
Teaching and Learning in the EYFS
November 2019



At Place Farm Primary Academy, our pupils are at the centre of every decision we make. We strive to improve the life chances of every child, whatever their backgrounds, skills and capabilities. Our ambition is to provide the best education we can: we invest heavily in the Early Years Foundation Stage, because we firmly believe that a love of learning should be nurtured from a very young age.

Our aim is to develop excellence in the Early Years. We have worked closely with Anna Ephgrave, a highly regarded Early Years' consultant and author, and continue to be influenced by her research and findings. Anna summarises her pedagogy as follows:

“Children are born with a natural desire to explore and learn. We support them, by creating an enabling environment and through the relationships and interactions that the children experience. We do not plan ahead, rather we remain “in the moment” with the children as they explore and learn. We observe carefully, and enhance the learning whenever we spot a “teachable moment”. Some of our observations, interactions and outcomes are recorded afterwards.”

Anna has over twenty-seven years' experience in Early Years, and, in the last ten years, has had four Ofsted inspections in two schools, all of which were graded outstanding, following this approach. Anna argues that the further you move along the journey of following children's interests, the more children's progress improves. She says that the adults in the room should be quiet; so engrossed with the children that you don't notice them when you walk into the room.

Anna says that even children (especially boys) who are running around have a story - adults need to step in and find the story. Adults must go to the children and engage with their learning. Any interaction between adult and child that moves their learning on is teaching. Adults have hundreds of interactions in a day, therefore there is a powerful opportunity to make accelerated progress with pupils.

This approach does rely on having highly skilled staff, who have a good knowledge of child development and understand how to use the following strategies effectively:

1. Scaffolding: assisting the children so that they achieve success, but reducing this support as soon as possible.
2. Modelling: this can be modelling speech, social skills, how to use resources appropriately, how we tidy away, how to share etc. as well as specific skills, such as letter formation, writing and maths-related skills. It also includes modelling that it is okay to make mistakes.
3. Praising and encouraging: this means using specific praise, based on the principles of growth-mindset (praising effort, perseverance etc. not 'how clever') and using language to encourage children to persevere and master new skills etc.
4. Use of questioning: clear understanding of the principles of Communication Friendly Schools (using questions appropriate to the understanding of individual children; ensuring that children are not bombarded with questions; modelling correct grammar and pronunciation; use of lots of visual supports; empowering the children to have a voice etc.)
5. Use of scribing to record children's thoughts and ideas, with scaffolding used to enable children to gradually take ownership of writing elements of each piece.

Use of the Leuven Scale

The Leuven Scale can be used to measure well-being and involvement. The aim is for children to be working at Level 5 on both measures. Staff can assess how effective the environment is, based on the Leuven Scales observed. Children need risky activities, so that they need to concentrate. Children need to get a buzz out of persevering and achieving something. We have invested in woodworking tools and resources and sewing resources.

We have also developed our outdoor learning environment, including the introduction of our Mud Kitchen, which is extremely popular and promotes high levels of involvement. We ensure that our outdoor area is open as soon as possible, and for as long as possible, every day.

Children display the highest levels of involvement when they are following their own agenda. With this in mind, when the children arrive in the morning, the rooms are not pre-set. Instead, the children are encouraged to choose what to play with. The first few weeks focus heavily on the children learning the routines and expectations, including how to access resources and pack them away when finished with.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

Playing and exploring

- finding out and exploring
- playing with what they know
- being willing to have a go

Active learning

- being involved and concentrating
- keeping on trying
- enjoying achieving what they set out to do

Creating and thinking critically

- having their own ideas
- making links
- choosing ways to do things and finding new ways

It is a statutory requirement that, 'in planning and guiding children's activities practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice.' (EYFS, 2012: 1.10)

The EYFS has always highlighted the importance of how, as well as what, children learn. In the 2008 EYFS this was most obvious in three of the commitments under the theme of Learning and Development: Play and Exploration, Active Learning and Creativity and Critical Thinking. The Tickell Review in 2011 pledged to strengthen the importance of how children learn as fundamental to effective practice, renaming these three commitments as the 'Characteristics of Effective Learning' and giving them greater prominence by devoting a section of the report to them. Although there is little information on them in the revised Statutory Framework, it has been made a requirement for Foundation teachers to provide information to Year One teachers on how each child has been learning in relation to the 'Characteristics', as part of the statutory assessment the EYFS Profile.

Golden Rules and Establishing Routines

At Place Farm, we use Jenny Mosley's Golden Rules throughout the school. During their first week, the children are read the six Golden Rules stories, and these are constantly referred to. Staff spend time getting to know each child and teachers gather initial assessment information, to build a picture of where each child is in their development. This information is used to determine what the next steps are for each child, so that all adults can have these in mind when they join children in their play.

Safety is paramount, so adults are always aware that they need to ensure that all areas are sufficiently well supervised and that the rules and expectations are consistently applied.

A visual timetable is displayed, and regularly referred to, to help the children understand the structure of the day. In addition, clear systems are introduced from the very first day, to promote independence and to take advantage of opportunities for name recognition and numbers and counting. As the children arrive, they self-register, putting their name card into either the packed lunch pot, or school dinners pot. The teacher greets every child at the door and completes a paper register, so that safety is maintained and the children can engage with their chosen activity immediately. Handy Helpers (two per

class each day) are set up in the third week, with these children counting the packed lunch boxes and recording the total on a visual sheet.

Lunchtime for EYFS pupils begins 10 minutes before the official time, so that the whole Early Years Team can support the children and maximise the learning opportunities for every pupil. This means that the children enter the Hall and are settled at tables 20 minutes before the Year One children arrive, which makes the experience less daunting. In addition, EYFS Learning Assistants work through the lunch hour, so that the children are always supported by highly experienced staff, who know the children well. Once the children have finished their lunch, they return to the EYFS Unit, so that they can continue to follow their own interests.

Phonics is taught discretely, as a short whole carpet session, but followed up by adults in children's play, both indoors and outside. Children work in two differentiated groups, with a teacher leading each group, and rotated weekly, so that both teachers understand where each child is in their Phonics learning journey.

We strongly believe that writing is a key skill, which we support our EYFS pupils to develop. We use 'Dough Gym' sessions, where the children use playdough to take part in a workout to music, to develop their fine and gross motor skills, and their beat competency. In addition, formal letter formation is included daily. Alongside this, we aim to develop children's understanding of story language and the elements of stories. We ensure that high-quality texts are read to our EYFS pupils every day, and we use Helicopter stories and Talk for Writing, to develop our pupils' ability to tell stories orally and to develop their creativity. It is wonderful to see their imaginations ignited by these approaches. The children are then encouraged to record their stories, at first supported by an adult, but, over time, with increasing independence. As children's writing confidence develops, they are encouraged to apply their phonic knowledge to their writing, and take part in weekly news writing sessions.

As is the ethos of EYFS, Maths teaching is integrated into the daily routines, and EYFS curriculum. As Years One to Six follow the Maths Mastery programme, we have a daily Maths Meeting and, in line with the whole school focus on improving children's reasoning skills in Maths, we exploit opportunities to develop children's reasoning skills and to encourage them to make links. During the Maths Meeting, children who have not yet secured one to one correspondence and numeral recognition, are taken in small groups for intensive interventions.

Observations and assessments are an essential part of the EYFS, but these need to be meaningful and manageable. As Anna emphasises, having a clipboard or iPad constantly with you is a barrier to engaging with the children and spotting 'teachable moments.' Therefore, whilst we do use EExAT to record 'wow' moments, we now take the approach of taking a photo, but adding the detail later in the day, when the children have gone home. In addition, from week four, we have six focus children a week (three from each class), for whom we collect observation evidence. On the Friday prior to their child's focus week, parents are asked to use EExAT to add 'wow' moments from home, and to complete a simple sheet to gather information and their views. Staff then collect evidence and add it to a sheet for each child, together with EExAT observations. At the end of the week, this information is shared with parents, to enable them to see their child's learning journey so far. In this way, every child is a focus child each term, and staff can identify next steps. In addition, staff take part in a brief professional discussion at the end of each day, so that key information about individual children's interests, worries, needs and next steps are shared. This is also a chance to reflect on what activities children have found particularly rewarding or engrossing, so that this learning can continue the next day.

We cannot over-emphasise the importance of working in partnership with parents. As well as encouraging them to add 'wow' moments to EExAT, we have a communication board, which is completed daily to share key messages. We also have regular meetings, for example a Phonics Meeting during the school day, and as a twilight meeting, to explain how reading and writing are taught at Place Farm. We also have termly Parent Share sessions, where parents and carers are encouraged to come in for an afternoon, to work with their children and their friends. These are always very well attended and successful.

What to expect on a Learning Walk in the EYFS Unit at Place Farm

- Children who are relaxed and confident, and following their own agenda
- Adults who are quietly interacting with the children in the children's chosen activity, to extend their learning
- Children freely able to move between the indoor and outdoor learning environments
- Adults consistently reinforcing routines and expectations
- Children who are being encouraged to 'have a go' and persevere
- Children demonstrating the Characteristics of Effective Learning through: developing their knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of development; initiating activities, showing initiative and making decisions; having time to explore in depth; behaving appropriately, feeling secure and becoming confident learners; developing concentration and seeing tasks through; making links and discussing their learning and realising when they have improved; working and playing cooperatively and resolving conflict (possibly with adult support); working independently; taking responsibility (tidying and taking care of resources); following instructions and responding well to questions; learning through movement and all their senses (being active learners); showing that they know how to keep themselves safe and healthy.

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