

Collierley Primary School  
Early Years Rationale

Why we do what we do in Early Years

Our pedagogy is based on research into child development over many years. We moved from a very structured timetable in 2011 and earlier to objective led planning before moving fully to ‘in the moment’ planning in 2018.

*“If a child can’t learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn.” Ignacio Estrada*

Children's engagement levels are higher when they are focused on their own interests. With carefully planned provision in place the opportunities for learning are rich. Our children are able to plan ahead and decide what they are going to do each day before they arrive at the setting, supporting the development of executive function skills.

*“Play is the highest form of research.” Albert Einstein*

*Play based learning in an early years setting is identified by EEF to have +5 months impact [Education Endowment Foundation | EEF](#)*

Children enter the setting and find their name card on a superhero before washing their hands. The hand washing was introduced with the pandemic but is something we will continue to do to foster good hygiene practices.

We begin each day with dancing. We introduced this when we were finding that children were struggling to sit quietly for the register and story. This allows them to do some physical exercise before sitting for a period of time.

*Physical development approaches in an early years setting is identified by EEF to have +3 months impact [Education Endowment Foundation | EEF](#)*

We prepare children for their future school career by introducing a formal registration time and we talk to the children about the importance of this for safety purposes.

The books we use for story time are carefully chosen to match the needs of the children and to support areas of the curriculum such as PSED or Understanding the World. Each book is read daily for a full week. This allows the children to develop a strong understanding of the story in order to retell it in detail. It also allows staff to discuss and explore vocabulary which may not be known to the children. We are able to talk about different types of text, conventions of English writing, and features of the text and illustrations.

During story time each morning, adults hear children read their decodable readers individually and some children take part in phonics interventions. This is a time where children are not being taken away from their important work of play but also time when the unit is quiet, creating the right atmosphere for children to concentrate fully on their reading skills.

As a school we have adopted “Sounds-Write” for our phonics programme. This was introduced in September 2021. Children in Reception have a focused 20 minute session following the scheme to develop their letter recognition, blending and segmenting skills, and their ability to swap phonemes.

Children in Nursery take part in a tailor-made pre-phonics session, preparing them with the skills they will need to begin formal systematic synthetic phonics in Reception. Phonics activities are based on the progression of skills found in Kirstie Page’s Launchpad for Literacy. This is a holistic approach which provides the skills children will need before they begin the more formal aspects of Literacy. Children take part in many different listening games, developing skills such as being able to distinguish between environmental sounds, identifying the first, middle and last sound in a sequence, and alliteration.

We believe that a sustained period of play is beneficial for the children to develop their own ideas, to become fully engaged in their play and to maximise the use of the provision. Our continuous provision is carefully planned to cover all areas of the EYFS.

*“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning.” [Fred Rogers](#)*

We have a strong focus on encouraging children to be independent thinkers and learners. Children are encouraged to complete tasks independently, with adults providing support or encouraging peer support where absolutely necessary. Good relationships are key in Nursery and Reception. This method of working allows staff to spend quality time talking with children, developing adult/child relationships and supporting child/child relationships within the setting. The older children support the younger children and whenever new skills are learned the children become the teachers for each other.

Self-regulation has a high profile within the new EYFS Statutory Framework (2020). Play provides opportunities for children to develop the skills required for self-regulation and executive function. Within the continuous provision, children are able to initiate tasks, plan what they want to do, organise the resources they need, exercise self-control (particularly when others wish to join in), develop their attention span, become flexible and persevere when things do not go to plan. Adults are ready to step in and support where needed but often we will step back and allow children to safely solve their own problems and difficulties.

*“If a child can do advanced math, speak 3 languages, or receive top grades, but can’t manage their emotions, practice conflict resolutions, or handle stress, none of this other stuff is really going to matter.” [Applebaum Training Institute](#)*

*Self-Regulation strategies in an early years setting is identified by EEF to have +5 months impact [Education Endowment Foundation | EEF](#)*

Communication and language are vital building blocks for future learning. Our children are encouraged to talk with one another and the adults in the setting from the very beginning. This happens in a range of situations. Some children may not be comfortable speaking to adults or children in more formal setting initially while others may be very confident to do this. We give the children the time and space to develop the confidence they need to be comfortable communicating with the adults and the children within the setting. Some children may be more confident to speak when they are outdoors or in a one to one situation. Vocabulary is explored and developed through books and children’s interests. Our daily story

times provide opportunities for children to develop listening and understanding skills in a larger group.

*Communication and language approaches in an early years setting is identified by EEF to have +5 months impact* [Education Endowment Foundation | EEF](#)

Physical skills are developed in many different ways within the setting. Gross motor skills are important for strengthening the upper body and core stability, enabling children to write and sit at a table for longer periods of time. We have a range of fixed play equipment outdoors and in the school hall. Children have access to this equipment as staffing allows but it is used to provide targeted interventions for children who require further practise and development of their gross motor skills.

Fine motor skills are developed through activities such as Dough Disco, but also through the use of play dough, small world equipment, construction and creative skills such as cutting.

*“Children need to develop proprioception and vestibular sense via adventurous play. This then assists them in learning to listen, focus and follow directions. Children with healthy neurological systems naturally seek out the sensory input they need on their own.”*  
*Neurochild*

Resources are available to support children with their writing skills, but they are encouraged to use these independently within the provision. Written instructions for areas such as the playdough, paint and food areas are provided with Widgit symbols to support those who are not yet able to read more complex words. Writing skills are encouraged through provision by creating plans for their models or creations, writing their own name on pictures and writing their own stories.

Maths is an area of learning that lends itself very well to every area of provision. Children are encouraged to discuss shapes, measures, space and number in many different scenarios. For example, within the construction area we will discuss the shape of the materials being used, their properties (e.g. does it roll? Is it the best shape to use?), the length or height of a model or tower in relation to themselves or another object, the weight of some of the materials, the number of blocks required to create a model, positional language to provide instructions about making a model; the possibilities are endless.

We use conversations to discuss the three main strands of Understanding the World with the children. They talk regularly about people at home, in their families and their wider community. We use maps and globes to create provocations for learning around the unit and develop some of those fascinations further through looking at different places of interest. For some children this may be related to holidays, for others it will be places they have heard about on TV and for others it may be places where extended family members live. Many of our children arrive at school with an interest in animals. This is developed through books, the internet and various other sources of information. This is often a way to engage children in reading and writing activities, where they may not always display much natural interest.

*“Before we ever put a pencil in a child’s hands, those hands should dig, climb, press, pull, squish, twist and pinch in a wide array of environments and with a variety of materials.”*  
[Amanda Morgan](#)

There are a number of creative areas set up within the provision. Children are able to explore role play in the home corner. This is always set up as a house but through different enhancements we are able to respond to the different interests of the children, as well as exploring different festivals and cultures. It provides children with the opportunities to explore the world around them in a context they are very familiar with. Musical opportunities are available within the provision. Children often ask for music videos to be played on the IWBs in both rooms. They will also use the CD player to perform familiar songs using the microphones. The junk modelling area is always well stocked through donations from parents and staff. Children plan out what they will make and what they will need prior to making their creations and are encouraged to change and develop their designs as they work, adapting where necessary and as problems arise. We use a wide variety of paints in the setting. Within the continuous provision, powder paint is always available for children to mix their own colours. They follow instructions and clean away their equipment when they have finished the task.

*“Much of what young children do as play – singing, drawing, dancing – are natural forms of art. These activities engage all the sense and help wire the brain for successful learning.”*  
David A. Sousa, *“How the Brain Learns”*

We are very fortunate to have two separate outdoor areas in the Early Years Unit. We have the fixed play equipment which is available to develop physical gross motor skills and we have a loose parts area which reflects much more of the overall provision. Children take responsibility for a small garden area, growing their own fruit, vegetables and flowers over the year. This provides amazing opportunities for children to see the full life cycle of a plant and where some of our food comes from. There are further opportunities for develop gross motor skills through the use of scooters, tricycles for the younger children and ball games. Small world and role play takes on a whole different form in the outdoor area, with the introduction of natural landscapes. We are able to provide a large outdoor sandpit which allows children to develop more upper body strength and develop their arm pivots through digging with large and small tools. A mud kitchen provides further opportunities for messy play and role play, as well as exploring different materials and beginning to use scientific vocabulary. In the UK, our weather is always changing and the outdoor areas provide many opportunities to explore this. We look at the changes in the trees and temperatures in the autumn time; explore ice and snow and what happens in the cold during the winter; spring time provides many different opportunities for looking at new life and growth, as well as splashing in puddles; and the summer allows us to find different ways to cool down often with an ice cream and a paddling pool! Writing opportunities on a much larger scale are provided and encouraged, particularly with children who are more reluctant to write indoors on a piece of paper. Outdoors, on a much larger scale, they are able to use their whole body to create marks and begin to write.

*“As academic demands on children increase, many children are asked to take a seat. They aren’t sitting for just a brief period, followed by lots of rich opportunities to learn through hands-on experience. On the contrary, the majority of children are expected to sit for hours every day. This lack of movement combined with an unrelenting sitting routine is wreaking havoc on children’s minds and bodies.”* Angela Hanscom, *“Balanced and Barefoot”*

All children in Nursery and Reception are offered the opportunity to attend Forest School with our trained Level 3 Forest School Leader. The sessions further develop many of the skills from our main provision. Children are expected to put on their own Forest School kit,

considering what the weather might be like and what they will need to keep themselves warm and safe. Forest School allows children to take risks within a safe environment. Children enjoy exploring our extensive Forest School area, excitedly talking about the environment, rolling down hills, playing in muddy areas and climbing trees. These experiences help to develop motor skills, communication, social interaction, self-regulation, executive function and among many other important skills for children in the EYFS.

Nursery and Reception children currently eat together at lunchtimes in the school dining room. The children receive their meal from the lunchtime staff and are encouraged to be independent within the lunchtime session. They pour their own water, make an attempt at cutting up their own food and clear away their plates and leftovers independently. As well as developing independence, this time is a social time where children are able to chat freely with their friends.

Our environment has a very neutral colour scheme. This has been an ongoing process for a number of years, removing bright blue tables and chairs and replacing them with natural wooden furniture. The purpose of this was to create a calming environment without the need for bright primary colours. There is research to suggest that bright, bold colours are over stimulating for children and do not create the best learning conditions, particularly for children with SEND.