



Early Years Philosophy (Happy, Healthy, High Achievers)

Introduction

'Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential. Children develop quickly in the early years and a child's experiences between birth and age five have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe, and happy childhood is important in its own right. Good parenting and high-quality early learning together provide the foundation children need to make the most of their abilities and talents as they grow up.'

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, 2023 - Department for Education

It is important to note when reviewing Lowbrook Academy's Early Years Philosophy that all policies, school and safeguarding procedures and requirements are already met through existing policies in this school. The exception to this is the additional Paediatric First Aid Training that the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Practitioners are required to undertake.

In developing our Early Years Philosophy, the Senior Leadership Team considers all the relevant research and the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage and relevant information on the DFE website regarding the EYFS Curriculum.

This highlights the educational theories and publications that have influenced our pedagogy within Lowbrook Academy and should be read in conjunction with our Curriculum and Teaching and Learning policies. At Lowbrook we feel our Early Years (EY) arrangements are unique, following recommendations of the Cambridge Review the EY encompasses the first two years at our school. The traditional Foundation stage and Year 1 work closely to ensure the transition is comprehensive and progressive. When the children start at Lowbrook we analyse their EYFS data from the previous settings and spend the first term getting to know each child individually.

At Lowbrook Academy our philosophy is based on the belief that all children will be competent readers, writers, spellers, and mathematicians as they progress through the school, but furthermore that all children should be given a personalised education that ensures they all enter the primary phase as well-rounded children who have achieved their EYFS objectives.

We aim to support all children to become independent and collaborative learners. Across the Foundation Stage, we will provide a broad and balanced curriculum that will enable each child to develop personally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically, creatively, and intellectually to their full potential. At Lowbrook Academy, we will:

- Provide a happy, safe, stimulating, and challenging programme of learning and development for the children to experience as they begin their journey through school.
- Provide a broad, balanced, relevant and creative curriculum that will set in place firm foundations for further learning and development in Key Stage 1 and beyond and enable choice and decision making, fostering independence and self-confidence.



- Use and value what each child can do, assessing their individual needs and next steps and helping each child to progress. We will use a variety of assessment methods, including ongoing and more formalised observations and the use of the Evidence Me assessment tool.
- Develop positive relationships with parents and carers to build a strong partnership in supporting their children.

Starting Date

Under current law, children in the UK must be in education from the term of their fifth birthday. The law also states that school admission codes must provide for the admission of all children in the September following their fourth birthday.

Following guidance from the Department for Education, here at Lowbrook we believe that most but not all children are ready for school in September. We therefore allow entry for children in the term of their 5th birthday if it is felt this would be beneficial.

The EYFS guidance advises that children who attend school shortly after their fourth birthday need special consideration to ensure that their particular needs are met. Here at Lowbrook we follow a ratio of 1:15 in our foundation stage classes ensuring all children receive high quality learning within a safe and stimulating environment.

Staffing

The adults in our EY classes are well trained and have a range of qualifications and experience. These qualifications include QTS, BA (Hons) Education, NVQ 2, HLTA and FdA in Early Years Childcare and Education. Teaching assistants are EY specialists and have a wide range of experience in EYs. The Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) found that ‘qualified staff in the most effective settings provide children with more experience of academic activities (especially language and mathematics) and they encourage children to engage in activities with high cognitive challenge.’ REPEY found that the most highly qualified staff also provided the most teaching, noting that they were more effective in their interactions with the children, using the most sustained shared thinking. At Lowbrook Academy, we feel the level of qualifications held by the staff members in the EYs supports REPEY, providing effective teaching and planning and ensuring all children reach their full potential. As outlined in the introduction, all Foundation Stage teaching staff and most Teaching Assistants have Paediatric First Aid training.

Learning and Developing

The EYFS Curriculum

Our curriculum for the Foundation Stage reflects the learning aims and objectives set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum.

There are seven areas of learning and development that must shape educational provision in all early years’ settings. All areas of learning and development are important and inter-connected, and none can be delivered in isolation from the others. Our children’s learning experiences enable them to develop competency and skill across these areas of learning. They require a balance of adult led and child-



initiated activities for children to develop effectively and to give them the best chance of obtaining a good level of development at the end of their Reception Year. Three areas are particularly crucial for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building their capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive.

The three Prime areas are:

- communication and language
- physical development
- personal, social and emotional development

Staff will also support children in four specific areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied.

Specific Areas:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design

Children's development levels are assessed and as the year progresses, the balance will shift towards a more equal focus on all areas of learning, as children grow in confidence and ability within the three prime areas.

Child-Initiated and Adult-Led Play

Through play, our children explore and develop learning experiences which help them make sense of the world. They practise and build up ideas and learn how to control themselves and understand the need for rules. They have the opportunity to think creatively alongside other children as well as on their own. They communicate with others as they investigate and solve problems. They express fears or relive anxious experiences in controlled and safe situations.

At Lowbrook Academy, the children receive a balance of child-initiated and adult-led learning judged appropriate to each child. Assessment plays an important part in helping parents, carers and practitioners to recognise children's progress, understand their needs, and to plan activities and support. Ongoing assessment (also known as formative assessment) is an integral part of the learning and development process. It involves practitioners knowing children's level of achievement and interests, and then shaping teaching and learning experiences for each child reflecting that knowledge. In our interactions with children, we will respond to our own day-to-day observations about children's progress and observations that parents and carers share. Daily observations of children learning in a range of contexts will take place, with some observations planned and others spontaneous. This follows the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, July 2023 guidelines.

The Academy invests in theories such as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) has been defined as *'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in a collaboration with more capable peers'* (Vygotsky, 1978. p86).



Therefore, suggesting a child's development is minimal without adult interaction raising the importance of adult led activities and teaching in early years to ensure a child reaches their full potential.

Vygotsky believed that when a student is at the ZPD for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance (scaffolding) will give the student enough of a "boost" to achieve the task. Once the student, with the benefit of scaffolding, masters the task, the scaffolding can then be removed, and the student will then be able to complete the task again on his or her own.

Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY)

Within the EY it is often observed that some of the children may well continue with the activity by themselves and even teach their peers. REPEY found best practice encouraged sustained shared thinking which occurred between child and either an adult or a single peer partner. We support this belief by encouraging pair and small group work within the setting, and this is a theory used throughout the Academy.

We ensure our EY lessons are clear and concise with a short and active input where all children participate in peer or group discussion as well as team games and whole class singing or rhymes. The group work is based on the individual children's needs. While some group work during the lessons are independent and children may be steered towards particular activities, they may use the resources for their own outcome and this is encouraged and celebrated rather than corrected. The children all work in groups with the teacher and work independently during the course of the week. Furthermore, REPEY (2002) found most effective settings involve a balance of 'teacher-directed, programmed learning approach [and] an open framework approach where children are provided with 'free' access to a range of instructive learning environments in which adults support children's learning' (p4). So, as well as 'teacher-directed' activities, the children have lots of time for child initiated activities, known to the children as 'Busy Time', during the course of the day to ensure they are fulfilling their own interests and schemes (as supported by Piaget) where they have free access to the outdoor area to play in the sandpit, with water, on bikes and scooters, in the playhouse, with creative arts activities inc. musical instruments, the construction toys or small world. Inside reflects the outdoor area there are always art activities, reading and maths activities, a role play area and also an excellent range of ICT activities including ipads, laptops and the IWB. The children know they can interact freely with the range of resources that are available.

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE)

The findings of EPPE (2003) suggests that the learning environment should be set out with activities to enhance children's learning, so that child-initiated activities still extend learning. The learning environment at Lowbrook demonstrates this and as a result delivers outstanding results by enabling children to feel positive in themselves and a build a positive attitude to learning.

As a result, all children leave EY being secure in Monster Phonics phases 2, 3 and 4 as well as being able to read and write basic sentences. All children can recognise numbers to at least 10 and can count, order numbers as well as relate this to everyday life; they are confident and controlled within their own



bodies and furthermore they have enquiring minds and all feel safe to develop and grow into well rounded individuals.

Assessment

Here at Lowbrook we have high expectations, thorough initial and ongoing assessment identifies what children can do, what they enjoy doing and what they need to do to progress. The children are assessed on entry to Lowbrook using the NFER baseline assessment which assesses the children in all areas of the EYFS. Experienced adults use this information with their understanding of child development to effectively plan the next challenges to stretch each child's learning, play and exploration. As a result, children at Lowbrook are enabled to build on what they already know and reach their full potential in their learning and development.

The Foundation Stage Profile is the nationally employed assessment tool that enables teachers to record their observations at the end of the pupils' Foundation Stage and to summarise their progress towards the Early Learning Goals. It covers each of the seven areas of learning contained in the curriculum guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Assessment, based on observation of children's learning and development, is an integral part of the EYFS. At Lowbrook we complete the Foundation Stage profile using Evidence Me and Target Tracker for each child during the academic year. The profile describes the child's level of attainment at the end of the EYFS and identifies their learning needs for the next stage of school. Reporting arrangements are the same throughout the school and this is covered in detail in the Assessment and Reporting policy.

Safeguarding

'Children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure, when their individual needs are met, and when they have positive relationships with the adults caring for them.'

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, 2023 - Department for Education

At Lowbrook Academy, we understand that we are legally required to comply with welfare requirements as stated in the Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage 2023.

- To provide a setting that is welcoming, safe and stimulating where children can grow in confidence;
- Promote good health;
- Manage behaviour effectively in a manner appropriate for the children's stage of development and individual needs;
- To ensure that all adults who look after the children, or who have unsupervised access to them, are suitable to do so;
- Ensure that the setting, furniture and equipment is safe and suitable for the purpose it was intended for;
- Maintain records, policies and procedures required for the safe efficient management of the setting and to meet the needs of the children.



It is important to us that all children in the school are 'safe'. We aim to educate children on boundaries, rules and limits and to help them understand why they exist, providing them with choices to help them develop this important life skill. We encourage children to take risks and highlight the importance of keeping themselves safe by teaching them how to recognise and avoid hazards.

Dave Rooney (Principal) is the Designated Safeguarding Lead, and Paula West is the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead for EYFS.

References

- DCSF, (2013) The Early Years Foundation Stage, Nottingham, DCSF Publications
- SIRAJI-BLATCHFORD, I. SYLVA, K MUTTOCK, S GILDEN, R AND BELL, D (2002) Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY), London DfES publications.
- SYLVA, K MELHUIH, E SAMMONS, P SIRAJI-BLATCHFORD, I TAGGART, B AND ELLIOT, K (2003). The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE), London DfES publications

Related Policies

Assessment
Curriculum
Teaching and Learning
Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

Signed:

Chair of Governors

Signed:

Principal