



Early Years Policy

Introduction

Education is an ongoing process from birth. Learning which takes place in the early years is very important for students at Beacon Hill School. We aim to provide a curriculum appropriate to the individual needs of the youngest children in school and an environment in which they are able to develop all their emerging skills and creativity.

Rationale

The early years curriculum is concerned with the child and the context or setting in which the learning takes place, as well as the content of the teaching.

These are the principles which underlie the yearly years' curriculum at Beacon Hill School;

1. Early childhood is valid in itself and should be a happy and fulfilling part of life, not simply a preparation for the next stage of education
2. Each child at Beacon Hill School is unique and will develop at their own pace.
3. Learning is holistic and for the young child with learning difficulties it may not be possible to be compartmentalised under subject headings.
4. Communication skills are fundamental to all areas of the curriculum in the early years.
5. Young children learn most effectively through play, experimental, investigation and first hand experience.
6. Children, particularly those with behavioural difficulties, need a consistent framework within the classroom organisation.
7. The adults and children to whom the child relates are of central importance. All adults working with the children should display positive attitudes towards them thus promoting high self esteem.
8. Parents are recognised as the child's first educators.

Aims of Beacon Hill School and Early Years Education

1. That celebrates achievement for everyone
2. To ensure an effective transition from home to school.
3. To work in partnership with parents based on shared responsibility, understanding, mutual respect and dialogue.
4. To continually assess each child's abilities in all areas of the curriculum and to formulate Individual Education Plans which will form the basis of the child's education at Beacon Hill School and their Statement of Special Educational Needs.

5. To promote a happy healthy atmosphere of security trust and respect.
6. To stimulate curiosity and to develop communication skills through spoken language, symbols and signing.
7. To give opportunities for choice-making.
8. To help the child to form positive relationships with adults and peers and to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in the group.
9. To develop self-confidence whilst showing consideration and compassion for others.
10. To encourage independence in the areas of personal hygiene and appearance.
11. To care sensitively for the basic needs of all of the children.
12. To provide opportunities to experiment with a variety of materials and to use and explore the senses.
13. To encourage creativity and develop an appreciation of beauty
14. To provide opportunities for integration with mainstream children and to use community facilities for teaching as much as possible.

IMPLEMENTATION

Environment and Resources

High quality equipment and materials which are appropriate to each child's needs and abilities are provided in the early years classroom. This will include use of ICT to support all areas of the curriculum. The environment is stimulating, challenging and aesthetically pleasing, encouraging high levels of play and learning which will help the child to become more confident, self reliant, responsible and motivated. The classroom is organised with due regard to health and safety.

There is an opportunity for a small group of children to spend time working in a mainstream classroom with support.

The children will benefit from trips out into the community to extend their experiences and to make use of a wide range of community facilities for generalising their learning.

There is a high ratio of qualified staff and nursing input as necessary to ensure the safety and quality of the education on offer.

Assessment

Children may be admitted to Beacon Hill from the age of two and one half years. They will begin on a part-time basis often with parental support. There is a flexible approach to admissions which caters for individual need. Contracts between home and school are signed by both parties. Throughout the early years close liaison is maintained between home and school through occasional home visits, home/school diaries, parent's evenings, open days, social events, Annual Educational Reviews and an 'open door' policy.

Following a settling-in period, the children are assessed using PIVATS to give a base line on entry to school also with the use of the Early Support Developmental Journal which documents the small stages of early child development. Beacon Hill's own detailed records of initial skills in all areas of the curriculum and reports from outside agencies are also used to build up a comprehensive profile of the child. This is an ongoing record which may include observations, photographs and sample of work.

IEPs are written, based on this information, in close consultation with the parents and other professionals who have often been in very close contact with the family. These IEPs are reviewed every term and form the basis the work with the child. Due to the special needs of the children staff are skilled in using behavioural techniques to encourage the children to achieve finely graded steps in learning. This may include use of reward, imitation and gradually fading physical, gestural and verbal prompts.

Planning

Professionals such as Physiotherapists, Medical staff, Speech Therapists and Teachers of the Deaf and Visually Impaired often work with particular children within the classroom supporting the ongoing work of classroom staff and advising on individual programmes.

It is important that all staff have a clear understanding of the aims and rationale of early years education. The planning addresses these issues;

- a) the purpose of the teaching
- b) the activities provided
- c) the resources needed
- d) the assessment opportunities

The organisation of the day should be sensitive to the needs of the children and an overall pattern and routine will help children to feel secure and provide them with a sense of time. This is particularly important for children on the autistic continuum spectrum.

The planning should be flexible enough to allow for children to make choices between given options. This provides them with the opportunity to work towards planning and taking some responsibility for their own learning.

Curriculum

The Early Years Curriculum at Beacon Hill includes the elements of the whole school curriculum including the "Enhanced Curriculum", the "Ethos or Hidden Curriculum."

Beacon Hill follows the Early Years Foundation Curriculum adapting it to meet the needs of our pupils. The six areas of development and learning are :-

- personal, social and emotional development
- Communication language and literacy
- Problem solving reasoning and Numeracy
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Physical development
- Creative development

The Importance of Play

- It provides an opportunity to develop language by the child interacting and co-operating and expressing ideas with peers and adults.
- It provides opportunities to practice and develop basic skills such as manipulative skills
- It helps children become self confident and develop self awareness
- It helps to encourage independent thinking and problem solving strategies
- It nourishes curiosity by allowing children to explore
- It develops concentration
- It gives pleasure and immense enjoyment
- It helps children to make maximum progress towards achieving their individual targets

To the 'Early Years' child at Beacon Hill, work and play should not be opposites but part of a continuum of experiences. The Adult's role in providing challenging play is vital as many of the children have underdeveloped and repetitive play strategies. The adult needs to intervene when appropriate and engage in the play with the child to enhance its quality.

To do this the adults needs to:-

- Observe and discover what interests' individual children, accounting for any physical and sensory difficulties
- Note how children perceive and solve problems
- Take cues from the children
- Play alongside the children, encouraging them to generalise their skills
- Support, encourage and extend children's ideas

Behaviour

For children to grow and prosper they need a warm, friendly environment that makes them secure and appreciated. They need consistency from adults and a common set of expectations and limits. Most importantly, children at Beacon Hill need a great deal of praise and encouragement. Behaviour programmes are implemented when needed, in consultation with parents, outside agencies and all staff.

Monitoring and Evaluation

It is the responsibility of the class teachers and the co-ordinators to monitor the delivery of the Early Years curriculum measured against the school development plans.

Frequent meetings of all Early Years staff are held to discuss issues arising and the quality of the teaching and learning.

CPD

Staff training and development is organised by the Early Years Co-ordinators. This is planned in detail in the School Development Plans.