



Nursery School Early Years Care Children's Centre

## OUTDOOR PLAY

*Working together to make a real and lasting difference...*

### **Our Mission Statement**

**Whitegate Nursery School and Children's Centre strives to provide a happy, caring and understanding environment, where each individual is valued and is able to develop to their full potential within the Early Years Foundation Stage**

**We aim to provide an integrated service which involves and supports parents in the care and education of their children. For very young children, care and education are inseparable.**

### **Aims**

That all children will prosper as per the Every Child Matters agenda, that is to:

- Stay safe
- Be healthy
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Acquire economic well-being

Children's achievements and the progress they make during the time they spend across the Nursery School and Children's Centre will be valued and celebrated, shared with them and their families. The Early Years Foundation Stage guidance on outdoor play underpins this policy.

### **Rationale**

At Whitegate we believe that all children are unique individuals with different learning preferences. We are committed to meeting the individual needs of each child and to support them to become capable and confident learners. We ensure that children are able to access the curriculum in the way that they learn best, indoors and outdoors. Children are given the choice as to where they spend time and engage in learning and their interests. **All children have an entitlement to play and learn outdoors on a daily basis.** The outdoor environment is accessible throughout the session on a free flow basis and children are encouraged and supported to make choices as to where they want to be. At Whitegate we believe that our outdoor environment should reflect the natural environment and children should be encouraged to explore and value their environment.

## Why do we provide outdoor play?

In many cases, the outdoor environment is far more practical and more effective for some learning experiences than the indoor environment. When observing young children learn, it is clear that outdoor play opportunities need to be provided alongside indoor play opportunities in order to form a complementary teaching and learning experience.

Harriman, H; *The Outdoor Classroom: A Place to Learn*; 2006; p.4

All staff at Whitegate Nursery School and Children's Centre share the belief that outdoor play is essential to children's learning and development. Some of the reasons that staff cited for valuing outdoor play include:

- Promoting physical development
- Providing a sense of freedom
- Exercise
- Enabling children to express themselves
- Exploring the natural environment
- Taking risks
- Learning in a non- threatening environment
- Supporting the needs of individuals, especially boys
- Learning in open spaces

(Staff meetings – April-May 2012)

Accessing learning outdoors can support children's development across the whole curriculum and different areas outdoors support different skills. The opportunities provided outdoors are different to those indoors. There are opportunities for children to play in natural environments, on a large scale and to have experiences that involve playing and experimenting with heights, speed and being enclosed or hidden. Children can also have autonomy in their play.



Harriman, H; 2006; p.7

## Entitlements

In March 2012 the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance was updated. The EYFS seeks to provide:

- **quality and consistency** in all early years settings, so that every child makes good progress and no child gets left behind;
- **a secure foundation** through learning and development opportunities which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and are assessed and reviewed regularly;
- **partnership working** between practitioners and with parents and/or carers;
- **equality of opportunity** and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported.

Four guiding principles should shape practice in early year's settings. These are:

- every child is a **unique child**, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured;

- children learn to be strong and independent through **positive relationships**;
- children learn and develop well in **enabling environments**, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers; and
- **children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates**. The framework covers the education and care of all children in early year's provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The EYFS document specifies that in planning and guiding children's activities, practitioners must reflect on the different ways that children learn and reflect these in their practice. Three characteristics of effective teaching and learning are:

- **playing and exploring** - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go';
- **active learning** - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements; and
- **creating and thinking critically** - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things.

Development Matters states that adults should arrange flexible indoor and outdoor space and resources where children can explore, build, move and role play support the characteristics of effective learners.

Play is not a luxury but rather a crucial dynamic of healthy physical, intellectual and social-emotional development.

Elkind; 2007

At Whitegate, all children have the entitlement to play and learn outdoors every day, unless the weather is deemed too severe. This decision is made by the Team Leader. Children must have appropriate clothing and footwear. All staff are responsible for ensuring that children are appropriately dressed. At Whitegate we provide rain coats, waterproof trousers, all in ones and wellington boots.

## **Provision and the environment**

### **(Risk and challenge)**

At Whitegate the learning space is viewed as indoors and outdoors; no distinction is made. The outdoors is in effect a room without a roof.

Our outdoor environment has been developed to support children's interests whilst encouraging them to develop their skills. The variety of equipment and structures has been provided to support children to engage in meaningful experiences with independence. Each outdoor space has been carefully designed to meet the development needs and interests of the children who will access it; whilst providing challenge and the opportunities for children to take risks in a safe and secure place with highly skilled staff.

Our environment has been developed to support children to take manageable risks and challenge themselves. Resources and equipment have been selected and developed to encourage children to challenge themselves. Activities such as climbing (including trees), exploring (the natural environment - bushes, mud, gardening) and experimenting are encouraged and facilitated by adults.

The environment and provision also supports children to develop socially, working with others to complete activities and support one another. Turn taking, sharing and cooperation are given the highest priority and are valued by all.

At Whitegate children's dispositions to learning are valued, nurtured and celebrated. The outdoors provides many opportunities for children to develop their exploratory skills, imagination and creativity, perseverance and problem solving, leadership skills and working collaboratively with others and their confidence and bravery.

### **The adult role and development**

*'Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships'* (EYFS Development Matters; 2012; p.2).

When outdoor play is seen as a vital part of early years education, it is more likely to be well planned, well organized, well provided for and developmentally appropriate. The role of the adult in the preparation for their play, their interaction during play and the assessment of and for learning as a result of play is absolutely crucial.

Harriman, H; 2006; p.50

At Whitegate the adult role is viewed as central to supporting children's development and providing quality learning environments. There are several different aspects to the adult role:

- Planning adult-led learning activities and providing resources to stimulate or develop an interest
- Supporting and developing child initiated activities
- Observing children's learning and assessing their development
- Encouraging children to develop their skills and interests and enabling them to achieve their aims
- As a play partner – playing alongside the children, letting them take the lead
- Challenging children and encouraging them to take risks in a safe and secure environment
- Demonstrating and motivating
- Praising and encouraging children
- Supporting involvement in activities
- Taking the opportunity for quality interactions
- Encouraging children to plan their next steps in learning

- Overseeing the outdoor space – monitoring health and safety and conducting ongoing risk assessments

(Staff meetings April - May 2012)

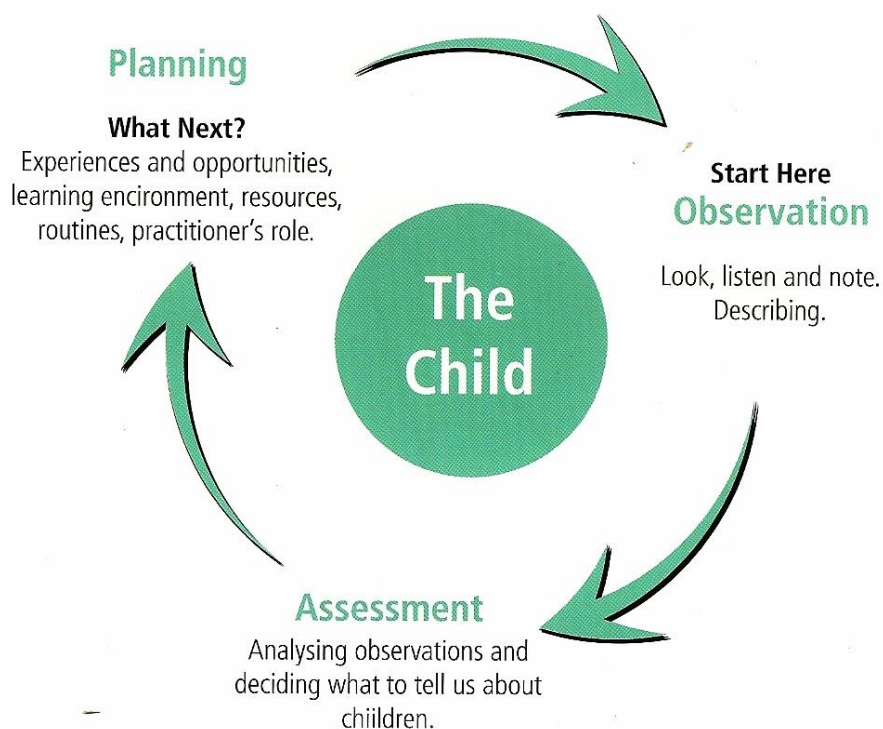
Staff will attend relevant training to increase their knowledge and skills of effectively using the outdoors to develop and support learning and development. Staff will be provided with training in line with their Supervision and Appraisal self evaluations and needs. Staff meetings are arranged regularly to discuss any updates to outdoor play and discuss health and safety procedures and risk assessments.

## **Health and safety**

*'Providers must ensure that their premises, including outdoor spaces, are fit for purpose'* (EYFS Statutory Framework 2012).

Children's safety is of the utmost importance at Whitegate. The outdoor environment has a secure boundary, surfaces below climbing equipment are appropriate to the activity and equipment has been carefully placed to ensure the safety of children and adults. An in depth risk assessment of the area and the resources takes place annually (see appendix). The site supervisor undertakes a daily check of the entire outdoor space. It is the duty of every staff member to undertake dynamic risk assessments of the space and equipment. Children are regularly reminded of the rules for safe behavior outdoors and breaches in appropriate behavior are dealt within in line with the behavior policy and procedures. Children must wear safe and appropriate footwear and clothing for all weather types and parents are asked to support Whitegate in this. Wellington boots, raincoats and waterproof trousers are provided and staff support children to wear appropriate clothing for the weather and the activity.

## Planning, observation and assessment



EYFS Development Matters; March 2012; p.3

All staff observe children's learning and interests outdoors. These describe the activity and the learning. Observations take several forms:

- Significant comments
- Learning stories
- Photographs
- Videos

Staff analyse their observations and assess each child's learning against the EYFS Development Matters areas of learning and age phases. Staff also identify, assess and celebrate children's dispositions to learning.

Practitioners must consider the individual needs, interests, and stage of development of each child in their care, and must use this information to plan a challenging and enjoyable experience for each child in all of the areas of learning and development.

EYFS Statutory Framework; 2012; p.6

Staff plan possible next steps for children's learning and development. Staff may plan further activities outdoors or plan activities indoors. Observations of learning indoors may present possible next steps which are better accessed outdoors. All observations and assessments are kept in the children's individual PAL (Personal Achievement Log) folders and shared with parents and families (for further information on Assessment, please see Assessment Policy).

## **SEN**

Whitegate is committed to meeting the special educational needs of all children and ensuring they make progress in line with our Mission Statement. Children with Special Educational Needs will be provided with an Targeted Learning Plan to meet their specific needs. These targets will be shared with the child's parents and all practitioners and targets may feed into planning. TLP targets will be assessed and updated with parents every 6 weeks. Please see Inclusion and SEN policy.

## **Looked after children**

At we are committed to helping children in care have the best possible experiences in line with Every Child Matters. We aim to provide stability, safety, continuity and individual care and attention. All looked after children will have a Personal Education Plan which will be reviewed regularly. Please see Policy for Looked after Children.

## **Monitoring and evaluation**

It is the responsibility of all staff and governors to monitor their adherence to this policy. The policy will be reviewed annually by the Lead Teacher. The Early Education Committee will review the policy every three years. The Head of Centre monitors the effective use of the outdoors environment, planning and assessments. Any outcomes and targets for action and improvement will be included within the School Development Planning Process. In line with our Mission Statement, we strive to ensure we meet every child's needs. We use both qualitative and quantitative judgement to evaluate the success of the policy.