

EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

POLICY

Implications of an acquired brain injury

The Early Years are a major time of accelerated development, not only physically but also in key areas such as cognition, social/behavioural skills and language/communication. Skills that are developing at the time of the injury may be most vulnerable to being disrupted (Anderson et al, 2010). "Skills emerging at time of insult were found to be more vulnerable to disruption than those previously established, (Anderson et al, 2010). Cognitive abilities that children rely on to learn new information and to generalise or apply new skills may be compromised. In the immature brain, there is a complex interaction between recovery from injury and ongoing development". (Predicting outcome after childhood brain injury Rob Forsyth, BM BCh PhD and Fenella Kirkham, MB BChir MD ([CMAJ](#). 2012 Aug 7; 184(11): 1257–1264)

When teaching and playing with children we make adaptations as appropriate, recognising that children with an acquired brain injury have suffered physical as well as psychological trauma and traumatic stress due to a myriad of reasons:

- *Many children have pre-existing childhood Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as well as those which are present as a consequence of the injury through the accident or illness itself*
- *the experience of being in hospital, often in intensive care*
- *invasive interventions which are sometimes ongoing*
- *severe disruption to normal life with changed expectations and complex feelings of loss*
- *separation from key attachment figures, made worse due to Covid restrictions*

Trauma can be a huge barrier to playing, learning and developing, therefore it is crucial that we ensure that young children are in the right place for learning and to do so they need to experience feelings of safety, predictability, containment and consistency within warm trusting relationships. Positive, consistent and repetitive experiences support self-regulation.

We understand that brain injury can provide a backdrop to some changed behaviour, caused potentially by the ~~organic~~ changes to the brain, in addition to the effects of trauma, which can lead to increased impulsivity, anger and frustration, reduced attention and slower processing skills. Understanding this helps support the child at difficult times

We provide education for very young children (2-5) who have an acquired brain injury or other neurological conditions, the majority of whom are following a rehabilitation programme at The Children's Trust or may be resident for complex medical needs management. This period provides opportunities to assess, identify and address needs, so facilitating an appropriate placement and contributing towards an Education, Health and Care Plan when appropriate.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework

This policy is based on requirements set out in the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) that published December 2023, effective from January 2024. This document is a principled approach to Early Years education, bringing together children's safeguarding, welfare, learning and development requirements through four themes: 'A Unique Child', 'Positive Relationships', 'Enabling Environments' with teaching and support from adults and 'Learning and Development.'

Play

Article 31 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

“State Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.”

Play is essential for children’s development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, relate to others, set their own goals and solve problems. Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults. (Statutory Guidance 2021)

We want children to be engaged in the learning process and for their learning to be relevant and purposeful. Therefore, we believe that children learn best by doing. We believe that play, both indoors and outdoors, is an essential vehicle for young children’s learning and development. Play helps children to explore, investigate and, make sense of the world around them. Play allows children to be challenged in their thinking and helps them to practice and rehearse skills and to be motivated in their learning. Children also learn through first hand experiences, being shown how to do things, talking, and joining in with activities which are planned by adults often using a playful approach to maximise engagement.

Independent play can be extremely difficult for many of our children, and they do not always have an appropriate peer group. Additionally, children can find it difficult to play spontaneously when afraid or anxious. Play and being playful is different for every child depending upon their level of ability, and their emotional status. Children often need support in this area to develop their play skills both in the classroom with teaching staff, with peers when possible, and with other members of the team. Through play and being playful, we aim for our children to explore and benefit from a variety of learning experiences, which help them make sense of the world and can be calming and reassuring.

As stated in Birth to Five Matters non- statutory guidance, it is vital practitioners understand the range of play children engage in and why. “Children may be pursuing different purposes in sensory play, exploratory play with objects, schematic play, symbolic play, pretend play (alone, in role or with small world objects), cooperative role play with others, fantasy and superhero play, physical play, rough and tumble play, risky play, or digital play”.

Aims of the EYFS:

- To provide a secure, safe, caring and stimulating environment.
- For children to have fun and be happy.
- To ensure that all children are valued and have equality of opportunity.
- To develop communication skills so that every child is helped to reach their full potential.
- To build on what the child already knows and develop a positive attitude and enjoyment for learning.
- To put children first; to listen to them and their parents/carers; to make them the most important influence on planning, assessment and routines.
- To provide a personalised, relevant, flexible and engaging curriculum that where possible can be co-constructed between children, practitioners and families that will motivate learning in all its aspects.
- To encourage independence, confidence, self- awareness and self-regulation.
- To provide a range of opportunities to learn through direct experience, enquiry, and active exploration, in the classroom and outdoors, using a wide variety of equipment and materials.
- To assess individual needs, abilities and interests of each child and use this information to plan challenging and enjoyable experiences for each child in all areas of learning and development.
- To assess children’s abilities and where possible help them develop strategies to make progress.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, we recognise:

[Reviewed May 2024](#)

- the central importance of parents, families and carers who themselves will have experienced trauma
- the essential nature of partnership working between with parents and/or carers, the multidisciplinary team and relevant professionals related to the child's educational placements
- that all children and families should feel included, safe and valued
- the need to work together to best support children's learning and development
- the value of sharing information so that appropriate and challenging targets can be set for the children

Our early years setting follows the curriculum and educational programmes as outlined in the latest version of the EYFS statutory framework that applies from September 2021 adapted to meet individual needs

The Early Years Foundation Stage is based around four Key Themes, three Prime Areas of Learning and four Specific Areas of Learning

Themes

1. A Unique Child

We recognise that children develop in individual ways, at varying rates from when they arrive at The Trust. Each child and each brain injury is unique. Teachers speak to the children where possible and parents or carers to ascertain prior and current interests so these can be included in planning to maximise feelings of familiarity, security and motivate and engage children. Sometimes, parents express they do not know what their child likes to do now they have newly acquired difficulties and the journey of discovery is undertaken together. After a brain injury, developmental trajectories are interrupted and altered. Since every child and every brain injury is unique, assessment of a child's specific strengths and difficulties and how to support them and reduce barriers to learning is at the heart of our curriculum intent and implementation.

2. Positive Relationships

We aim to develop caring, respectful, professional relationships with the children and their families and carers. Children's attitudes and dispositions to learning are influenced by feedback from others; we use praise and encouragement, as well as celebration, to encourage children to develop a positive attitude to learning.

"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."

Parents as Partners

We recognise that parents are children's first and most enduring educators and we value the contribution that they make. We recognise the role that parents have played, and their future role, in educating their children. We do this through talking to parents about their child and encouraging parents to talk to the child's teacher if there are any concerns. We hold in mind the trauma parents and families will have experienced during our interactions and meetings with them.

There are more formal meetings with parents with the multi-disciplinary team where the child's progress and barriers are discussed. There are ongoing informal discussions during a child's stay and parents are always welcome to speak to the teachers. Parents often accompany children at least initially, particularly when they are very young or distressed

Teachers share written reports with parents on their child's attainment, progress, as well as areas of need and teachers provide educational advice when requested by the local authority which will form part of the Educational Health and Care Plan to ensure pupils receive adequate support in their future educational setting. -Personal Learning Goals-which are written for each child, after the baseline assessment is completed,

are shared with parents. Learning journals are in place in addition to formal reports, which children and parents enjoy as a record of experiences and progress.

3. Enabling Environments

We recognise that the environment, a major part of which is the people within it, plays a key role in supporting and extending the children's development. We understand the importance of enriched environments to stimulate new synaptic connections. Through observation, we assess the children's interests, stages of development, recovery and learning needs, before planning achievable and challenging activities and experiences to extend the children's learning. The classroom is organised to allow children to explore and learn securely and safely. There is an enclosed outdoor area outside Yellow Class. Children may access the soft play and multi-sensory room the grounds of The Children's Trust, as well as a range of equipment to help them learn and develop skills. We plan activities and resources both inside and outside enabling the children to develop in all the areas of learning. At Surrey Teaching Centre we work with parents and as part of the multi-disciplinary team consisting of speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, the play team, doctors and nurses and carers. There is a close working relationship whereby priorities for each child are decided often with the main overarching goals

4. Learning and Development

Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates; all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected. Teaching and learning is personalised for each child.

Priorities for the EYFS:

- all children are kept safe
- the partnership between children, teachers and parents and carers, so that our children feel secure at school and develop a sense of well-being and achievement;
- adults who are responsive, affectionate and readily available to engage in high quality interactions
- the understanding that teachers and teaching assistants have knowledge and experience of how children develop and learn, the effects of trauma and brain injury and how this can affect their teaching;
- the range of approaches used that provide first-hand experiences, give clear explanations, make appropriate interventions, extend and develop play and talk or other means of communication;
- a carefully planned curriculum that helps children work towards their Personal Learning Goals as well as the Early Learning Goals throughout the EYFS when appropriate;
- the provision for children to take part in activities that build on and extend their interests and develop their intellectual, physical, social and emotional abilities;
- there is equality of opportunity
- the encouragement for children to communicate and where possible talk about their learning, and to develop independence;
- the support for learning with appropriate and accessible indoor and outdoor space, facilities and equipment;
- the identification of the progress and future learning needs of children through observations;
- the good relationships between our school and the rest of the multi-disciplinary team as well as prior and future placements

The ways in which the child engages with other people and their environment – playing and exploring, active learning, and creating and thinking critically – underpin learning and development across all areas and support the child to remain an effective and motivated learner.

The EYFS framework includes seven areas of learning and development that are equally important and interconnected. However, three areas -the prime areas are seen as particularly important for igniting curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, and for building children’s capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive.

The **prime** areas continue to be fundamental throughout the EYFS.

The three prime areas

- Communication and Language
- Personal Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development

“Practitioners working with the youngest children are expected to ensure a strong foundation for children’s development in the three prime areas. The specific areas of learning provide children with a broad curriculum and with opportunities to strengthen and apply the prime areas of learning. This is particularly important in developing language and extending vocabulary”. (Statutory Guidance 2021).

The four specific areas

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

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Characteristics of effective learning:

- 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
- creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things
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We fully embrace the ethos described below in the Birth to Five Matters non- statutory guidance:

“Children’s emotional wellbeing is the first necessity for effective learning. Children need to feel safe within warm, loving and caring relationships. When children’s primary need for emotional safety is met, they can then relax and move into exploring, taking risks, making discoveries, and experiences of the deep involvement through which they learn. Adults can help children to feel confident and at ease by providing environments that meet children’s need for tenderness and affection, relaxation, inner peace, enjoyment, openness, safety, and belonging.

Through co-regulation, over time effective learners develop self-regulation, the ability to regulate their feelings, thoughts, and actions toward a goal. Self-regulation includes both emotional self-regulations developed through emotionally supportive relationships, and cognitive self-regulation described in the Characteristics of Effective Learning. When there is support for children’s sense of agency – knowing they have control of their own decisions, goals and actions rather than simply being passive in their experiences – children are likely to be effective in their learning. Experiences which endorse children’s agency and autonomy reinforce and develop their learning powers”.

<https://birthto5matters.org.uk/learners-for-life-characteristics-of-effective-learning/>

The Early Learning Goals (ELGs) define the expectations for children to reach by the end of the EYFS where possible.

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“Areas of learning, and therefore the ELGs (Early Learning Goals), are often interlinked. These may also be related to the characteristics of effective learning. If practitioners can see these links, it will join up the assessment process. Practitioners will be able to capture each child’s learning more effectively and genuinely. Practitioners can also reflect on these links when they quality assure their assessment judgements”. Early Years Foundation Profile Handbook 2021

The Curriculum, Observation, Assessment, Progress and Planning

. The curriculum is based on each child, is fully inclusive and personalised. Often there is greater focus is on the 3 prime areas due to the young age and/or stage of the child and the short time they are with us. Planning for the curriculum within the EYFS is based on each child’s needs, interests’ achievements and starting points (current and pre-injury). Topics, termly SMSC themes and special events can also be used as vehicles for learning and teaching.

Planning “in action”, or ‘in the moment” where next steps can be set and maybe met as they occur. Focus activities are also planned to teach skills within more specific activities.

Continuous provision is used, with a consistent approach using core resources (the different provision areas which are available for children to use every day) to help children feel safe, and to develop to self-efficacy, self- confidence, thinking and memory skills, independence and to offer a variety of learning opportunities. We have defined spaces, such as the home corner or shop, a mark- making, writing and problem- solving, book, water and sand areas, although these will be different depending on our cohort. Enhanced provision is added to develop themes, interests and to personalise learning opportunities further. Provision is dependent on the cohort of children at the time and whether there are children who can play and learn together.

For the children with most complex disabilities, they likely to depend on adults to access the continuous provision although adults should promote independence and independent exploration as much as possible. Focus activities, and continuous and enhanced provision plan for and allow the exploration or trial of strategies to help children overcome specific barriers to engagement or learning.

We make regular assessments of children’s learning together with the other multidisciplinary team members and we use this information to ensure that future planning reflects each child’s emerging and identified needs. The main EYFS assessment method is through practitioners’ observations of children in different teaching and learning contexts, including both adult focused activities and child-initiated play. Practitioners are involved using observations to support their developing knowledge of individual children. Through our observations, assessment and professional judgement we gain valuable insights into how each child learns best. This information informs our planning to meet the needs of each individual child. Progression in learning and play comes about as a result of a real understanding of the interests, needs and experiences of the children. Information and knowledge of how children learn, what they understand and can do and where they may need extra support is often held in practitioners’ minds. Observations are used to inform future planning and advice for strategies to support children when they move from The Children’s Trust. They also inform adults of children’s abilities, needs, interests, play schemas and learning styles.

Children’s learning priorities are identified and relevant learning opportunities are planned to support children to make the next steps and progress. Progress from the baseline is measured using a combination of professional judgment, deep knowledge of the child encompassing parents’ views (gained through discussion and information sharing) as well as within their own Personal Learning Goals which are summarised in reports. Baseline and ongoing assessments incorporate our core curriculum slightly adapted for our younger cohort,

Some children benefit from a more specialised multi-sensory approach in which the child’s earliest skills are the focus and the core skills curriculum or elements of it will be the most relevant. For all children we have a small steps approach that seeks to encourage the extension and consolidation of emerging skills that

identifies areas where the child may need help and support, as well as ensuring recognition and celebration of achievements.

Next Stages

The EYFS staff will work with the multi-disciplinary team to identify special educational needs and contribute to EHCPs where appropriate. There is liaison with previous, current and future educational establishments to ensure accurate information is shared. Children will be supported in transition into pre-school, nursery or school as far as possible and followed up once they have left, with parental agreement according to our Follow Up Policy.

Please read in conjunction with the following policies and documentation:

- Inclusion Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Surrey Teaching Centre Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Working with Parents
- Behaviour for Learning
- Online Safety
- Positive Touch
- SEN & Mental Health
- Supporting pupils with medical needs
- Intimate Care
- Follow Up Policy
- Keeping Children safe in Education KCSIE
- Early years foundation stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers. Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five Published: 8 December 2023 Effective: 4 January 2024
- Early years qualification requirements and standards January 2024