



# **Stonehouse Park Infant School**

## **Learning and Teaching Policy**

**February 2017**

***The best start for every child so that every child can be the best they can be.***

## **Our School Context**

Our team are committed to providing the BEST start for every child and we recognise that in order to achieve this we must begin with whole child. This means that we get to know all of our children and families and develop genuine relationships. We believe that by adopting an individual approach, parents, children and staff will be able to work together to achieve the BEST possible outcomes.

The majority of children enter our school with development below that of their expected chronological ages, with 20% entering school with development considerably below their chronological age. Over a third of our families live on the Park Estate which is in the 20% of most deprived wards in English Neighbourhoods and the biggest issues facing our community are low levels of adult skills and education, high level of mental health issues and domestic abuse. Our own assessment of our families demonstrates an increasing number of vulnerable children. Therefore, we believe that learning and teaching must reflect the diverse needs of our children and focus on the long term bigger picture as well as preparing them for the next stage of their education.

With the holistic child and the diverse range of needs at the heart of our approach, we have specific areas of foci for each stage of every child's learning and development. During their first year with us, learning and teaching focuses on the three prime areas of learning; Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development, and Communication and Language. Teachers assess the level of need and adapt their practise continuously and plan specific interventions based on the cohort of children. Children are inspired to learn and explore new concepts through exciting and innovative play activities. Our aim is that by the end of Reception, children will have acquired the skills that they need in order to begin the next stage of their learning journey; they will be able to recognise and manage their own feelings, communicate their needs effectively with others and have the physical skills to carry out tasks independently, from getting themselves dressed, to being able to feed themselves, to holding a pencil confidently.

We are proud that in our school we continue an early years approach to learning and teaching through to Key Stage One. We know and understand that the early play experiences that children have lay the foundations for understanding concepts. Without secure foundations, children are likely to experience difficulties in building on their knowledge and understanding and making deep, meaningful links in learning. Therefore, we aim to provide continuous provision through a play based curriculum where children can explore concepts and develop an understanding which correlates to each of their lives. Children are taught the fundamental Literacy and Maths skills through real life experiences which enables them to use and apply their knowledge, skills and understanding. We know that our children learn best when they are in a nurturing environment with adults they trust and they feel excited by play activities which inspire curiosity, exploration and discovery.

## **Our School ethos and beliefs**

We believe that early education and the first years of school life can hugely impact on shaping children's attitudes towards lifelong learning. In our school we believe that children learn best when they feel safe, secure and valued as individuals. Our aim is for every child to set out confidently on the adventure of learning: curious about the world, excited about their future, positive of their ability and caring towards other people.

We believe children learn best when:

- School and parents work together to support and celebrate children's learning and achievements
- Children are immersed in their learning in creative and inspiring ways
- Children are surrounded by people who positively encourage them and who respond to their needs in sensitive and caring ways
- Children are actively encouraged to understand and develop the characteristics of an effective learner
- Children feel they are valued for their unique talents, strengths and personalities
- Children's voices are at the heart of teaching and learning and teachers use these as starting points for planning learning

## **We use the following strategies to achieve our aims:**

### **Parents as partners**

Research shows that when school and parents work together children are more successful in their learning. Therefore, positive relationships between staff, parents and children are paramount to us and we take great pride in the nurturing family friendly atmosphere that we have created. We actively encourage parents to:

- Read with their child on a regular basis; we also invite families into our reading rooms before and after school to offer a calm and purposeful environment for reading
- Attend parent meetings to discuss their child's well-being, progress and achievements
- Attend 'time to share' every Friday to work with their child on fun and engaging activities
- Attend 'happy hour' once a term to celebrate their child's learning
- Attend class assemblies and plays
- Attend workshops led by teachers to find out how best to support their child's learning at home
- Support their children with developmentally appropriate home activities set by teachers including spelling practice
- Talk to their child about what they have been learning in school and use termly topic overviews to aid this discussion

## **A nurturing, happy and caring environment**

Our children's personal, social and emotional development is at the heart of our practice and we believe that in order to be a successful and confident learner, children must have good self-esteem and believe that they can achieve. Our staff develop excellent relationships with children and strive to develop the skills and attitudes that we believe make a successful learner.

Our school values which underpin everything we do include:

- I am caring
  - I am joyful
  - I am peaceful
  - I am honest
  - I am respectful
  - I am responsible
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- We focus on one value each term and we explicitly teach these values through assemblies, stories, video clips, pictures, role-play etc. so that children gain a comprehensive understanding of each of them.
  - Staff consistently role model our values and talk about how the actions of themselves and others demonstrate each one.
  - Children are praised and encouraged to demonstrate our values in every part of their day to day life and to be reflective and articulate when doing so.
  - Each classroom has a heart displayed where children can move their name to in recognition of displaying our values.

## **Our learning culture**

Our staff have very high aspirations for all of our children and we believe that as part of being a successful learner, children must understand the characteristics of an effective learner. Therefore, we have devised 'star learner' competences that we believe children will not only need during their years in education but also to lead successful lives:

- **I try my best** (motivation, commitment, quality)
  - **I keep going, I don't give up** (resilience, perseverance)
  - **I am brave, I have a go** (confident, creative, courageous)
  - **I concentrate and listen well** (open-minded)
  - **I learn and play well with others** (co-operation)
  - **I am independent and can think for myself** (reflective, mindful)
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- Staff consistently role model this language and praise children for demonstrating these competences.
  - Both written and verbal feedback support children's understanding of these.
  - Learning lines are used in each class, in a developmentally appropriate way, to help children to understand the learning process and how these competences can aid learning.

- Children are enriched in the sophisticated vocabulary to describe each competency and are warmly encouraged to use this language in context.
- Each classroom has a 'star learner' display where each day children can move their name onto the star for demonstrating these competencies.
- Our weekly assembly 'time to shine' is used to celebrate children's attitudes and dispositions.
- As our children grow and mature, they are introduced to learning about growth mindset and brain development.
- As part of our learning culture, we have introduced a 'no hands up' policy where every child is expected to take part in discussions and actively make contributions. We believe that this reinforces our ethos, that every child is valued and important, and that all children will be encouraged to be active learners. We understand that children must be provided with ample time to think about questions and contributions, so children are given thinking time and when they are ready, they show this by sitting like a 'super star learner'. This means that they will sit with good posture, make eye contact with the person leading the discussion and give a smile to show that they are proud of their thoughts and ideas.
- After play times the children take part in 'take a minute', a short meditation session where children sit still, concentrate on their breathing to slow their heart rate and listen to calming music. This helps the children to unwind from play time, relax and get ready to learn again.

### **A creative, broad and balanced curriculum**

We believe in giving our children as many first-hand experiences as possible which will stimulate, inspire and promote a genuine love for learning to flourish in each and every child. We believe that high quality provision includes:

- Beginning with the child's voice and in each class we ask the children what they would like to learn about before teachers plan each topic.
- Teachers listening carefully to children's ideas and then creatively and conscientiously weaving subject knowledge, skills and understanding into vibrant and exciting topics.
- Immersing children in topics by providing inspiring experiences such as trips out of school and having key texts which teachers use to transform the learning environment and create a wide range of exciting cross curricula learning opportunities.
- The value of play based learning is evident throughout the school and is viewed as the essential foundations which must first be secure before any further learning can take place.
- Staff are quick to respond to the needs of the children, reflect on learning and teaching and continuously adapt their practice in the light of their evaluations.
- Teachers elicit what children already know before teaching new concepts, so that learning activities can be very well matched to learning needs. Teachers understand the importance of challenge for all children and they carefully plan both how to support children and how to challenge the most able. Early

intervention is key; teachers are quick to pick up on areas where children need additional support, interventions are carefully designed and staff utilize every minute in order to maximise learning opportunities. Teachers take time to explore a range of ways to challenge the most able children, this may be offering complex mathematical problems to solve and reason with. Teachers place a high emphasis on 'deepening' learning rather 'broadening' knowledge and skills.

- Teachers have in-depth and extensive knowledge of every child they teach and they use this to provide individual strategies to enable every child to achieve.
- Teachers use ongoing formative assessment to inform planning and make judgements on children's progress and attainment. We understand the potential barriers created by asking young children to carry out written assessment tasks. Therefore, teachers use their knowledge and expertise of individual children to plan effective assessment tasks, such as speaking and listening activities and games.

### **The learning environment**

We believe that the learning environment, both inside and outside, should both promote and celebrate children's learning and achievements. Therefore, we are committed to providing children with:

- High quality resources which reflect the interests and needs of all children.
- Easily accessible tools and equipment to aid learning and promote independence
- Effective and innovative use of ICT to aid and support learning, for example, learn pads to carry out research and take videos of learning for self-evaluation, talk buttons to aid sentence construction and early literacy skills.
- Many areas and opportunities to practice reading e.g. cosy reading areas with cushions, soft toys, an interesting range of books and story sacks with exciting activities designed by staff.
- Books are used as a starting point to immerse children in their learning, for example, the book 'Tracks of a panda' was used as a starting point and this led to learning such as exploring where in the world pandas live, what they eat and feeling real bamboo, exploring different grass in tuff trays and herbs in sensory trays, comparing the size of panda's footprints with other bears and weighing how much grass and bamboo they eat. The children also learnt about the Great Wall of China and used bricks to build their own wall.
- Classroom displays both support and celebrate children's learning and they are referred to constantly in teaching so that children use them as a tool for learning.
- Subject displays are used throughout the school to promote and celebrate the characteristics of an effective learner specifically for that subject e.g. 'I am a mathematician, I explain my reasoning etc'.
- Each classroom has a 'take a break' basket, this includes resources such as glitter bottles, stress balls, soft toys etc. to help children to calm down when they feel unable to cope with being in the classroom. This enables children to learn ways of managing their own feelings and they can return to their learning when they are ready.
- Each classroom has a 'how are you feeling today?' board, where children can move their name to a feeling. This provides children with a non-verbal way of

communicating their feelings, helps children to self-regulate and is also helpful to adults as they are able to quickly see if any child may need support or the opportunity to talk.

- Individual work stations are created for any children who have difficulties learning and concentrating with others. The approach to each child's learning is personalised around their individual needs. For some children this may mean that their learning is broken up into short bursts of focused activities followed by a therapeutic activity in order for them to be able to manage and enjoy their learning.
- We have incorporated the forest school philosophy into our work with children of all ages. Forest school offers excitement, adventure and the chance to take risks and become innovative and creative. Children can explore and experience things that they may have never done before, like look for mini-beasts, create a sculpture from natural materials and observe the natural wonders of the world, like a spiders web on a frosty day. Research has shown that children who had this type of experience are less likely to get ill and less likely to vandalise their environment when they are older. Children attend forest school sessions throughout the year, experiencing all weathers and changing seasons. We are able to plan learning activities outside which cover all areas of the curriculum which build on confidence and self-esteem as well as foster a love of the natural world.

Also refer to the following documents:

- SEN Policy
- Assessment Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- E Safety Policy
- Curriculum map