Chelwood Nursery School
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Teaching and Learning Policy

Policy Schedule	
Reviewed and edited	April 2026
Agreed by Governors	April 2026
Chair's signature	
Next review date	April 2027

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Teaching and learning policy

1. Overview

This policy document has been written to inform all those who work within the school or who have contact with it: parents, staff, governors, representatives of the LA, visitors and members of the local community, of Chelwood Nursery School's approach to Teaching and Learning within the school.

This policy has been developed in consultation with all members of staff and represents whole school reflection on our practice and our understanding of Early Childhood development. It has also taken into account the voice of our children, our families and of the wider Community of which we are proud to be a part.

This policy supports and informs our practice, and as a working document, it is open to review and modification in the light of the needs of the school, families and children and in the light of our continued interest in research and our commitment to our own Continuing Professional Development.

As a former National Teaching School we understand that our school is a community of learners, each on their own journey of discovery, and we understand that we each have an important role to play in developing and supporting others, sharing our expertise, our time and our enthusiasm in order to support this development. Team work is at the heart of our ethos.
Please refer to the 'Developing Others' Policy for what this looks like in practise.

Chelwood Nursery School aims to provide a happy, welcoming, relaxed, stimulating, calm, and safe environment in which the diversity of social and cultural backgrounds of our school community are valued, respected and celebrated.

Central to our ethos is our commitment to working in true partnership with all parents and carers. We believe strongly that 'we nurture the Child through nurturing the family,' and we place great emphasis on developing and maintaining these important relationships. We expect all adults in school (staff, volunteers, students, parents and carers) to provide a positive role model by treating children and one another with friendliness, sensitivity, care and courtesy.

2. Our core values

- **Children come first**
- **Start with the developmental needs of the child**
- **Listen and respond to the many unique voices of each child**
- **Nurture the family to nurture the child**
- **Valuing play inside and in the 'Open air'**
- **Value and celebrate every individual**
- **Research-led early childhood practice**
- **Work together in partnership to develop ourselves and others**
- **Develop confident, caring, independent children**
- **Challenging inequality, promoting social mobility and safeguarding the vulnerable**

3. Play based learning

The activities and experiences offered at Chelwood are designed to enhance the holistic development of the children and support their physical, emotional, intellectual and social development. The activities are designed following observation of the children and noting what interests and excites them and through our understanding of the ways in which individuals and groups of children prefer to learn. Throughout their time at Chelwood the children will learn through active and investigative play both inside and out. Through this the 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, making and testing predictions. They express fears or re-live anxious experiences in controlled and safe situations and they develop an understanding of and respect for the needs and emotions of others.

'Play is the work of children.'

Jean Piaget

4. Our history and our heritage

We were developed in 1939 as part of The Open Air Nursery Movement and the key principles historically developed by the McMillan sisters, Froebel, Montessori, Robert Owen and Susan Issacs, still underpin and drive our philosophy and our practice today; -

- The entitlement for all children to have constant, uninterrupted access to fresh air and open spaces.
- The understanding that family support and nurture is essential in order to support the child.
- The understanding that health and wellbeing impact significantly on a child's development and that we as Practitioners have a responsibility to impact on and consider this in our practise.

We believe passionately in the importance of large scale, kinesthetic play to support children's development and cognition and we view, plan and staff our garden area very much as our fourth classroom. The garden itself is constantly reviewed and developed through our work on listening to and valuing the voice of the child.

5. The importance of outdoor play

The experiences that we offer children at Chelwood and our commitment to high quality outdoor play, reflects our understanding that the outdoor area provides opportunities for learning that we could not deliver inside. The children are able to explore and experiment on a much larger scale here and enjoy a much greater freedom of movement. They are able to interact with an environment that is always changing ~ exploring different weather conditions, the changing seasons; different light and temperature conditions etc and they are able to develop a sense of wonder and respect for the natural world. The outdoor area offers unique challenges for children to work together, to solve problems, to take risks and to learn how to be safe. We plan for the children's learning outside with the same rigor and the same commitment to personalisation that we bring to the indoor learning experiences; drawing on the children's interests in order to really excite and motivate them, making connections to experiences that they have enjoyed at home and drawing on and building upon our observations of schematic behaviour, dominant learning styles and the children's multiple intelligences. The outdoor team changes on a weekly basis and has a representative from each class team on it so that every child's needs can be considered and

effectively met. Each outdoor team works closely with a shadow team to ensure continuity and progression from one week to the next. As a whole school staff we are constantly reviewing and developing our practice. Currently our focus outside is centered on developing risk and challenge, using open ended, natural resources to foster imagination and using the children's voice to develop our provision and learning environment.

6. Risk and challenge

Much of our Curriculum at Chelwood is centred on helping children to judge and take safe risks and we support them in understanding how to keep themselves and others safe in lots of different contexts. We believe strongly that children will be faced with risk and danger in the world around them and that it is our job to support them in recognising and understanding how to keep safe. We also believe that children who rarely come into contact with potential dangers are a lot less protected than children who are systematically taught to recognise these. Children are actively involved in the process of risk assessing throughout their time at Chelwood and our Curriculum includes the use of a wide range of woodwork tools, glue-guns and sharp knives for cooking with. We teach the children how to use these safely and responsibly and how to respect the fact that they could cause harm if they are not used appropriately. Equipment of this kind is always located in an area of the classroom that can be easily monitored by an adult and at first adults will closely support their use. We understand that embracing 'risky play' can be a challenge to both staff and families alike and so we actively problem solve and risk assess these experiences collectively, ensuring that we think through potential risks fully whilst also considering the benefits. As the children's confidence and independence grows however, the adult will step back. As children and their families are settling into our environment all members of our staff team support families in understanding and embracing this vital part of our Curriculum.

7. What learning characteristics are we aiming to develop in our children at Chelwood

In order to gain the maximum access to and benefit from the Curriculum, the children are encouraged to be independent and autonomous, to organize their own time and to be in control of their own learning. We recognize that the most valuable learning takes place when children enjoy freedom of choice and access to sustained activity. **The Characteristics of Effective Learning, (EYFS 2022)** are threaded through and integral to our practice. These are: -

- **Playing and Exploring** (developing engagement)
- **Active Learning** (developing intrinsic motivation)
- **Creating and thinking Critically** (developing thinking skills)

In order to support the children in the development of these we provide an environment and experiences that encourage them to: -

- Develop and excite their natural curiosity, exploring with all their senses.
- Develop their interests and motivations, using these to broaden their experience.
- Develop their self-belief, their pride and an 'I can do it!' attitude.
- Develop their resilience and perseverance, supporting their focus and concentration.
- Develop their ability to solve problems, make predictions and test out their ideas.
- Make connections and notice patterns.
- Take risks, rise to a challenge and understand that it is ok to make mistakes.

- Work well with others in a variety of contexts, sharing, taking turns and listening, responding to and respecting the ideas and needs of others.

8. What does the curriculum look like to the children at Chelwood?

We aim to make learning totally irresistible to every child. Our play based Curriculum is highly personalised to the needs, interests, passions, learning styles and schematic behaviour of each individual child and is highly responsive to what we observe and to the voice of children and families. Our close family working is at the heart of everything that we do. We firmly believe that children learn best when they have extended periods of uninterrupted time in order to extend their thinking and revisit their ideas in a wide range of contexts. Learning goes on throughout the day, whether the children are working with a specific adult at a supervised activity or playing alone, or with a group of friends. We provide a balance between child-initiated and adult focused activities and all staff work alongside the children, answering questions, suggesting ways that they can extend their activities and introducing new words and ideas. We use focused activities to introduce ideas, knowledge and vocabulary and to make sure that we are offering the children a broad and balanced curriculum.

All adults will be extending the children's learning and development by: -

- Playing with children, showing an interest in what is most important to them.
- Joining and fitting in with children's ideas developing these with them.
- Modelling new language.
- Encouraging children to make their own choices and to do as much as possible for themselves.
- Focusing on the process of learning rather than on an end product.
- Encouraging open-ended questions.
- Stimulating interest through shared attention and sustained shared thinking.
- Giving children time to think and talk.
- Respecting and valuing children's ideas and responses.
- Actively listening to children.
- Helping children to make connections over time.
- Making praise specific.
- Helping children to reflect on their own learning.

9. What are the principles that underpin the curriculum?

We know that the children joining our school have already learnt a great deal. The curriculum at Chelwood is centred on the four key principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS 2022). These are:

- **A Unique Child:** "Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured"

- **Positive Relationships:** "Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person"

- **Enabling Environments:** "The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning"

- **Learning and Development:** "Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rate and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected".

These Principles are so central to our Practice that the main body of this Policy will be organised under the above headings.

10. Positive relationships

Making Transitions

We know from experience how stressful changes in routine can be for young children and their families and the Curriculum that we offer at Chelwood is designed to provide personalised and responsive support to minimize this stress and promote Well-being and security. During their short time with us, our children undergo a number of very significant transitions and our close family working and the expertise of our Key people is at the centre of how successfully and confidently our children are able to embrace and adapt to these changes. The information that we gather from families throughout their time with us is crucial to our personalisation in this. We have a number of strategies to support the most significant of transitions and we use visual timetables, adult and peer support to build the children's confidence with the incidental transitions that occur as part of a normal school day.

Managing the transition from home to school

The first stage of this is an **Admissions Interview** with a member of The Senior Leadership Team. At this meeting a full family history will be taken which will enable us to plan effectively for any needs that the family or Child may have and which will inform our decision of which class and often which Key Person would be best suited to them as a family. Considerable strategic planning takes place after these interviews to ensure a balance across the school and to group children together who have community languages in common.

Come and Discover Sessions

We invite children and their families to spend time with us before they officially start, developing their confidence with our learning environment, getting a taste for the range of experiences that are on offer, and beginning to build strong relationships with our class teams. Our observations during these visits often inform our Key Person allocation. These sessions are planned with our existing children and we involve them considerably in the welcoming process!

The Welcome Day

At the beginning of the term in which the child will start with us, the children are invited to experience a session with us when our focus is on new children and their families and on developing relationships with our returning children. The focus of this session is all about building confidence and strong relationships and providing families with the information they may need to support them in feeling settled and secure.

Home visits

Shortly before a child starts with us at Chelwood their family will be offered a home visit. We see this as an important opportunity for the Key Person and another member of the class team to begin to build those important relationships that are central to our practice. At this visit the Key Person will spend time with the family, gathering important information to support the initial settling process. (See Appendix 1-Tell Me About Your Child.) The other member of staff will play with and respond to the child so that everyone feels valued and important. At the home visit, provided the family are happy for this, photos will be taken which will be quickly celebrated in the child's new classroom. This ensures that images of important people are available to support the Child's sense of belonging and security and that everyone feels quickly valued and welcomed into the school environment.

The Role of The Key Person

We work very much as part of a team at Chelwood and all adults in school will get to know, observe and work with all of the children. However, we are very aware of the fact that our environment can feel large and overwhelming to very young children, particularly when they are first making the transition from home to school. We are also highly aware of how important strong relationships are to support the family at this time, as well as to develop a sense of security, well-being and attachment for the child. We feel that it is essential that every child feels special, individual and thought about by someone special when they are away from home. Every child in school is allocated a Key Person from within their Class Team and this person has a pivotal role in supporting that child and their family in settling, exploring the provision and in developing their confidence and independence. This person will; -

- Make particular time in their day to develop and maintain a strong relationship with their key children and their families.
- Act as a first point of call for families, advising them, reassuring them and signposting them to other staff within the school.
- Respond sensitively to children's feelings, ideas, interests and needs and act as their advocate during team planning sessions.
- Become very familiar with their Key children's conversations, patterns of play, interests and behaviors, observing them often and sharing their knowledge with the wider team.
- Particularly support their key children at times of transition and change.

We view the role of Key Person as a key feature of our practice and provision and we know that it is intense, hard work, often emotional and a big commitment. As a result of this all staff who are new to the role spend time shadowing an experienced member of staff and initially have a reduced number of Key-children. The Team Leader plays a crucial coaching role in supporting the other Key people in their team whilst maintaining the strategic overview of all of the children and their development. There are 2 people in each team who have the Key-Person role as part of their job description, the teacher and the Nursery Nurse. The Teaching Assistants do not have this role but will support aspects of it under the support and guidance of the Team Leader. Some Teaching Assistants may choose to shadow the role for their own professional development.

Settling In

We know that every child's experiences and personalities make them unique and so we are deeply responsive to children during this time, tailoring how we settle children in to match their individual needs. We see this as an important partnership between school and family and a valuable time to spend time together sharing our practice and observations and gradually building up the time that a child spends away from their family. We know that children will only learn and develop when they feel settled and secure and so we place a huge emphasis on investing time in this initially and our planning and curriculum reflects this emphasis. To support us in this we stagger our children into our setting, and we actively welcome younger siblings as part of our settling period.

The Welcome Group

During settling in, families will be spending extended periods of time at Chelwood and for many, the initial periods away from their child will be emotional. To support our families at this time, answer their questions, unpick our curriculum and support them in building new relationships amongst each other and with our staff, we prioritise having a member of staff available to them at this time. This group, funded by our Charity, 'Chelwood House for Families', encourages families to take an active part within the life of the school, build their confidence and actively encourages them to continue with and develop their own learning. Families who have found this approach supportive will be signposted to our 'Helping Hands Group'.

Managing The Transition from Part Time to Full Time

We offer 30 hour full time places for families with the working parent entitlement and some limited paid places. All of our children are initially settled into a part time place and only when they are fully settled will we initiate this second transition. At this time, we work closely with the family who will be invited into school to see how the dining room is presented to children and to find out more about our lunchtime routines. We view our lunchtime sessions as a highly important teaching time, particularly encouraging choice making, healthy eating, independence and autonomy and we invest in our staffing at these times to ensure that all children are supported in family groupings by staff who know them very well. We stagger the children into our full time program in order to give them individual attention and our more experienced children play an important role in helping their newer peers to feel settled and secure. As part of the preparation for starting lunch, every child makes a dinner mat which incorporates a photo from home of a food sharing experience. This is essential as a tool for talking to children about how they are feeling about this transition and the mat supports the child in feeling that they have a place within the dining room. For these reasons, this task should always be completed before a child makes this significant change to their routine. Gradually the length of time that a child spends in school is extended, enabling them to gradually build up their stamina for an extended session. Our Inclusion and Diversity Leader is a constant support within our dining room for staff and children.

Managing the Transition to Primary School

As a school we are highly aware of the impact that one-point of entry has had on anxiety for families and children, who will in most cases be having to plan for this very significant step before they are even fully settled into our Nursery environment. As a result of this we have a number of strategies in place to support them and guide them through this process.

Meetings for Families to Support Primary Applications

We hold a series of meetings in the Autumn term to support families in understanding the process and in how to make informed decisions in the best interests of their particular Child. Our Inclusion and Diversity Leader and our admin team individually supports families who don't have access to the internet at home, as well as supporting those who will benefit from a more personalised approach. We actively check that all families have made their applications by the deadline and then

as the offers are made we support families in understanding how best to proceed. We talk our families through how and when to start talking to their child about this change so that they can be most effectively supported.

Fostering Friendships

In the final half term before a child makes the transition to Primary School we organise a number of activities and experiences that are designed to support children in forming new relationships with others who will be going to the same school. We know how reassuring and important a familiar friendly face can be on that first day. We also hold a series of activities that families and children attend together so that contact can be made and playdates can be organized during the holidays to further build on these relationships.

Working in Partnership with Receiving Schools

Because of our location we feed to a large number of Primary Schools across two local Authorities. As a result of this, the importance of effective partnership working is particularly essential and we are very proactive in evaluating and developing this on an ongoing basis. We consider that we have a very significant duty to share the comprehensive knowledge that we have about children and their families with the receiving school and although we do complete detailed and personal Leavers Records to hand on, we see this sharing of information to be wider than this. We invite receiving teachers in to spend time with the children at Chelwood where they are confident, settled and secure and we devote staff meeting time to the sharing of records with their new teacher, so that the whole team can be involved in this. We encourage the children to share their **'Look What I Can Do' book** as a powerful tool to talk about and reflect on their own learning and to feel positive about themselves and how much they have achieved.

School Visits

As the child and family are invited to visit their new school we provide them with a digital camera and encourage them to take photos of their new classroom and school environment. We use these photos to promote discussion and encourage the sharing of feelings, emotions and anxieties which we can then support that child with. We create displays that enable these conversations to be revisited over time.

Child Conferencing

Talking and listening to the different voices of our children is an integral part of our work at Chelwood and to the ongoing development and evaluation of our Curriculum. It is a particularly significant part of our Leavers Record and will provide families and Professionals with a unique insight into how that child perceives themselves as a learner, what is important to them and what they want their new teacher to know. **The children's reflections are often remarkably perceptive and astute, underpinning our belief that the ability of our very young children should never be underestimated and that we should never make assumptions about what is or is not possible!**

During the pandemic, when the majority of our children were learning at home, we introduced a family voice section to our leaver's records so that families could share their views about how their child learns at home and what they are proud of about their child. This proved to be such an effective tool and so valued by families and schools alike that we have kept this element

Family Partnership

At Chelwood we fully value the family as a Child's first teacher and we know that they will hold a wealth of information about their child which will enrich and extend the experiences that we can offer to that child. As we only have the majority of our children with us for three terms, we are also highly aware of how significant strong family working is on the impact that we can have in that

limited time. **For us family partnership is an integral part of our Curriculum and of our Teaching and learning and it should never be seen as optional or additional.** We know that some families find it easier to play an active role in schools than others and we actively work to identify and break down barriers to this, supporting all families in having equality of access. We have developed a number of strategies to support families in feeling part of our school, part of their child's learning and in understanding how and why their child learns through the curriculum that we offer.

Helping Hands

As part of helping families to feel welcome in school, meet new people and build their confidence we involve families in a range of practical tasks that support the smooth running of the school whilst unpicking what we see as important and why. This could involve

- chopping and attractively presenting platters of fruit and vegetables to support healthy eating,
- Sorting and organising play resources.
- Ironing drapes and cloths to create enticing spaces and places for children to play.
- DIY jobs and the creation of resources.

Stay and Play

In the Spring term, once the majority of children are fully settled into our environment, we run a series of days when families can come and play and learn alongside their child. Families can always informally arrange to do this in consultation with their class team but these planned days are particularly centered on specific areas of the Curriculum and are evaluated and responsive to what families have expressed an interest in finding out more about. In the past these have focused on areas such as gardening, messy play, mark making, problem solving, challenge and 'What Makes Me Tick?' Families are encouraged to spend anything from a few minutes to a full session with their child and teams will plan to explicitly share what the children will be learning from the range of experiences on offer. This is followed by a focused chat/discussion and question and answer session for families led by a Senior Leader.

Show and Tell

Each week as part of team planning, the classes will identify an experience, activity or suggestion that families can actively engage with to support their child's learning at home. The children will then be encouraged in small groups to share and talk about these experiences using objects or photos to support them. We particularly use this as a strategy to support families in using the local environment as a resource and in exploring seasonal change.

Sharing Food

As a school we recognize the very great importance that food sharing has within all cultures in bringing Communities together and promoting mutual respect and understanding. As a result of this it is an integral part of our Curriculum. Time is invested in choosing and planting seeds, and in harvesting and cooking the produce throughout the year, supporting healthy lifestyles and an understanding and respect for food as well as supporting and building the Community of which we are a part. In addition to this each class cooks at least once a week, involving the children in a variety of experiences often linked to recipes that children have brought in from home or related to cultural and first hand experiences that children have been exploring through domestic based role-play. In addition to these experiences the school celebrates a number of significant festivals and cultural events throughout the year designed to reflect and build an understanding and respect for the rich diversity of our wider Community. Families are actively invited and supported in taking part and in planning and developing these experiences with us and each of these celebrations culminates in an aspect of Community feasting and food sharing.

Child and family voice

Our curriculum is dynamic, responsive and constantly evolving and developing. We collectively reflect on and develop our practice, informing this through research and through our observations and through professional conversations involving our whole School Community. Consultation and true partnership with our children and their families is an essential part of this. Throughout the school year there are a range of formal and informal strategies to seek and respond to family opinion on our school and the way in which it works and to support us in developing our responsive curriculum. We are very aware that some members of our Community find it easier to share their views with us than others and we work hard to remove barriers to this, drawing on our strong relationships and on our understanding of different learning styles to support us with this.

Involving the children in real and important decision making as part of their curriculum is an essential part of our practice and we have worked hard as a staff team to develop ways of scaffolding and supporting this, building our collective understanding of how to develop and harness children's verbal and non-verbal means of communication. Staff actively seek to involve children in the planning and development of the rich range of experiences on offer and in influencing and developing the physical environment to further support learning. They actively develop their ability to talk about their learning and on what is important to them, building their vocabulary and their ability to express their ideas through this. Most recently the children have been involved in thinking how best to spend the Curriculum budget and in developing the garden area and outdoor provision.

11. A unique child

Personalisation

At Chelwood we have a genuine fascination in the uniqueness of the individual in learning and development and the way in which experiences, interests, motivations and learning styles influences and impacts on this. As a result of this we are committed to a highly personalised and individual approach, both to the way in which we support, develop and respect the children and in the way in which we support, develop and respect each other. At the heart of this is a real, shared understanding of each child and their family, what 'makes them tick', what excites and motivates them, how they prefer to learn, who they prefer to learn with and their friendship groups, their schematic fascinations and their dominant learning styles and Multiple Intelligences. This is informed by our close family partnership, by the strong teamwork that underpins our entire philosophy and by the detailed observations that we make of the children in a wide range of contexts. These are at the centre of our curriculum and the heart of our practice.
We are constantly reviewing and developing our understanding of Learning Styles and schematic behavior and take our commitment to sharing this with families very seriously. Those that feature most regularly in our planning at this current time are

Learning Styles

- Kinesthetic
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- Naturalistic
- Musical
- Logical
- Spatial
- Visual
- Sensory, tactile, manipulative
- Auditory

Schematic behaviour

- Trajectory
- Rotation
- Linear
- Layering and overlapping
- Mixing and combining
- Logical and spatial
- Enclosure / enveloping
- Transporting
- Connecting and linking

12. Observation, planning and assessment

We have a firm policy that all adults across the school have a responsibility to work with and observe all children, as we know that in observing we will all notice and highlight different things and we value the larger picture that this practice facilitates. At the end of each day we share and talk about these observations so that our planning can be truly responsive to what we have seen and understood and to the questions that these observations may have raised. These observations are vital to our practice as they: -

- Help us identify the strengths of a child and where they may need extra support.
- Help us identify a Child's developmental level and informs the planning so that we can support their next steps.
- Raise questions to reflect on in our planning meetings and helps us develop our practice through this.
- Help us to look at how children interact with each other and the learning environment and supports us in identifying friendship groups.
- Help us identify interests and motivations, learning styles and schematic behaviour.
- Gives us an insight into how a child may learn or process information best.
- Well-being and involvement- helps us identify how a child may feel about their learning.
- Gives us an insight into how children organise their time, and how they function at specific times of the day or during the week.
- Support us in supporting the children at key times, most particularly when making transitions.

Proformas for different types of observations for a range of contexts and to suit a variety of needs can be found in the observation folders in each class.

All About Me /Progress reviews

As part of our commitment to ensuring that every child gets what they need and that we are constantly monitoring and reflecting on their progress, each child's ongoing record is updated and monitored each term, drawing on the information that has been collated from all the professionals involved in their education. Children's progress and development alongside the ranges within Birth to 5 Matters is noted by the class teacher and this information is uploaded to an electronic system by the Head teacher as part of their monitoring and overview. The class teacher, in consultation with the child and family, will draw up a personal plan for each child using this information and also record the things that are currently really important to and for that child. This will form the basis of a discussion with the family that will celebrate the things that a child has achieved both at home

and at school and identify two areas of development that the school and family are going to seek to develop during the next term. These areas of development will feed into the class planning.

When a child leaves us to move onto Primary School the Class teacher with the family and child, will complete a highly personalised summative report that will unpick for the family and for the receiving school, how that child learns best, what motivates and excites them most and what they are currently working on in each area of their learning. The class teacher will support the child in sharing with their new teacher the things that are most important for them and this also forms an important part of the final **Leaver's Record.**

Assessment

All adults in school will be constantly assessing children's learning and development through their observations, through playing alongside and with the children and by listening and responding to what children say and do. At the end of each session the class teams and the garden team will gather together to share and talk about their reflections on the children and on the learning experiences that have taken place. We consider these team conversations to be an essential part of our practice, as every team member will have recognized different things and this all contributes to the quality and accuracy of our understanding and it informs and guides our provision the following day.

In this way our Curriculum is highly responsive to the needs of individuals and groups of children. We have a number of planning sheets to scaffold and support our thinking within a short, medium and longer term context. Our daily planning is particularly significant, as on the basis of what we have observed today, we will plan tomorrow. Our learning experiences will all have been planned with specific children in mind, and the team work hard to share and unpick this with the families involved.

Our assessments are informed by Birth to 5 Matters (Many of our staff team were involved in the consultation process for this document,) combined with a working knowledge of Development Matters (2022)

13. Children's self-assessment

Children's Voice

We place considerable emphasis on listening to and harnessing children's voice throughout the school and from their earliest days with us, children are encouraged to be involved in real decision making. They are encouraged to reflect on their own learning, talk about their likes and dislikes and begin to think about things that they would like to practice next. We consider that children communicate their voice in a wide range of ways and that this is evident in what they do, and through their Involvement and Well-being, as well as through what they are able to articulate. We would aim to never underestimate what a child can do as they are constantly surprising us! We know and respect that their ideas around their own learning are often very revealing and insightful! We support children in developing their vocabulary to help them name and talk about their feelings and emotions and this is particularly important at times of significant transition e.g. when children are preparing to move onto Primary School.

'Look What I Can Do'

Every child in school will have a 'Look What I Can Do!' book which is an extremely powerful tool for supporting children in talking about and reflecting on experiences they have enjoyed and people that they have enjoyed playing with. These go backwards and forwards between home and school

and children are encouraged to add to their book using photographs that they have chosen from home and from school. In this way it is also a powerful tool for information sharing and for home-school partnership working.

These books belong to the child rather than to the adults working with them and we encourage children to take the lead in deciding what is and what is not included. The things that a child wants to say about each photo are recorded in a speech bubble (using home languages as well as English.) **We respect and record exactly what a child says** and would never correct the grammar for example or presume to extend their idea. Over a period of time a child may make a comment on a photo more than once and this serves as an important record of children's language development and of their growing ability to reflect on and recount experiences.
The 'Look What I Can Do' books are on constant and open access to all of the children and families and so confidential information, (observations etc,) are stored securely and not added to these.

14. Enabling Environments

The environment as 'the third teacher'

We know that young children learn from their families and from close loving relationships, from the sensitive, respectful and well timed interactions of our staff team, from each other and from the environment that surrounds them and the wider Community of which they are a part. We understand that

> '*An environment is never neutral, rather it reflects values about children, their learning and development. It communicates powerful messages about what is deemed important or trivial.*' (Tovey 2013.)

And as a result, we are constantly reflecting on the messages that we want our environment to communicate and on how it meets the needs of individuals and groups of children. We will spend time reflecting on and discussing how different areas of our environment are used and this will constantly evolve and change as the children develop and grow.

Some Core Principles about Our Learning Environment:

- **Our environment must support our children and families in feeling a strong sense of belonging.** We use photographs as a powerful tool to support this and we consider it essential that every child is celebrated and that there are positive images of them and their families around the school throughout their time with us. We know that the welcome children and families receive each day is an integral part of this.

- **Our environment must support our children in feeling proud of who they are**, what they look like, how they speak and to respect and value the differences of others. As a result, it is essential that our environment reflects the rich diversity of our school and of the wider Community. We know that this must be embedded in our practise and through our interactions as well as through the resources and images that we use.

- **Our environment must support children in feeling confident and independent.** We ensure that children have open access to resources in all areas so that they can make their own decisions about how they develop and extend their play and thinking. In order to support this we know it is essential that children know where to find the things that they need and where to put them back. This means that:

- All resources are at child height and are well labelled with photographs.
- All resource areas in the classrooms are monitored by the class team and by the children throughout the day to ensure that they remain well organised and well stocked.
- We use photographic sequences to support children in following routines, (eg how to wash and dry their hands, how to prepare themselves for messy play, how to put on waterproof clothing in wet weather etc.)
- We use visual timetables and visual cues to support children in managing daily transitions and in understanding what will happen now and next.

- **Our environment must support children in developing a sense of ownership.**
  We feel strongly that the children should feel that the environment belongs to them, that they can shape and influence it, make their own decisions and develop their own ideas, move resources from one place to another and return to a piece of work or to an idea over an extended period of time. We want them to *'be authors rather than readers of their environment*.' (Tovey 2013.)

- **Our environment must celebrate and support every individual.**
  Our observations and our interactions with the children constantly inform us about the ways in which children think and learn and the things that intensely matter to them. We aim to harness each child's unique and magical qualities and we know that what is right for one child may not be right for another**. It is essential that our environment reflects and celebrates this diversity so that all children can draw from it what they need.** This means that:

  - In each class and outside there will be gathering spaces for larger group play, smaller spaces for partnered play, and tiny spaces for children who want time on their own to focus or reflect. There will be places that are noisy and places that are quiet, places that are visually stimulating and places that are calmer and more neutral. There will be covered and enclosed spaces and spaces that feel more open. Light and bright spaces and spaces that are darker. There will be places for children to sit, lie or stand.
  - We know that if we only ever present certain areas of learning in the same way, we will only reach the same children, so we plan for children's development rather than for tables or areas, and we ensure that over time we present every area of learning in a range of different contexts, on a small and large scale, on a table top, floor or at an easel, inside and out.
  - We recognise different children's interests and their schematic behaviours and we use this knowledge to entice children into exploring areas of their learning in which they feel less confident and might otherwise avoid. We take note of what really matters to each child and then use these insights to plan experiences that we aim to be irresistible to them.

- **Our environment must excite children, spark their curiosity and ignite their imaginations.**
  Through the way that we present our provision and through our careful, respectful interactions, we strive to ensure that our children are drawn into new experiences and that their eyes are opened to a wealth of new possibilities.

  We aim for our children to explore our learning environment using their muscles and their minds, exploring with their whole bodies and with all of their senses. We aim for our resources and our experiences to be open ended and always focused on the processes and stories of learning rather than on an end product.

How are our School and Our Classrooms Organised?

All of our children are allocated to one of our three classrooms or 'home bays' for our 3 and 4 year olds, or to our 'Garden Room ' provision for two year olds, and they will have this as their base throughout their time with us at Chelwood. This is where their Key Person and the team who know them best will be based, although we have a very strong principle that all adults in school have responsibility for and will work with all children. They will be welcomed into this 'home bay' at the beginning of each session and this is where they will self-register before they begin their day.

A mix of ages

Our 'home bays' all have a range of differently aged children allocated to them and at any one time there will be children who are 2,3,4 and 5 learning and playing with and alongside of each other. We organise our classes in this way because we want our children to develop very secure relationships with the adults in their team, we want to limit unnecessary transitions that we know children find difficult, and we want to encourage children to support and learn from each other, just as they would in a family with their siblings. The team will support children in developing empathy and understanding of each other's needs and they will support children to feel included whatever their developmental stage, through skilful interactions, questions and through their deep understanding of each child as an individual. Our knowledge of attachment in young children and the importance of key relationships means that we would always place siblings together in the same 'home bay' and that we would never split twins or triplets for example, although they may have a separate Key Person.

What do our Classes Look Like?

All of our classrooms will look slightly different dependant on the current needs and interests of the children, but there are areas of provision that we consider to be core and which will be common to all. We sometimes refer to this as 'our continuous provision'. These areas include:

- **A Home Corner.** Our children engage in all kinds of role-play and we regularly have different themed areas throughout the school linked to the children's interests. However, each of our classrooms will have an area that supports children in making connections between home and school and which encourages children to draw on their first hand experiences in order to support their imaginative play. We will present real experiences such as cooking and tasting within our home corners to further support the making of these connections.
- **Small world provision.**
- **A block play area.**
- **A graphics area.** This will house resources for children to make marks with in a range of different contexts. Children will be encouraged to use these around the room as well as outside.
- **A creative workshop.** A space to explore colour, texture and materials in two and three dimensions.
- **A woodwork bench and access to real tools.**
- **A place to explore, make and move to music.** This is likely to be linked to different aspects of provision at different times rather than having a static base.
- **Sand and water provision.**
- **Places to explore puzzles and problem solving play**
- **Places to explore messy and manipulative play.**

What does the session look like for children?

We want to ensure that children get lots of opportunities for uninterrupted learning and that they can return to ideas and concepts in lots of different ways and contexts. We want the children to be

highly motivated by and engaged in their play and this takes time! Because of this a child's session at Chelwood will feel very fluid, with one experience leading naturally into another and there will be very little stopping and starting. At the end of each session there will be a 'tidy up time', when the children will return and organise resources back to where they belong and reset the environment ready for 'others to learn'. This is often a great opportunity for developing important mathematical skills, counting, sorting and arranging for a purpose!

There will then be a very short gathering time with songs, rhymes and finger plays, followed by a story time. This is a carefully planned time of the day and children will be broken into small groups with each adult in the class reading a story. The stories will be carefully chosen to match each group's needs and interests and they are highly interactive in nature.

Free Flow

Apart from a very short space of time at the beginning and end of each session, the children are able to make choices about where they want to play and for how long. They are able to travel throughout the school, visiting any of the classrooms and in the garden. We believe that this gives our children the greatest and richest range of experiences possible.

We understand that for a small child this level of choice and the size of our school can feel a little over whelming at first and many children will initially stay close to the security of their Key Person and to their 'home bay.' Staff work very closely with children at this time, to gradually build their confidence with playing with a range of adults and in different parts of the school environment.

Our Garden

In line with our heritage we view our garden as our fifth classroom and we plan, resource and staff it in exactly the same way as we do our indoor spaces. Children and staff will be outside in all weathers exploring the seasons and connecting with the natural world using all of their senses. All areas of the curriculum will be being explored on a much larger and more physical scale than would ever be possible inside. **We always take the curriculum to the child and work with them where and how they feel most comfortable.** For many of our children this means they will spend extended periods of time outside and we would be encouraging this.

As an historic, Open-Air Nursery we are very passionate about outdoor and natural experiences for young children and we feel a real commitment to conveying that passion and the research and understanding that underpins it to others. For this reason, we involve our families in lots of shared planting, growing and harvesting experiences within our garden space and we develop lots of opportunities for families and children to spend quality time together here. We are conscious that families often have limited time. That green spaces are continually shrinking, particularly for families like ours who live in cities, often without gardens and with few safe spaces to let their children really explore and immerse themselves in nature. We are really aware that with the explosion of screen based technology, people are increasingly experiencing a virtual world. So we are committed to balancing that, to helping families and children reconnect with the natural world and watch and wonder. **We believe that if we want our children to help protect the environment in the future; we need to be investing time in connecting them with it now.**

The use of the wider environment

'Out and About'

We fully recognize how important it is to draw on the rich resource of our local Community and to encourage children to feel an active part of this. There are a wealth of opportunities on our

doorstep to support children's teaching and learning and so as soon as children feel settled and secure with us and are confident within the school environment, we will plan to take them on 'expeditions' around the local area. **These are short journeys in small groups and will be planned with the needs of that particular group in mind.** A shared experience to encourage talk in a range of different contexts. This could include: -

- Visiting a local supermarket to buy cooking ingredients.
- Visiting a local park to search for and appreciate seasonal change.
- Spotting print or numbers in the environment.
- Pond dipping in a local Community Garden.
- Going on a short train journey.
- Acting out a favorite story.
- Visiting a local park to explore more challenging climbing.
  'Walk and Talk.'

We will often encourage families to come with us on these expeditions as
We are really committed to helping families see the learning potential in a simple walk to the shops or a journey on a train and to enjoy experiences with their children that have little or no cost, but which really trigger the imagination. The things that memories are made of.

15. Learning and Development

As a State Maintained Nursery School we refer to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework (2022), Birth to 5 Matters (2022) and to Development Matters (2022) to support and inform our planning and practice.

As a School we have always placed a particular emphasis on the importance of the **Prime Areas of Learning:-**

- **Personal, Social and Emotional development**
- **Communication and Language**
- **Physical development**

And a focus on these is embedded throughout our practice. We firmly believe that these are the most important foundations to support all future learning and that by focusing on these we will support children in developing

- Self-esteem,
- Resilience,
- Confidence,
- Independence
- And Motivation

Characteristics which are key indicators for later school success and improved life-chances.

We also plan for and monitor children's progress in the **Specific Areas of Learning: -**

- **Literacy,**
- **Mathematics,**
- **Understanding the World,**
- **Expressive arts and Design**

Curriculum Teams

In order to ensure that our curriculum is dynamic, constantly under review and remains responsive to the developing needs of our children and to different cohorts within our school, every member of staff is a member of a Prime and a Specific Curriculum Development team. Each team will have representatives from each class so that they have a shared over-view of and are in a position to influence curriculum delivery across the school.

Under the guidance of the teachers who are the Team Leaders, these Curriculum teams will: -

- Identify and plan for key areas they wish to develop,
- Organize, audit and bid for resources
- Share and promote best practice
- Lead/ Co-lead staff development in these areas, taking a lead in staff meetings.
- Review, update and write Curriculum Policies.

Staff meeting time is allocated to support the work and development of these teams.

Holistic learning

Although we plan for each area of the curriculum separately in order to ensure that every child has a broad and balanced curriculum and that they are developing well in all areas; in practise **it is important to remember that children's learning is much more holistic and connected than this** and that planned learning experiences will support children's development in many ways and in many areas. These important connections are at the very heart of quality learning. **We also need to remember to constantly monitor, support and plan for children's well-being as how a child feels will greatly impact on their capacity to learn.**

This policy should be read in conjunction with our school Newsletters, photographic portfolios, curriculum leaflets, displays on classroom and corridor walls throughout the indoor and outdoor learning environments, Welcome booklet and the school website, which all have additional information for families.