

“Children are entitled to be provided with an appropriate curriculum”

Children’s learning is divided into two curriculums: the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum. Children aged 3-5 years are to be taught the Foundation Stage and children from 6-11 years are to be taught the National Curriculum. Children from age 3-11 years are entitled to be taught an appropriate curriculum regardless of gender, social class, disability, culture and ethnicity.

Both the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum are going to be explained briefly but, the Foundation Stage has been chosen to be focused on in more detail.

The National Curriculum is a set guide from which teachers can refer back to. It was developed by the Conservative Government in 1989 following the Education Reform Act 1988 to assist teachers in the classrooms, then revised in 1995 by Dearing and further revised in 2000 by New Labour.

It is divided up into three core subjects: Mathematics, English and Science, seven non-core subjects: History, Geography, Music, Art, P.E, D.T, I.T, there are other requirements such as R.E, Sex education and non statutory guidance like P.S.H.E and citizenship, and foreign language (KS2). All these subjects are organised into four *key stages*. *‘For each key stage, programmes of study set out what pupils should be taught, and attainment targets set out the expected standards of pupils’ performance’*. (DFEE (1999), p17)

The *programmes of study* set out what pupils should be taught in each subject at each key stage, and provide the basis for planning schemas of work. It is up to the schools to decide upon the programmes of study for each subject in order for the pupils’ to reach the *attainment targets*.

Attainment targets set out the expected standards of pupils’ performance. They range from level 1 to level 6 and are a way of assessing pupils’ attainment.

‘Levels of descriptions provide the basis for making judgements about pupils’ performance at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3. At key stage 4, national qualifications are the main means of assessing attainment in National Curriculum subjects’. (DFEE (1999), p17)

All teachers have to plan and prepare a lesson before they can perform it. The purpose of planning is internally so all staff are planning together and working as a team for the children and externally to reassure the parents, inspectors and Government that the staff are delivering the National Curriculum. There are 3 types of term within the National Curriculum, long term (key stage and year plans), medium term (termly or half termly plans) and short term (weekly or daily plans). There are 5 principles which teachers must remember when planning: breadth and balance, continuity and progression, differentiation and

match, relevance and appropriateness, and assessment opportunities. In order for teachers to meet the requirements they must include all the principles.

Teachers must assess children to find out what they have achieved. They are assessed by doing national tests at age 7 and 11 years, and then the S.A.T. S are made public in league tables and checked by Ofsted inspectors.

Assessing children's learning of the National Curriculum is performed by teachers observing, questioning, listening and marking the children's work. When teachers assess children they write down their evidence, devise recording systems, produce tables of results, add information to the pupil's profile and finally write reports for the child's parents.

The Foundation Stage is a guide for early years practitioners, set by the Government to teacher children from age 3-5 years. There are 6 main areas of learning within the Foundation Stage. The stepping stones within the 6 areas of learning are a root to the early learning goals so that expectations for most children to reach can be established. Children learn through play so the teaching is mainly play orientated.

By the time children are 3 years old they will have already learnt a great deal. Many will have been taken to groups like parent and toddler groups, and some will have had experience of group settings such as day centres or home settings with a childminder.

The *early learning goals* establish what stage the children are at by the end. They are organised into 6 areas and provide the basis for practitioners to plan throughout the Foundation Stage. By the end, some children will have gone beyond the goals. Whereas some children maybe working towards some or all of the goals like for example younger children, children with special needs, foreign children who are learning English as an additional language and children who have not had high quality learning experiences.

The *stepping stones* set out the early learning goals for each area of learning. In this section of the guide it shows practitioners what they need to know about children's learning in each area and what it means for teaching i.e. planning and assessment. The stepping stones are a root to the progress laid out by the early learning goals and therefore help practitioners to understand what the goals mean for the children throughout the Foundation Stage. *'These stepping stones identify developing knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes that children need if they are to achieve these early learning goals by the end of the Foundation Stage'* (QCA, (2000), p26).

There are 6 *areas of learning* within the Foundation Stage:

- 1) *Personal, social and emotional development* – this is about emotional well-being, knowing who you are and where you fit in as well as feeling good about yourself and being able to make friends. It is also about developing respect for others, social skills and a positive attitude towards learning.
- 2) *Communication, language and literacy* – this includes communication, speaking and listening in different situations. The ability to communicate gives

children the capacity to participate more fully within their society. They do so with adults who understand what they say through developing closely linked relationships with them in an affectionate atmosphere.

3) *Mathematical development* – this development in children arises out of daily experiences in a rich and interesting environment. It should be developed through stories, songs, games and imaginative play, so that children enjoy using and experimenting with numbers larger than 10.

4) *Knowledge and understanding of the world* – in this, children are developing the crucial knowledge, skills and understanding that help them make sense of the world. This forms the foundation for later work in science, design and technology, history, geography, and information and communication technology (ICT).

5) *Physical development* - this benefits children in 2 ways, it helps them to gain confidence in what they can do and enables them to feel healthy and active.

6) *Creative development* – Being creative helps children to express feelings and emotions in different forms such as art, music, dance, role play and imaginative play.

The following section shows a few underlying principles of the Foundation Stage. Principles have to be put into practice; they are a set of beliefs, values, and ideas which inform us of what we do.

'No child should be excluded or disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, special educational needs, disability, gender or ability' (QCA, (2000), p14). This refers back to children are entitled to an appropriate curriculum no matter what. Practitioners must implement this by making sure there is a variety of materials and equipment, also the practitioners must ensure the children are able to play in an environment free from discrimination.

'Parents and practitioners should work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect within which children can have security and confidence' (QCA, (2000), p12). This can be implemented by offering childcare and group work to parents and children when attending nursery for example. Trust in the relationship between the practitioners, parents and children should be certified.

'To be effective, an early years curriculum should be carefully structured' (QCA, (2000), p15). Experiences that are relevant, imaginative, motivating, enjoyable and challenging should be planned. This principle requires being play focused, as Piaget says children learn best by doing .

Children learn in a variety of ways, and may prefer to learn in a specific way i.e. their preferred learning style. There are 3 sayings which cover what is important to understand about childrens' learning: listen and you will learn, you learn best by doing and lets discuss it. These three sayings are methods of learning from which practitioners plan from.

'There is no doubt that children learn much from listening to adults' (Pollard (1996), p10). Pavlov and Skinner are behaviourist psychologist who found out that children learn a lot from the practitioner who transmits their knowledge and skills on to the children.

'The task of the teacher or adult is seen as being to provide stimulating activities and a secure environment within which the child can grow and develop' (Pollard (1996), p10). Piaget a constructivist psychologist emphasises on doing. The children learn through interaction and both accommodation to it and assimilate what is to be learned from it.

'The strong emphasis on discussion underpinned by the experience of many people that talking with others is a very effective way of clarifying one's thinking' (Pollard (1996), p10). Vygotsky and Brunner are social constructivists who have studied this area. Adults scaffolding childrens learning through discussion encourages collaboration and language development. Knowledge and skills are constructed gradually through experience, interaction and adult support.

Out of the 3 methods *'you learn best by doing'* is more likely to be implemented in the early years of learning. These methods of learning are important for children's learning but there are other factors which have an impact on children's learning, for example discrimination from practitioners and other children.

Early years practitioners have set a high value on children's ability to learn through play. As well as learning it is a way for children to socialise and interact with other children. Play is seen as an essential part in children's development as it uses all of the stages in some way. Some attempts to define types of play behaviour have been suggested. Piaget distinguished between 2 types of play; practice play involves repetition of actions until they are gradually mastered and symbolic play which involves the manipulation of symbols, and games with rules.

Practitioners must constantly be thinking how they can implement the methods of learning into every area of learning, so they must prepare a plan for every lesson. *'Planning is a key factor in the effective implementation of the pre-school curriculum'* (Neaum & Tallack, p61). Practitioners must decide on the best methods to help young children learn. There are 3 ways of planning; long term which is for the whole Foundation Stage, medium term which is for the term or half a term and finally short term which is for the week or each session. The practitioners must use the document to ensure that all 6 areas of learning are covered, and that what they have planned is working towards the early learning goals. Also they must make sure that all the work is appropriate to each individual's needs.

Assessment is very important for children's learning. It tells the practitioners what stage the child is at and whether they have met all the early learning goals. The practitioner makes records for each child and will then inform the parents of their child's progress. In nursery the assessment is ongoing. Practitioners observe children, notice what they say and what they do and make a record of what they see. They use the document's column *'examples of what children do'* to help them assess. In reception the assessment is baseline. This happens in the first term of reception. At the end children will be assessed to see if they have achieved the early learning goals.

In conclusion as both the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum show children can study a wide variety of subjects, so there is something for every child. They will find some subjects easier to grasp than others, but usually there is something for everyone. As long as the right teaching methods are put into practice at the right times, children should get a lot out of learning not just for educational reasons but developmental as well. Finally, children from age 3-11 years are entitled to an appropriate curriculum regardless of gender, social class, disability, culture and ethnicity; we should not forget this when working in an early years child setting.