

Harriet House School

Nursery Curriculum Policy:
Principles and Implementation



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September 2015

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Nursery Curriculum Policy

At Harriet House we combine the Montessori approach to education with the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Montessori is a holistic approach with an emphasis on giving children freedom of choice within a prepared environment, allowing them to develop naturally in their own way and at their own pace. Given such an environment children are self-motivated and quickly develop in independence, confidence and concentration. We provide opportunities for the children to learn through playing and exploring (engagement), active learning (motivation) and creating and thinking critically (thinking). English is our teaching language.

The Principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage are grouped into four themes:

A Unique Child – every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

We celebrate the individuality of every child and encourage them to work at their own pace and make their own choices. We use observation and assessment to monitor the child's progress. This provides the teachers with a sound knowledge of the child so we are then equipped to stimulate and extend the child's learning journey. We present new activities to the children, (show them how to do it) and then let them explore the materials for themselves. The staff monitors their progress and encourage the children to have pride in their work. The children are not corrected but shown the

activity again or redirected so that they are continuing to explore in a safe manner. Keeping the children safe and healthy is an integral part of our practice. When a child feels safe, secure, included and happy their minds are like absorbent sponges.

Positive Relationships – children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

Nothing is more important than happy well-balanced children. We aim to provide a warm and caring environment in which children can thrive. We operate a group teacher (key person) system and are careful to employ individuals who believe in and reflect our values (see the Recruitment Policy). We model good behaviour, setting examples of kindness and politeness and praising children when they show these qualities. We encourage children to reflect on their feelings and actions. We value their families and friends and we help them build relationships with other adults and children. We plan for children to work in small and large groups as well as on their own, and we promote community awareness inviting the police fire fighters, doctors, vets mobile library and so on. Also see our Parents as Partners Policy.

Enabling Environments – the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children’s development and learning.

Maria Montessori always placed huge emphasis on the importance of the prepared environment. We aim to place the materials within reach of the children and ensure that they are the appropriate size. Children are free to request materials that are not on display and where possible we will then provide these. The materials are in good condition so that they are inviting for the children. The children are involved in maintaining the environment, which increases their respect for it.

The setting encourages freedom of movement. We have allocated different areas of learning within the classroom. Every activity has its own learning goal. The environment is regularly assessed and developed.

Learning and Development – children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are equally important and inter-connected.

This area includes learning through Playing and Exploring, Active Learning, Creating and Critical Thinking as well as the seven areas of Learning and Development. Children’s play reflects their wide-ranging and varied interests and preoccupations. In their play children learn at their highest level. Play with peers is important for children’s development. They learn

through physical and mental challenges. Active learning involves other people, objects, ideas and events that engage and involve children for sustained periods. When children have opportunities to play with ideas in different situations and with a variety of resources, they discover connections and come to new and better understandings and ways of doing things. Adult support in this process enhances their ability to think critically and ask questions.

Alongside the Early Years Foundation Stage overarching principles, Harriet House School incorporates The Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning into the curriculum:

- **Playing and Exploring**

ENGAGEMENT Finding and exploring
 Playing with what they know
 Being willing to have a go

- **Active Learning**

MOTIVATION Being involved and concentrating
 Keep trying
 Enjoying achieving what they set out to do

- **Creating and Critical Thinking**

THINKING Having their own ideas
 Making links
 Working with ideas

The AEL activities are at the heart of the Montessori curriculum and correspond perfectly with the above requirements. AEL consist of activities which on the one hand equip children with skills that lead to greater independence, while at the same time being a route to improving the children's fine motor skills, hand-eye co-ordination, sense of order and concentration. The range, which these activities can cover, is large, and typically the teachers change the materials through the course of the term. The dressing frames (for learning to use large and small buttons, buckles, poppers, zips etc) are always accessible; other activities encompass pouring, threading, polishing, opening and closing boxes and bottles, cutting with scissors, sweeping up and using a dustpan and brush, nuts and bolts, locks and keys, transferring objects with spoons, tongs and tweezers, and transferring liquids with sponges, basters and pipettes.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Personal, social and emotional development involves helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves, and others; to form positive relationships and develop respect for others; to develop social skills and learn how to manage their feelings; to understand appropriate behaviour in groups; and to have confidence in their own abilities.

Harriet House maintains a wonderful atmosphere where the child can explore and make their own choices thus building up their self-esteem. The staff are trained to be sensitive to their needs and always answer their questions honestly, trying to use positive language at all times. They help the children build relationships and solve disputes. The children are in classrooms where they benefit from working with children of mixed ages. Children have their own individual aims, which are prepared by their group teacher (key person). We have large circle times including all the children as well as small circle times with group teachers. Activities include sharing their weekend news, show and tell and small projects. We have a communal snack table where the children are encouraged to pour drinks and share fruit and vegetables with their friends. They are also encouraged to wash up and leave the area clean for the next child. While the group teacher has an important role we like to ensure that the children get the opportunity to work with all staff. The AEL activities help the children do things for themselves, which increases their independence and confidence.

Communication and Language

Communication and language development involves giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment; to develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves; and to speak and listen in a range of situations.

At Harriet House children are exposed to an environment, which inspires conversation and dialogue. There is constant learning and interaction throughout the day. Informally the staff are constantly engaged in conversation with children and there are many points of language learning in the classroom in terms of both scheduled events (Show & Tell, stories, drama, songs) and materials (games, books, audio materials). We aim to identify early and respond to any particular difficulties in a child's speech development, co-ordinating with outside specialists as appropriate. We are aware of those children for whom English is an additional language and make special efforts to assist them. We recognise that many building blocks need to be in place prior to the teaching of writing. These include the

development of comprehension of spoken language, phonetic awareness, rhyme, rhythm, visual discrimination, small motor control and pincer grip.

Physical Development

Physical development involves providing opportunities for young children to be active and interactive; and to develop their co-ordination, control, and movement. Children must also be helped to understand the importance of physical activity, and to make healthy choices in relation to food.

The classrooms and outside learning encourage movement throughout the day. The AEL materials provide an extensive range of activities designed to refine and strengthen fine motor movements. Gross motor development is nurtured through a wide variety of activities including balancing equipment, walking blocks, obstacle courses, drama, music and movement, ballet and multi sports. We go outside every day and the children have the opportunity to use large play apparatus. When exercising we help them notice the changes in their bodies through discussion and example. (see our P.E. policy). The sensorial material offers opportunities for the development of the senses. We have a strong focus on the importance of healthy eating introducing the children to new foods and using real food in the classroom. We cook regularly, choosing healthy, nutritious recipes from around the world. Lunchtime is a social occasion where the value of healthy eating is discussed and celebrated. Children are taught to wash their hands before eating. We have a free flow snack table where children can independently help themselves to fruit, vegetables and water when they are hungry or thirsty. We provide time and opportunities for children with physical impairments to develop their physical skills, working with physiotherapists and occupational therapists and using additional adult help if necessary. In addition to all of this, the nursery and reception classes take part in an annual sports day.

Once the foundations have been built in the three prime areas, communication, personal, social and emotional and physical development, we then support children in four specific areas, through which the three prime areas are strengthened and applied. The specific areas are:

Literacy

Literacy development involves encouraging children to link sounds and letters and to begin to read and write. Children are given access to a wide range of reading materials (books, poems, and other written materials) to ignite their interest. These are situated in a comfortable and well-presented

book corner and books are refreshed regularly and we represent different cultures, topics and languages.

When the child is ready to commence formal written work, we approach this via the well-structured sequence of Montessori materials (sand paper letters, large moveable alphabet, pink boxes etc). We are careful to teach children according to their own stage of development and not to push them before they are ready. We have an extensive array of writing equipment to encourage mark making, exploration and creativity.

Mathematics

This involves providing children with opportunities to develop and improve their skills in counting, understanding and using numbers, calculating simple addition and subtraction problems; and to describe shapes, spaces, and measures.

The development and training of the senses is central to the unfolding development of the human being - "There is nothing in the brain which did not first enter through the senses". The Montessori sensorial materials provide opportunities for the refining of all the senses, which lay a foundation for problem solving, reasoning and numeracy. Tactile is addressed through the touch tablets and fabrics; olfactory with the smelling boxes; auditory with the sound boxes; sight (both visual discrimination and colour perception) with the knobbed and coloured cylinders and colour boxes; and taste with tasting exercises and in our many cooking activities and in experiencing food from other cultures. Other materials address the sensation of weight, pressure and temperature. Materials such as the broad stair, pink tower and long rods offer multiple sensations (in these cases, dimension and weight). Another set of the sensorial materials embodies mathematical concepts, notably the broad stairs, pink tower, knobbed and coloured cylinders, geometric cabinet and solids, constructive triangles and the binomial and trinomial cubes.

In line with Montessori thinking the children are helped to approach mathematics working from concrete to abstract and from simple to complex. There is a well-structured sequence of material with which the children learn the meaning and symbols for numbers from zero to ten (large and small number rods, sand paper numbers, cards and counters, short bead stair) as well as more advanced numbers (golden beads, Séguin boards, number strips). This formal Montessori material is supplemented by a large range of puzzles, books and other mathematical apparatus, used both inside and outside. Furthermore, we aim to promote general mathematical awareness in much of what we do in the course of the day - through songs, rhymes, stories

and games, as well as the opportunities that arise in cooking, small groups, in creative activities and with construction materials.

Understanding of the World

Understanding the world involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community through opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment.

In the Montessori curriculum the cultural area covers not only the traditional cultural aspects - learning about different countries, peoples, languages, foods, festivals and cultures - but also elementary biology (lifecycles, terminology cards), geology (globes and maps, land forms, volcanoes) and science (floating and sinking, tasting, gravity, states of matter, properties of air etc). We have a full array of natural and scientific objects for the children to explore and experiment with. The children are encouraged to use ICT equipment such as CD player, cameras, computers and programmable toys. The curriculum includes regular science and cooking sessions and is further extended by a schedule of well-planned outings to theatres, libraries, the woods and to farms.

Expressive arts and design

This involves enabling children to explore and play with a wide range of media and materials, as well as providing opportunities and encouragement for sharing their thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of activities in art, music, movement, dance, role-play, and design and technology.

We offer a range of opportunities for children's creative development. The children have permanent access to graphic materials (pencils, crayons, pens, chalk), paint, collage and three-dimensional modelling, as well as introduction to a wide variety of artistic materials and techniques (clay, plaster, play dough, stencils, stamps, rollers, sponges, water colours etc) on a rotating basis. The children have access to dressing up clothes and role-play equipment so that they can create their own stories. The children relate their stories to the teachers who record them and then enable the children to perform their stories. The children take part in two performances a year for parents to come and watch. They are the Nativity and the Summer Arts Festival. Music and musical instruments are available at all times. There is teacher led singing daily and a specialist music teacher comes in once a

week. We use a wide variety of construction materials and model people and animals, which provides opportunity for the children to create stories.

In addition to the standard curriculum, Harriet House offers optional afternoon clubs as part of the school day.

Clubs Offered

At the end of each term all parents will receive a full listing of clubs for the next term. They will then choose which club they would like their child to do. Each club has a cost attached, which goes towards buying resources for that club. Some clubs are run by outside staff which will be advised accordingly. Once a child has signed up to a club and paid a fee they need to continue with that club for the term. If they wish to stop attending that club during the term, the club fee will be non-refundable.

Once the children have chosen their clubs for the term, an electronic registration form will be emailed for completion and contains the following information:

- Day and time of club
- Staff in charge
- Venue
- Arrangements should the club be cancelled
- Any necessary clothing needed for the club

Registration

The staff in charge will take a register. The register will clearly record whether:

- The child is present
- The child is absent and the member of staff in charge has been informed

Cancellation

Parents will be notified in advance of any sessions that need to be cancelled.

If a session needs to be cancelled on the day itself e.g. due to illness of the member of staff in charge, the school will notify the parents by phone or email and an extra session organised, or a refund issued.

All of this information is relayed to parents at Syllabus Supper and Parents Evenings. In addition, Harriet House has an Open Door Policy that offers daily communication with parents/carers.

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