

Personal development

Personal development at Woodlands is all about recognising the unique child, with their differing backgrounds & individual needs, whilst all living in the local community & same society.

The curriculum that we follow is unique to our setting. We use the early year's foundation stage as our basis or long term planning.

Our medium term planning is the organisation of the children's focus weeks, gathering evidence from key workers & parents. Collating & evaluating the evidence completes the cycle & helps us plan for the next stage of development.

Our short term planning is what happens daily, in the moment of every day at Woodlands. It is our staff teaching, supporting, and guiding, encouraging, observing, reassuring & progressing children's development little by little each day.

Our policies & procedures guide us, but essentially our guide is the whole hearted knowledge of really knowing all of the children that we work with.

This journey begins at open days where we make our initial connections with families. Following this each child is offered a home visit in the week leading up to their start date. Home visits are a time to gain an in-site into each child's background including their culture, beliefs, medical, physical & emotional history. Key workers play with the child & take visual initial observations of the child's age & stage of development, while management chat to family members & answer any questions they may have.

Over the initial first few weeks the key person continues to get to know the child & their family, this relationship is ever evolving during the time the child spends with us. A key workers role is to ensure secure attachments are made initially, encouraging independence & supporting the child's overall well-being alongside their development throughout.

By recognising each child as an individual, we are promoting their personal development. We make sure each child has appropriate access to a preschool education by addressing all of their needs. Some children need additional support just to attend, those with physical disabilities or difficulties for instance, could struggle with the steps to our outdoor area or the independent structure we offer. Those with language delays or non-verbal would need closer support than a typically developing three year old. We ensure we liaise with other working professionals to support all children & offer every child the best start we can. Whether that be by securing extra funding to enable us to employ additional staff or arranging whole team meetings with families to ensure everyone is up to speed.

Another way we support children's personal development is by giving children choices.

By allowing children to make decisions for themselves we are enabling them to recognise their individual characteristics & encouraging a diverse & mutually respectful society. Examples of this are allowing children to choose their own character in the Christmas play instead of allocating roles for them, Voting for their favourite story at circle time, encouraging role play of all types even if it goes

against gender specific stereotypes. All of these examples are non-tokenistic ways we promote equality & diversity in our setting.

The key to promoting children's individual character & personal development is to build their self-confidence, independence & resilience. Preschool is the ideal setting for this development to naturally take place. Children are encouraged to take risks whilst in an emotionally safe environment with people around them that they trust. Risky or challenging play offers children the opportunity to develop all of these skills.

In modern Britain today, many families are fearful of allowing their children the freedom to explore & challenge their surroundings & are risk averse. Families often 'over parent' & do too much for their children. We provide a relaxed environment without time pressures, we encourage & allow children the opportunities to do things for themselves, teaching & supporting the life skills needed along the way.

Our daily routines such as putting on our own coats, changing our own shoes, pouring our own drinks, cutting up our own snacks, washing our own hands are just some of the ways personal development is encouraged. Our resources encourage curiosity & we provide many open ended resources to engage all children.

We evaluate our resources all the time to make sure we are meeting the needs of all of the children. We use audits & observations to lead us. Around 3 years ago we took the decision to remove our PC from the environment. Observations showed us that many children become fixated on computers which limits their access to the broad spectrum of other resources & opportunities we offer at preschool. We also found in our initial observations of children during home visits that almost all children arrive to us knowing how to operate computers, tablets & phones with ease. Instead, we offer children opportunities to look things up on our tablets, to support their play. Things like googling what a road sign or traffic light looks like before encouraging children to have a go at drawing or making one during their play. Children are always supported by an adult & encouraged to always have an adult nearby at home when using the internet. Other methods of technology are encouraged instead such as torches, CD players, cameras, photocopiers & printers. This has proved a much better extension of their knowledge of technology.

We use our daily routines & boundaries to encourage a healthy lifestyle & aim to educate children in the importance of looking after ourselves. We have a PANCO policy which covers healthy eating & regular exercise that aims to teach children & families the importance of having a healthy start in life. In the past we have offered healthy eating talks to families & had displays of healthy lunch options during our recent parent's evenings. Through our newsletters & Facebook page we support this message by sharing articles & giving lifestyle advice regularly.

The most important way of supporting children's personal development is to be reflective. We must always evaluate our practice & as children are individual, each cohort of children brings different needs & challenges to rise too.