

Following children's interests

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**SHARING LEARNING ACROSS THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP
PEER PARTNERSHIP VALIDATED SCHOOL STRENGTH**

“As human beings, we are born with an innate capacity to learn. Young children show this unique, organic capacity when they learn to talk and walk. They try again and again until they are successful.” **MICHELE BARRETT, EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER**

Intention

There are an exceptionally wide range of children attending Vanessa Nursery School.

Some children are working within the ‘typical development’ that would be expected for their age group. Others are high fliers, with exceptional skills, in a number of areas. Some children have identified special educational needs / disabilities when they start the nursery, others are identified and supported when they are in the nursery. A wide range of languages are spoken in the school, and parents come from a wide range of backgrounds.

Some children are full time, and others are part time. Their pattern of attendance depends on their home needs.

A year is a long time in a young child’s life. The needs of a very young three-year-old is very different from the child approaching transition into a Reception class.

How does a school cope with this wide-ranging diversity?

Fundamentally there is a comprehensive knowledge of child development that has led to a curriculum that is based on the



core experiences that are offered to children.

In addition, the school developed an ‘expert body’ of practitioners, who know exactly what they need to do in order to create exceptional learning.

The interactions between everyone, from staff to staff, from staff to children, from child to child, and from family to school is based around a concrete notion of positive relationships.

There is exceptionally strong leadership and management that has developed an unwavering practice and expertise that is wholly child centred and focused.

Rosalyn, one of the teachers, sums up effective teaching at Vanessa. “It’s like breathing!” she says.

“We need to provide a curriculum that enables every child to follow their interests and access learning at their own level of development. We can do this through the core experiences we offer them.” **SIAN THOMPSON , DEPUTY HEADTEACHER**

Implementation

Vanessa Nursery School developed and embedded the core experiences it offers young children over a significant period of time: It is from a deep and ongoing analysis of what their young children need in order to be highly successful learners, that the core experiences have been articulated. When the core experiences work together, they are broader than either child or adult initiated learning, continuous provision or successful adult interactions.

The core experiences are a synthesis of the following activities and routines:

- The interactions of children with adults and other children that help them to be articulate, deeply engaged and active learners who create and think critically about what they are doing.
- An uncluttered nursery environment inside and outside, that has been carefully thought out to give children the time to enable them to “wallow in their learning.”
- A highly rigorous planning and assessment cycle that enables

each adult working with the children to know each child.

- A planned transition into the nursery that takes into account children’s individual needs when settling is also carefully managed. It is this basic structure that enables staff to know the children so well.
- Next steps for learning are planned on different levels: in discussion between staff, through informal and formal planning, with identified and agreed next steps that are shared with parents.

The school does not have a behaviour policy but a relationships policy. Helping children to manage their responses to challenging situations is handled through positive relationships.



"(Everyone) agreed that the learning seen during the review reflected the success of the core experiences. Children were engaging in positive often very deep, learning experiences."

HFLP PEER REVIEW REPORT, 2018/19

Impact

Perhaps the best way to sum up the value of following children's interests is by describing a core experience that has had significant impact on a group of children's learning and progress.

This type of description also highlights the way in which all the core experiences are underpinned by a highly rigorous planning and assessment system.

Creating this type of learning is neither haphazard, nor does it occur by chance.

Part of the curriculum at Vanessa is based on the use of core books. When a core book is chosen it is used in a range of ways by staff and by children. There are enough books for frequent retelling, for children to read independently or in a group together, sometimes with an adult.

When children were planting green beans in the garden, one child made



the connection between the bean growing and Jack and the Beanstalk. The next week, this was the core book in the nursery. It led to a wide range of activities such as making props to retell the story, and later, making and eating bean salad.

Children were deeply immersed in making props so that they could retell the story themselves. The teacher encouraged them to help one another here, and they did. The learning then moved on to children's own book making, with children writing and illustrating the story.

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