Kenilworth & Whitnash Nursery Schools

& Early Years Hubs

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Observation & Assessment Policy 2024

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## OUR APPROACH TO MEANINGFUL OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT

We have worked within a national group of Maintained Nursery Schools to consider what effective observation and assessment looks like in the most successful Nursery Environments. We have based our work on values and principles inspired by the work of Loris Malaguzzi:

“Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then if you have understood well, teaching will be different from before” (Loris Malaguzzi).

Our intention is to develop a system which honours children and childhood in which we plan time to observe children without fixed agendas to better understand them. We build in time for quality reflection about children’s learning. At KNS and WNS we have drawn upon the work of Barnett Early Years Alliance(BEYA) and have adapted and enhanced their system of Observing Play & Learning (OP&L)

The focus on telling the story of the children and observing to understand them links strongly to our ethos in which **‘each child’s uniqueness is recognised and valued’.** Alongside the clear recognition that **“if we are recording the moment we cannot be part of it”** and our understanding that by being part of the moment and co-constructing beside the child we are making the best possible impact on young children’s learning**.** Our aim is for Practitioners to have the maximum amount of time to be involved with and co-construct learning and experiences with our young children. To do this we must make the shorter times that we observe to understand and assess children really effective.

We also know and value the importance and benefits of parent partnership in the early years. We understand that parents **know their child best** and that they are co-responsible for their learning in the early years and beyond. Our system ensures that parents are part of the process throughout, working in close collaboration through focused conversations about their child’s learning, collecting vital information about their knowledge, skills and emotional well-being on entry so that we understand their interests and starting points.

To successfully develop this system we must also assess our own practice and ensure what we offer is appropriate and effective for all of the children who access our Schools. Building in reflection time and professional development experiences for our team so they may offer the very best opportunities for learning for the young children who come to our Schools. To best ensure this is possible we have also adapted our CPD ana appraisal system to allow each member of the team a professional partner to reflect with.

**THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT**

Integral to teaching is how practitioners assess what children know, understand and can do, as well as taking account of their interests and dispositions to learn (characteristics of effective learning), and how practitioners use this information to plan children’s next steps in learning and monitor their progress.

**Ofsted Early Years Inspection Handbook 2021**

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBSERVATION, ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING:**

**Formmative and Summative:**

Formative assessment is an integral part of teaching young children. Practice begins with knowing and understanding the child and grows in co-responsibly with Parents. Responsive pedagogy is needed to recognise what children know, understand and can do. Children and adults can then construct the curriculum together.

**Formative assessment** is ongoing as adults adapt and respond to the child when working beside them. **Summative assessment** requires the adult to step back and observe to understand more deeply so that an overview of the child at that point may be gained and within that development and progress can be identified. Reliable summative assessment is based on ongoing formative assessment to ensure professional knowledge of the child is based on a holistic view of their development. Summative assessment serves several purposes that can enhance development and learning opportunities for children, including making changes in the environmental offer and the approach of adults working beside the child. (based on supportive materials from Birth to 5 Matters 2021)

**OBSERVING TO UNDERSTAND**:

**OUR PRACTICE at KNS & WNS**

Spotlight Observations and Starting points:

At least 3 times during the year we complete a summative assessment alongside the ongoing formative assessments that occur all the time. For this to be possible and effective we spend a short but intense period observing an individual child.

We are observing to understand as we dedicate a short block of time to watching and noticing the child, trying to understand their intentions, their skills and interests, their communication and social skills. Staff watch carefully for at least 15 minutes and sometimes this extends to 30 minutes without taking pictures or writing notes. They are noticing and reflecting intently. They will then sit down and reflect all they have seen to a ‘Lead’ practitioner who listens and then reflects back the understanding that has been gained during observation. They will then work together to think about what the next steps might be to support, motivate and deepen learning for that individual child incorporating their formative knowledge and the contributions they have already gathered from Parents.

From this work the short spotlight summaries are developed and then these are shared with Parents so that a dialogue about the child current interests, intentions and skills can take place that also determines the next steps for learning for that child. Within that work we also reflect on the child’s current skills and knowledge against developmental milestones linked to their age every 6 months to decide if the milestones are *met* or *not yet* met.

We can then evaluate:

1. what specifically may support or deepen learning for that individual child
2. how the learning environment and planned provision may change to respond to that child;
3. teaching styles and the approach of the adults and management of time;
4. whether we are supporting all children effectively and making it easy for them to learn or are there possible barriers to learning that need to be addressed?

Noticing and observing as an ongoing process.

Observation and Assessment is an on-going process that takes place all the time, starting on the day we home visit the child and family. Much information about the child is gathered from the parent/carer on the home visit, whilst playing with, and getting to know the child offers opportunities to perhaps share books, talk with, gather drawings, play with toys etc. that will provide a baseline for record keeping, and planning.

Assessment allows the children to demonstrate their skills and knowledge across all areas of learning, it allows practitioners to reflect upon their approach and the support and encouragement each individual child may need to help them to access their early years education successfully, developing positive dispositions for learning.

When we observe, even briefly, we:

1. watch children’s actions and reflect on what their interest or intentions maybe, are they exploring a particular aspect of learning, what sort of links are they making and how are they building upon knowledge they already hold?
2. listen to children talking;
3. focus on their interactions with other children and adults;
4. are aware of children’s body language and non verbal expressions of their social and emotional development;
5. value their efforts and achievements.
6. Recognise their involvement and participation levels
7. Note their interest and specialisms

We are seeking to understand:

1. conceptual development;
2. self esteem, attitudes to learning new skills and concentration;
3. social skills and relationships with others;
4. preferences for particular activities/materials;
5. communication skills for different purposes and audiences;
6. physical skills;
7. skills of enquiry and investigation.

Assessments based on observation help us to:

1. gather information about how a child is settling in to the nursery;
2. monitor how a child is using their time;
3. look closely at inter relationships;
4. monitor provision in an area of the nursery;
5. evaluate a special focus for learning;
6. compare a child’s responses when involved in a directed activity and one which is self initiated.

In each learning area, adults have access to ‘post-it’ notes/digital cameras and video cameras (including our Outdoor Classroom) for recording our observations. See Appendix I.

The observations are collected, given to the child’s Family Group Leader each week and added to their individual records.

**What happens to the assessments:**

Spotlight and settling in summative assessments are shared with parents.

They are used to decide the next steps for the child and what the school will do to support further progression and to allow the interests to be followed maintaining motivation for learning. The middle section of the ‘spotlight’ is entered into the planning portfolios so that the actions of the school can be put directly into practice, changing resources, or considering a specific piece of group work or adult intervention. This ensures planning is responsive and that the understanding we gain from assessing by observation and discussion is used and applied to benefit the child and often other children within the cohort also instantaneously.

**Monitoring:**

Spotlights are reviewed after 2 months and that again is shared with parents via an online App. This means they receive an update and also become aware of how their child’s interests have developed. It may be possible to see progress within this review if a child has responded to the additional opportunities planned for them. Or we may see a new interest and skills has developed.

**Cohort Monitoring:**

In addition, the Leadership team keep an overview as age related spotlights occur that allows them to ascertain information about individual children, as well as a cohort overview of children, who are meeting developmental milestones and those who are not yet meeting the milestones. As spotlight assessments are developmentally linked to a child’s age they happen in relation to the child’s month of birth and then again at a six-month interval. This means the cohort information is a live and working document rather than being completed a fixed point in a term. This supports staff workload and also allows the time for the more in depth observations systems to take place.

If children are not yet meeting a milestone then we recognise this could indicate a wider educational need, an emotional barrier or the child may just require a different teaching strategy to engage them in learning, the team seek to scaffold up rather than differentiate down, starting where the child is and recognising their interests and skills as a place to begin other work beside them.

Monitoring is shared with Governors who track and analyse performance and standards termly, focussing particularly on three yearly targets set for each cohort. Monitoring systems now allow for tracking in the Nurture Nursery and Main Nursery using one continuous system. Trend reports are produced to allow Governors to look at the impact of the school work over a period of three years or more.

**Pedagogical Development based on shared observation practices:**

­Progress and well-being is carefully monitored at weekly ‘children’s meetings’ and more formally each term by the Teacher and Head teacher. A moderation meeting follows every observation to understand and is built into the OP&L system. In addition, the team have opportunities to observe together using 5-10 minute videos of children where the team can then discuss learning and unpick intentions and interests. Photograph stories in which a series of photographs capture a child’s engagement in something that is self-chosen and directed are also useful for shared pedagogical discussion within the teaching team.

**Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

Children with Special Educational Needs are identified by the school as early as possible, to support their learning and development. Information and records are sought from agencies prior to admission for children who have already been identified.

Our assessments for these children, as with all others, result in a positive statement of progress and achievement and consideration of their current skills and interests. The School references the research work completed by Pen Green and basis the work with children with SEND on their celebratory approach.

It is recognised that children with SEND may not always ‘meet’ all developmental; milestones but their skills and achievements and interests will be captured and built upon to ensure they have the best and most successful early educational experience, valuing their strengths as well as acknowledging aspects in which they may experiences challenges.

**Parental Involvement:**

Parents are invited to complete a “Parents Contribution” sheet both at the very beginning to inform us of their child’s current knowledge and interests, to tell us about the things they enjoy or any worries they may have about their child. This ‘portrait’ of the child helps us to really begin to know them from the first meeting. It is our first form of assessment.

As we observe children’s play and learning we then begin to share what we are seeing with Parents via an Online Learning Journal so they can stay up to date and the information is readily available tot them. Summative assessments, Spotlights, settling in or Progress Summaries for our 2 year olds, always have space for Parental feedback and staff will often complete this session based on the meetings that accompany the sharing of the observations.

We will also provide up to 6 snap shots of interesting wow moments that the children experience during the term that will be briefer but informative for Parents and they are encouraged to contribute as significant events occur throughout the year. This is kept as part of the child’s Learning Journey.

Observations and achievements are informally verbally offered to parents by staff at the end of sessions, as much as possible, to keep parents informed and up to date. This also offers parents the opportunity to share the child’s progress outside school, with us.

After any summative assessment Parents are offered a face to face meeting (or virtual during Covid 19 protocols) to sit down and share the information, including what School will do next. At these meetings, the child’s ‘Online Learning Journey’ is shared and parents can again complete a comments section.