

The Family School's aims and objectives

The Family School aims to foster the development of self-confidence, self-reliance and sound judgement, coupled with well developed social and citizenship skills and a sense of personal morality, empowered by confidence and ability in the core skills which are fundamental to leading a fulfilling and effective life. A school which offers a fulfilling experience, one which fosters a love of self, of learning, of life.

Philosophy

The fundamental decision that underpins our approach is to trust that children are natural learners and to seek to support children as they develop.

For a child, all of growing up is a learning experience, and children seek to engage with, explore and empower themselves within their environment.

We support rounded development through play, projects, responsibilities, conversation and experience - all in relation to others, in an informal, social setting; considering the school, its people and its activities in the widest sense as the educational environment.

Education is not seen as delivered, but lived, emerging from the child's own interests, curiosity, characteristics and needs, voluntarily played out within their environment and through relationships with others.

Considering the school as an educational environment, within which children will develop and acquire skills and knowledge as part of their normal activities, requires that we design that environment carefully, with due regard to offering and encouraging engagement with those skills, knowledge and personal strengths considered important for effective adulthood.

We respect and listen to children and, with adult support and engagement, enable them to largely direct their own learning and to take ever greater responsibility for themselves, so that in time they can become respectful and responsible members of their family and of wider society.

Regular engagement of family members in the life of the school helps make learning a part of normal life, something that all people, not just children, engage in. A happy family is seen as fundamental to people's well being and The Family School prides itself on the parenting support it offers.

Character of the Family School

- Small and friendly, where everyone recognises each other, and feels personally valued, with a cohesive, relaxed feel, like a large, loose extended family.
- Families are involved in the day-to-day life of the school. All key family members are CRB checked prior to enrolment.

- The school engages with each child as an individual, in the context of their family and the whole school, paying attention to their needs, abilities and interests. Children are supported to learn at their own pace and in their own ways.
- Praise is for effort and attainment, not routine expectation or natural progress.
- Children's views and feelings are taken seriously and understood to be fundamental to well-being and their ability to learn.
- Children are actively involved in the decision making about all that affects them at school; their learning, their environment, their relationships.
- Individual religious convictions are respected, but there is no religious instruction.
- Food prepared by the school is healthy and nutritious.
- The school works to develop ecological understanding in all its members, and aims for best practice in its actions.
- The school fosters connections with local residents, businesses and institutions.
- Children at the Family School spend a high proportion of their time outdoors. Special effort is made so that, even though they are city children, they have regular, normal interaction with the natural world in all its variety.

Teaching and assessment at the Family School

- With small class sizes and a high adult/child ratio, staff can respond to children's enthusiasms and needs.
- The school has professional teachers who are personally engaged with the life of the school.
- We also value the engagement of others; parents, interns and volunteers who bring a variety of skills, energies and interests.
- The principal mode of assessment at the Family School is the engagement of staff in thoughtful observation of children on a continuous basis. These observations are recorded and discussed at daily staff meetings at the end of the school day. This discussion is wide-ranging, with immediate documentation of observations and proposals for action.
- These observations and documentation together with a limited use of tests, informal and formal assessments, are used to prepare Individual Learning Plans (ILP) for each child. Children are encouraged to assess and document their own learning, to judge how well they are progressing and to celebrate their progress and achievements in appropriate ways.
- The observations, documentation, assessments and plans are brought together in each child's file, and together with their portfolios, provide authentic evidence which clarify progress. These documents bring learning to life for children, teachers and parents and

enable progress and development not only to be recorded and tracked, but also evaluated and celebrated.

Responsible and Respectful Behaviour at the Family School

- At the Family School we support all participants to achieve high standards of behaviour based on principles of honesty, respect, consideration and responsibility for oneself and towards others. We maintain a culture of respectful communication and responsible behaviour between all participants by teaching, modelling, demonstrating and defining acceptable standards through good communication and understanding during all activities, without recourse to strategies of reward or punishment. We consider conflicts as shared problems, to be addressed immediately, and to be resolved together through discussion, acknowledgement, acceptance and respect.
- The Family School acknowledges that society expects good behaviour as an important outcome of the educational process. The school creates an environment which encourages and reinforces appropriate and socially acceptable behaviour and self-regulation.
- The Family School focusses on developing children's emotional maturity by;
 - encouraging and supporting children to express their feelings and emotions openly without fear or judgement (with due consideration for others),
 - showing how to set clear personal boundaries,
 - encouraging development of good judgement,
 - showing how to value themselves as individuals with unique qualities,
 - empowering them and trusting them to learn useful skills and knowledge through the development of their interests,
 - promoting to the staff and parents the importance of high self esteem and intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation to well being.
- The Family School helps children to develop self control and good judgement and to recognise and understand wider social controls through its culture and activities. With progress in their personal and emotional development, and success in finding ways to develop positive relationships with others, comes an increasing independence and self control and greater responsibility, not only for themselves but for others.
- Developing self esteem, intrinsic motivation, good judgement, empathy and effective communication skills will, we believe, enable children to develop into fulfilled and successful citizens.

Family School emergent curriculum approach

The Family School's curriculum is not a curriculum to be delivered, consisting of a list of skills, knowledge, experiences and outcomes planned in advance - we trust that a child's expressed interests and manner of engagement with the environment is directly related to

the child's current developmental needs and natural drive to learn, and we work from that basis to support each child's journey through the school.

The Family School's educational approach is to present an environment (physical, social, emotional) within which children, individually and in groups, can develop an evolving, emergent, personalised and largely experiential curriculum. This is not delivered, but developed - 'co-constructed' - with staff, parents and pupils in mixed age social groups. This approach supports each child's unique development through play, projects, activities and experiences within engaging and varied environments and by developing respectful, facilitative relationships with others in the group and the wider community.

In this context, each child's character, interests and needs are the impetus for a journey of exploration and personal development best described as an '*emergent curriculum*' [inspired by Reggio Emilia in Italy, an emergent curriculum approach has already been adopted in many early years settings in the UK; The Family School believes there are enormous benefits to extending this approach to older groups of children].

The journey is not random, nor wholly directed by the child, but influenced by interventions, encouragement, suggestions and requirements from staff. Rather than starting with a lesson plan which requires a "hook" to get the children interested, an emergent curriculum starts from the children's interests. This is not to say that the teacher has no input; staff engage and intervene to ensure that these experiences encompass a range of skills and knowledge over time.

An idea for a curriculum activity, plan or project may be sparked by anything or come from anywhere. For instance, a teacher may overhear a pair of children having a discussion about bugs that leads to the whole group sitting down and discussing all the possibilities for finding out and experiencing more. Thus the child's experience through the school is of voluntary engagement with stimulating and interesting activities of varying kinds, over the course of which many kinds of skills, knowledge and development are encountered, accompanied by a growing understanding and appreciation of learning as an activity in itself.

The emergent Curriculum approach in practice

The Family School uses real-life activities as vehicles for learning. Children feel that what they are doing is worth doing for itself. Direct, practical experience of all sorts of activities is valued.

As children grow older, the school supports their transition to more abstract and intellectual approaches - finding out that learning itself is a real-life activity - a normal and enjoyable part of life.

The Family School offers a holistic and integrated curriculum, addressing development of ability, knowledge and judgement across all 'subject' areas and life skills.

The Family School empowers children to take the initiative in and self-direct much of their learning, with or without the help of others; to have authentic control over decisions to do with their learning and gives access to a full range of available and appropriate resources. Children learn most effectively and deeply through engagement in activities that interest them, and when adult support is appropriate and well judged. In this context, it is expected that they will learn more purposefully, more effectively and with greater motivation, and develop an appreciation of learning that will be valuable throughout their life.

Learning is a social process through which meaning and understanding are created through interaction with others. For young children and pre-readers especially, access to others who are able to converse at length about matters of interest to the child is essential to acquiring knowledge and developing understanding. The free flowing nature of conversation in all classrooms at the Family School fosters assimilation of vocabulary and language development.

The Family School understands that playing is a serious activity for children, through which they explore their world, their society, and stretch their mental and physical abilities.

The Family School advocates the use of project based learning rather than subject based learning because projects are more inherently interdisciplinary and student centred. They enable students to learn to organise their work and manage their time or, during group projects, to collaborate.

By direct immersion in a wide range of experiences, children can develop at their own pace and in their own style and can discover all kinds of ways of predicting and controlling their world directly. By practising, they develop and amplify their learning competencies.

By learning how to learn, we learn for life. We aim to enable learners at the Family School to develop skills of resilience, resourcefulness, relevance, imagination, language, communication, reflection and responsibility which will be useful for the rest of their lives. We help children develop a deep love of learning coupled with a mature ability to manage their own learning so that they will be able to learn whatever needs to be learned. We foster these skills by providing a safe and supportive environment where people are free to discover who they are, to explore their preferences and dispositions and how best they learn, by helping them to discover ways to manage feelings effectively and handle stressful situations, by supporting and facilitating their ongoing learning in immersive and stimulating ways through interactive relationships and, importantly, by empowering them with a greater and greater responsibility for the initiation, direction, control and evaluation of their own learning.