



Learning and curriculum at Dunblane Nature Kindergarten

A mature tree stands tall within our garden, changing as the seasons change, its canopy enclosing a gathering space for children in summer and a haven for birds and insects; in winter showing its bare and weaving branches. We aim to integrate indoors and outdoors, kindergarten and community, play and learning. Children are involved in their learning and direct it based upon their own fascinations and motivations and their own attunement to the world around them and the natural rhythm of the year. Our environment is homely, natural, not visually busy or over stimulating – welcoming and involving of all children and their families. We enable children to value their natural environment, their planet and fellow people. The adult team listen to the words, thoughts and feelings of the children and encourage their own independence of thought and action but also their reliance on those they can trust around them. We provide a range of experiences; cooking and fires, climbing, natural outdoors experiences in all weathers, risks that can be assessed by carefully supported children. We believe that the world is a fascinating puzzle throughout life and that childhood is only the start. This is our vision

Nature based learning

“The methodology [of a nature kindergarten] is that nature creates the context and the curriculum comes from it in a more natural way than over-planned activity-driven days”

“The younger the child, the more responsive and fluid we need to be so that they can develop skills within a purposeful context over several consecutive days. For a 2 year old, the space of a week is actually a long time to carry forward shared thinking” - *Claire Warden, Nature Kindergartens*

Research evidence of benefits to children of learning in a natural environment includes: more advanced co-ordination, balance and agility; more imaginative and creative play with language and collaborative skills; reduces stress and benefits health; benefits cognitive development – reasoning, awareness and observational skills and language; more positive feelings and social interactions between children.

Some of our core values are that:

- Children are capable and competent in many respects and these are what we build from
- Learning should flow from children’s interests and fascinations
- Children should have extensive opportunity to be outdoors and off-site in all weathers
- Children should be able to experience natural changes in their environment and community as a source of learning
- Children should be able to take some risks and face challenges where this is of benefit in their play and they are carefully supported
- Children should be able to feel part of a family group in a homely environment

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the curriculum framework for ages 3-18 in Scotland since 2010 (developed 2004 onwards). This partly came about through a drive for more child-led and play-based learning directed by children (1998 research by Paul Black and Dylan William). The “early level” usually runs from age 3 to the end of primary 1. This is why transition reports to school have such value and importance within CfE.

There are several principles which underpin how the curriculum should be delivered:

- Challenge and enjoyment
- Breadth
- Progression
- Depth
- Personalisation and choice
- Coherence
- Relevance

There are subject areas within the curriculum which we are expected to touch upon in a holistic and “cross-curricular” manner:

- Health and wellbeing
- Literacy/languages
- Numeracy/mathematics
- Expressive arts
- Religious and moral education
- Sciences
- Social studies
- Technologies

Active learning is fully supported by the CfE

“Active Learning takes full advantage of the opportunities for learning presented by spontaneous play; planned, purposeful play; investigating and exploring; events and life experiences; focused learning and teaching.

*In recent years, a more formal approach to learning and teaching has become prevalent in the early years of primary school, perhaps due to schools’ response to an increasingly crowded curriculum. Research indicates that developmentally appropriate practice is most conducive to effective learning. For example, it suggests that **there is no long-term advantage to children when there is an over-emphasis on systematic teaching before 6 or 7 years of age.**”* Active Learning in the Early Years, Scottish Executive, 2007

Our teacher input (Stirling Council provision) helps to support us in providing a suitable curriculum. Managers also work together in trios (local authority and private mixed) as an “Improvement Partnership”

How we support and document learning

Recording the flow of children's learning through big books/floorbooks that they regularly interact with and reflect upon, alongside individual children's journals.

Planning experiences and PLODS (Possible lines of development) with children through in depth dialogue and small group discussion which is recorded as a mind-map.

Using objects, photos, natural items as central points of small group discussion to promote curiosity and observational language and develop PLODS

"Building the Ambition"

Is a Scottish Government guidance document produced in 2014 which, in response to the Children and Young People's Act, guides childcare and education settings on the current best practice in supporting what is called "early learning and childcare". It widens the idea of education starting at age 3 or 4 and bridges the separation of "preschool" from 2 year olds and younger. It also seeks to make clear the value in promoting the care and wellbeing as children as not secondary to direct learning. It is very readable and is available online and the guidance within it is used within our daily planning and documentation of learning experiences and within our staff development and meetings.

Planned developments at DNK

"Learning Stories" are to be developed for all children to provide in depth snapshots of children's development in play.

"Mind maps" displayed in 3-5s for planned learning to involve parents and families and share the learning better.

Use the new framework this year from Education Scotland (How Good is Our Early Learning and Childcare) to ensure that our curriculum is as good as it can be.

Our transition information to school is to be improved to better reflect our ethos and give a more holistic picture of all children.