

Most Inclusive Practice in Early Years

Inspiring Foundations

Our Federation consists of two Nursery Schools in the City of Sunderland; Houghton Community Nursery School and Mill Hill Nursery School. Both settings provide outstanding Early Years Foundation Stage Education for children aged between 0-5 years.

Houghton Community Nursery School is situated in Houghton-Le-Spring within Sunderland, serving a varied community. Mill Hill Nursery school is based in the Doxford Park area of Sunderland, and serves a mainly white British community.

Both nursery schools have grown and changed in response to the ever changing needs of the community. Houghton is open 7.30am until 6.00pm, with Mill Hill being open from 7.45am until 5.30pm both for 50 weeks of the year. Initially both schools were purely for 3/4 year olds, however the schools adapted and opened provision for 2 year olds , followed with provision for babies.

We view all the provision as one, and firmly believe that any child that comes to either school should have an outstanding experience.

Since joining a hard federation both schools have developed a training programme (see Appendix 1; examples of training fliers) specifically for Early Years Practitioners, as we are passionate about supporting and working alongside our colleagues. We feel it is vital that there is high quality training available for staff who want to continue to develop and reflect upon their own practice.

This has proved to be highly successful, and as a result we have now worked with a range of settings across numerous Local authorities, including, PVI's, Infant schools, Primary Schools, Sunderland University and also held events for Early Education. Feedback from the various sessions has been extremely positive and is a strength of the school we are all very proud of.

We also have very close links within the community, and ensure that both the children and families have the opportunity to visit various places within their local area, ensuring they have positive experiences outside of Nursery. During the Covid-19 Pandemic we continued to look for innovative ways of continuing this work, using

digital technologies to embark on a learning project with elderly residents of our local Assisted Living Home (see Appendix two; digital project examples). Despite the pandemic we have continued to have visits to a local community garden where we have planted flowers for our community to enjoy. As well as this we have recently begun to return to forest school visits within local woods. Such visits allow our children to not only get to know their local surroundings but gain a sense of belonging within our local community.

The combined impact of our work as maintained nursery schools, and training for early years is making a difference to outcomes for children, families and practitioners both within our local community and beyond.

There are currently over 30 staff employed across the schools, including one Headteacher, one teacher/SEND Co, four teachers, one childcare manager and one senior Early Years Practitioner (the leadership team). As the Federation has grown and developed it has been important to develop the leadership capacity across the schools, and as a result there are now six staff (including the Head Teacher) on the Senior Leadership Team, all of whom bring their own specialism and individual strengths to the team. Having a large team provides more capacity to offer school to school support and increase the training being delivered from the school, ultimately supporting the sustainability of both Nurseries.

Both Houghton Community and Mill Hill Nursery Schools are inclusive settings, currently 30-40% of the children are on the SEN register. Many children come to the nurseries as a result of the setting's reputation. All the children with SEND receive the intensive support they need with high quality interventions through teaching approaches, peer integration and a rich and exciting curriculum. All the children follow an individualised learning route that is specifically designed to meet their needs based on outcomes. This is fed into with the use of highly experienced, strong and established relationships with a range of specialist professionals. To further enhance the already established curriculum, the children who require particular support have access to additional learning environments, including a dedicated sensory space, as well as the forest and sensory garden. Children are able to use visual timetables, concrete objects of reference, communication equipment and a multitude of other resources to support their learning. The nurseries are well staffed and each base has a teacher and a number of support staff, depending on individual need. This enables those children who require one to one support to receive this support during the day.

Our SENCo works very closely with a range of other professionals including, Speech and Language Therapists, the local Autism Outreach Team, Health Visitors and the Federation's Educational Psychologist. This high level of expertise helps children to make excellent progress due to the tailored support it provides them. She also performs a number of roles for the local authority including a permanent panel member of the Local Authority's Early Years Inclusion Funding Panel, Strategic Development Group, Integrated Service Group and as a SENDCo Champion and Moderator as new guidance and practice was rolled out across the Authority. This has involved working in a series of 'Working Teams' with Local Authority advisors, professionals from other settings including Secondary, Primary, Special Schools, Speech and Language Teams, Health Visiting Team, Educational Psychology, Behaviour Teams and the Pupil Referral Unit, Sensory Teams, Autism Outreach Teams and Physical and Occupational Teams. This has not only allowed the school to have a 'voice' in the resultant policy and practice but has allowed the sharing and witnessing of good practice at an Authority level.

Key messages from this have been shared with Senior Leadership Team (SLT), staff and Governors and have supported the schools to continue to develop, improve and adapt their inclusion practices.

Governors play an extremely important and active role in running of the Federation and provide great support, challenge and engagement with both the staff and parents as part of their work to gain an accurate picture of how good the Federation is, what it needs to do to maintain its ambition and also continue to improve. All link governors have been into the schools and met with relevant staff representatives throughout the year. Throughout 2020-2021 half termly meetings with the full Governing body along with regular link governor visits have continued using digital means or in person as allowed. Our link Governor for SEND/ Inclusion is an experienced Early Years Lecturer who has an excellent range of skills and expertise allowing her to provide both challenge and support within the Nursery.

Parents speak very highly of the leaders and Practitioners. They feel that they are listened to and the schools have fostered a real partnership ensuring both parties share the process of educating their children. Mill Hill school has recently achieved the Quality Inclusion Mark and has been recommended to go forward as a Centre of Excellence. During our recent assessment Parents commented that communication between home and school is excellent. If parents have any concerns, they are confident that staff will take them seriously and act immediately.

One parent spoke about the excellent progress her son had made at the nursery and appreciated the support given by the very approachable staff. She stated that, “This is a great nursery and the staff provide fantastic 1:1 support”. Another parent said, “Every child is treated in a unique way and all the staff go the extra mile to support the children. I can’t praise the nursery enough for the way that my child has grown in confidence. The staff are very special people!”

The Federation’s pedagogy and principles are:

- Rooted in our values and beliefs about what we want for children
- Informed by our understanding of how children learn and develop and the practices through which we can enhance that process
- Supported by knowledge, theory and experience

We understand that:

- Children are born ready, able and eager to learn and that they actively reach out to interact with other people, and in the world around them.
- Development depends on each unique child having opportunities to interact in positive relationships and enabling environments.

(Adapted from Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage).

- Parents and carers, based upon warm, trusting relationships, support children’s development and learning.

(Adapted from The EYFS: Parents as Partners). If we want to know who children are and what they can do we need to ensure we are giving them the opportunities to show us.

Evidence of going above and beyond

The Federation’s pedagogy and practice are inherently inclusive. The whole staff team including governors and staff hold a shared passion for inclusivity for all, and a drive for providing an education that is based on the needs of the individual. The schools use an innovative approach to inclusion which hinges on tailoring the environment, resources and curriculum to meet the needs of the individual, rather than excluding any individual from any part of the day or environment to complete work separately to their peers. We feel we go above and beyond in many ways to support our children, parents and wider community.

The first of these is our unique approach to curriculum. The child is at the centre of our curriculum. Careful and Close observations of children form the basis of our curriculum in which children's unique questions, interests and fascinations are used as a starting point to 'light the fire and passion' of learning which is then moved forward by practitioners working alongside the children to research together as co-constructors of knowledge, skills and understanding. Practitioners are skilled at weaving a child's next steps for learning and key skills into their curriculum through working in this way; using the unique starting point of each child within their group of learners to ensure the curriculum on offer matches their needs.

Specifically, our vision for our children is the creation of a caring safe and secure environment along with the promotion of equality of opportunity. The staff aim to ensure that everyone feels respected and confident. All children from our youngest babies, to our 2, 3 and 4 year olds should feel valued and able to fully participate in school life.

We aim to create an inclusive, supportive atmosphere in which children can be independent and challenged in their development; where families are welcomed as partners and relationships are firmly based on mutual respect and trust.

In order to realise the vision we treat children as unique and value their differences. Every child has a voice- this can be expressed in many different ways; our staff are very skilled at listening, observing, giving them time and tuning into this voice so that every child is able to express their thoughts, fascinations and interests. These 'consultations' form the basis of our curriculum in which children and staff work in partnership to explore, create and discover how exciting learning can be (see Appendix 3; a range of examples of children's voices and how these are recorded). This is achieved through whole group piazza's; where children and adults have high-quality interactions based around children's learning and lines of enquiry, and together plan next steps for learning. These next steps are developed during planning groups which happen twice daily, where children have the choice of which planning group they'd like to join in with, most of the time returning back to the same group time after time, which allows their learning to progress and their interest to strengthen. Giving children choice over the own learning allows a sense of ownership and responsibility, as well as allowing them to feel heard and valued.

Inclusion is at our core and there are many reasons for this. 'The Child' is truly at the Centre of all we do. We want to ensure that ALL learners are valued and respected for being an individual. Everyone is given the same opportunities regardless of age or stage of development. For us including ALL children is not simply saying 'All are welcome'. For us it goes beyond this. It is inextricably intertwined within our vision, pedagogy and principles. Within our relationships with the children and families. We think about and respect children's own experiences from their own unique background. We ensure all our children are treated as individuals and are encouraged to share their own lives and interests. We acknowledge that no two children or their families are the same and therefore each child's learning journey will be unique to them. We have high expectations of all our children.

But perhaps surprisingly inclusive practice is closely linked with our relationship with the learning environment.

Our learning environment is award winning, with our Houghton Nursery receiving the 2020 'Enabling Environments' Award. The learning environment is integral to our practice and another way we feel we demonstrate our innovation and go above and beyond expectations. We have created an environment that is driven by relationships, communication, collaboration and exploration. Our environment reflects our beliefs on inclusion and belonging. We have created an environment for ALL to succeed. We don't have separate parts or areas for SEN or high achieving children.

We have inclusive resources that can be, and are, adapted in the moment to meet the needs of the learner. The environment is designed to meet the needs of, and cater for, ALL learners regardless of where they are on their journey. It fosters each child's stage of development. Children are enabled to fulfill their potential through staff taking into account their needs and building upon them. As a result the spaces change to meet the needs of the cohort. The School environment is built around key resources. These resources are often recycled or reclaimed and perhaps most importantly aren't expensive! However, what is important is that they can be used and presented differently to meet the needs of the children.

Our resources, and staff, provide a continuous or 'golden' thread that covers all ages and stages of development, which children can access at their own pace. Access and diversity are promoted. Importantly we understand that every child comes to us

with different experiences and will therefore have a different foundation and skill set to which we can build upon. It is therefore vitally important that all staff take the time to get to know all children so that we can confidently assess their starting point and understand their own strengths and areas of interests.

In addition to going above and beyond in the way in which approach the curriculum and environment we also have a unique and innovative way of, documenting the child's voice and analysing children's learning; in particular with regard to the depth in which this is done and how it feeds into provision for next steps of learning.

We give particularly close attention to the individual child through use of our:

- Planning Books
- Reflection Books
- Daily Feedback (discussions around learning and the identification of next steps)
- Children's Learning Journals
- Look at Me Now Documents
- Children's Floor Books
- Half termly children complete their own 'This is me'
- Half termly strengths and barriers discussions for every child
- Medium term planning evaluations for the whole school
- Individual development matters assessment
- PLP's
- Pupil premium work and progress

(Please see Appendix Four for a selection of examples of these)

There is a strong emphasis on identification of strengths, barriers and needs for each individual, and the curriculum is planned and adapted for individual children so that they are carefully supported to reach their potential.

Children's quantitative progress is also measured against two specific data gathering systems; Development Matters and the Launch Pad to Literacy, developed by Kirsty Page. A baseline is taken for each child upon entry into the setting and progress against this baseline is checked at regular intervals by each child's Key Person. At the point of each data entry Key Workers complete a data

meeting with our Data Coordinator who works with them to identify next steps for each individual child, as well as to analyse patterns and areas for development for their Key Worker Groups, which are then taken by the Key Worker and fed into future small group and individual plans for those children.

Children falling behind age-related expectations are assessed separately against our Local Authorities Ranges Document and if appropriate (i.e. more than Quality First teaching strategies are needed) are given additional targets contained in a Personal Learning Profile Document (PLP). Their progress is checked against these targets, as well as the Development Matters document each six weeks. Key workers then work with the SENDCo to plan for next steps of learning alongside the child's parent/ carer in six-weekly review meetings (Please see appendix 5 which shows the level of detail recorded within our PLP documents). Progress is also monitored for these children through six-weekly observations undertaken by the SENDCo and (where available) the named SEND Governor.

The following examples of the attention to detail which is used track and support individual learners and groups of learners within the federation and to ensure children's voices, needs and next steps are skilfully tracked by staff.

We have a high proportion of children with SEND. Many children come to us as a result of our reputation in this area. We also go above and beyond for all of our SEND families. All children with SEND receive the intensive support you would expect in any quality Special School provision, whilst at the same time being offered the teaching approaches, peer integration and expansive curriculum associated with the mainstream foundation stage experience. All children follow an individualised learning route that is specifically designed to meet their needs. This is fed into using our strong and established links with a range of specialist professionals.

To further enhance our already established curriculum, the children who need this have access to a number of additional learning environments including a dedicated sensory space, as well as our forest and sensory garden. Children have tools to support their learning such as; visual timetables, objects of reference, total communication equipment and much more. Each Base has a teacher and a number of support staff, depending on individual need. This enables children who require 1-to-1 support to receive it at times during the day.

Teaching is delivered in several ways, in a range of environments, again to suit need. There is a heavy emphasis on practical learning, with a multi-sensory approach, in order to get the best possible outcomes for each child. Movement breaks and sensory breaks are built into the day for those children who need it. All staff are aware of the strengths and barriers of all children in the setting, thus they are able to support any learner in their own preferred area. Daily pedagogical reflections between all staff are used to share information, reflect on learning and build next steps into the curriculum tailored to each child.

We feel another way in which we go above and beyond are our staff. All members of staff are dedicated and knowledgeable about early year's provision and are passionate about improving outcomes for all children. They work collaboratively together, drawing on their experience to provide effective support and guidance for all children. The team have a strong knowledge and understanding of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. They comprehensively know how children learn through play and through practising skills they have mastered. Staff skilfully and confidently plan exciting activities that meet the needs and interests of all of the children. Children are treated as individuals and, most importantly, are treated with care and respect. Staff take collective responsibility to ensure that all children are included and that everyone matters.

The staff are highly skilled they go above and beyond in their approach to continued professional development, accessing numerous training opportunities and constantly reflecting on practice/ actively looking for ways to broaden their own knowledge and pedagogical understanding. Across the federation we have an action research and enquiry-based approach. Each half term we have a protected staff meeting for SEND training and updates, as well as a second protected staff meeting for discussing the strengths and barriers to learning for all children.

As previously mentioned, we have a dedicated SENDCo who works to support pupils, staff and parents and drive forward training needs. This year in particular she has led the whole staff team in an action research project aimed at narrowing the gap for pupils with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). Working on advice from colleagues at our local specialist school for pupils with a diagnosis of ASC, Educational Psychology and wider specialists to overhaul the Federations assessment system for these pupils and to up-skills staff to form an expertise in this area.

We currently hold the Silver Autism Friendly Schools award and are well on our way to achieving Gold.

These are just a selection of training courses which staff have undertaken in the past 2 years.

- Sensory Processing Training
- Transitions Training
- First Steps Training
- Understanding Behaviour Level 2
- Several staff hold a level 2 Understanding Autism qualification.
- Theraplay
- Makaton- all staff have awareness training, 3 members of staff are qualified at a level where they are able to train others.
- PECs
- Elklan
- Ican
- Attachment Training
- Medical training in diabetes care, EPI Pen administration, Tracheotomy Care, administration of oxygen to name a few.

Over the course of the pandemic we have used our innovation and creativity to ensure a continuation of our work and to maintain our relationships with parents and children. We have implemented a new APP to maintain communication with our families. This has been used to send information around learning and well-being (Please see Appendix Six for examples). We have also launched a #BEEKIND and #BEECONNECTED campaign involving the Federation (Please see Appendix Seven).

Finally, we feel that we go above and beyond in our approach to sharing of practice and dissemination of training. As a Federation we are passionate about lifelong learning for all and achieving best practice not only for those in our care but for improving the life chances of children across the city and beyond. We are active in

our Local Early Education Branch, Sunderland University, in supporting Early Excellence and in delivering training to our own and other Local Authorities. We regularly share practice across social media platforms and have a range of visitors to our setting; thus ensuring that we can develop pedagogical approaches to inclusion over a wide remit (see Appendix four; instagram posts).

Evidence of sustainment over two years

Mill Hill Nursery School and Houghton Community Nursery School have now been federated for four years. The Federation's SLT meet regularly to discuss all aspects of the school and each member takes responsibility for an area of school improvement deriving from the school's development plan; leading on their area of expertise or interest and monitoring key aspects of their practice. The team is diverse and effective and staff within the team work well together, knowing when to draw on one-another's strengths, and each has a passion and drive to make the settings the very best provision for children.

Our Headteacher skilfully leads the team, providing challenge and direction where needed and encouraging all staff, children and families to reach their potential. She is passionate about providing the best start in education to every child and has an unwavering commitment to the Federation and its families, accepting nothing but the best for them in every aspect of school life. She has a strong commitment to Professional Development and as such there is a whole staff culture of continuous PD and research in which all staff are encouraged and supported to progress their skills, understanding and knowledge based on their starting point and where they are in their own learning journey.

In particular in terms of SEND in 2018 we reflected upon the needs of our children across the settings and made the decision to develop the role of our SENDCo-freeing her to work across the federation and increasing the amount of time dedicated to SEND and Inclusion. This resulted in reflection upon systems and practices, and protected work time to develop pedagogy and practice, reflect and act upon staff training needs and look at areas of priority for the school.

There has been a collective journey between the SENDCo, Leadership team and staff to increase knowledge, skills and understanding, work with outside agencies and to reflect and develop the curriculum, environment and practices to achieve effective, reflective, targeted, best practice provision for all children no matter what their strengths or barriers within their personal learning journey. For example, this

academic year the SENDCo has led the staff in an action research project aimed at narrowing the gap for pupils with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Condition. The SENDCo has worked with the local specialist school for pupils with ASC together with the Educational Psychologist and wider specialist to overhaul the Federation's assessment system for ASC children and to up-skill staff in this area.

As a staff we have a life-long commitment to learning- striving to know more, do better and provide the best for all in our school community.

Appendix One – An example of our training fliers

Appendix Two – Examples from our digital project

Appendix Three – Children's voices

Appendix Four – Documenting