

Windmills Pre-School Playgroup, Solihull - Case Study 2019

Free Flow Snack and the Wider Impact on Practice and Provision

Windmills Pre-School Playgroup is a twenty six place, sessional, pack away provision based in Dorridge Methodist Church, Solihull. There are seven staff and it opens for four mornings a week during term time. The group has been there for fifty years and is highly respected in the community. They are able to ensure continuous improvement because they have an experienced team who have worked together for a long time. The leader has been at the setting for twenty years. Working closely with parents and a successful key person system ensures they know the children and families well.

The team are reflective and keen to remain up to date with the latest early years initiatives that support children's learning and development. A two year journey of change has led to developments in their teaching approaches and a particular interest in ensuring practice and provision gives children a balance of effective adult and child led learning opportunities.

Planning is fluid and enables adults to interact and follow the interests of the children. A move away from activities that require an end product has given the team a deeper understanding of, and value for, the processes involved in individual children's learning. They plan for children to explore and enjoy their learning, discover for themselves, and develop effective characteristics of learning.

Ofsted's definition of early years teaching has provided an opportunity to reflect on and value the many ways in which adults and the enabling environment supports children's learning in the setting.

The changes in approach led to the team reflecting on the routines of the session. Adults wanted to spend time playing, interacting and following children's lead. They became conscious of the need to reduce interruptions to children's play and learning and the need to join play sensitively. This led to consideration of the snack routine. This was a busy time which involved moving tables and chairs, clearing away activities and in particular staff reflected on the way in which children's choices were removed.

The manager introduced the idea of free-flow snack to the staff. The team agreed to try offering snack to children as an activity within the continuous provision for a short period of time. They were not initially convinced of the advantages to children but within a short time the benefits of free-flow snack became evident – they have not looked back! Offering snack in this way has enabled children autonomy over the majority of the session. They now have the freedom to choose when to eat and drink and who to sit next to and so in turn organising their own time to play. Adults are responding sensitively to children's needs and wishes and not interrupting play and learning but enabling children to move to the activities around the room freely, including the snack table. Adults share snack time with the group at the table, encouraging independence, supporting and valuing conversations.

The team have experienced a major change in their provision, giving them an opportunity to reflect on the positive impact on children's learning and use this as a model for other changes. Introducing autonomy for children in this way has given the team the confidence to support and enable further opportunities for choice, empowering children and supporting their self-esteem. It has improved the continuous provision and successful outcomes for children.

'Teaching should not be taken to imply a 'top down' or formal way of working. It is a broad term that covers the many different ways in which adults help young children learn. It includes their interactions with children during planned and child-initiated play and activities: communicating and modelling language; showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas; encouraging, questioning, recalling; providing a narrative for what they are doing; facilitating and setting challenges. It takes account of the equipment adults provide and the attention given to the physical environment, as well as the structure and routines of the day that establish expectations. ...' **Early years inspection handbook May 2019 page 34**