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**Little Owls’ Sharing Evening**

**27th November 2018**

**Summary**

The purpose of the Sharing Evening was to share with you our approach, explore together our ethos, respond to parental feedback, support parents at home and provide a summary of our activity as a pre-school setting. This is a note of the items discussed during the evening.

**Staff members**

Abby lives in Haslingfield with three young children, two of whom are at the local primary school and one who will become a Little Owl in a few months’ time. She is married to Rich who is a GP. Abby started her career in Lewisham where she taught for 5 years, and then moved to Harston and taught there for 9 years (including overseeing the Pre-School as Early Years Coordinator). Most recently, Abby taught at Haslingfield Primary School (Year 2!). She took over from the former Little Owls’ Manager, Karen, at the start of this academic year (2018/19).

Anita is German and spent many years as a Physiotherapist at Addenbrookes. She trained at the Steiner School in Cambridge and brings elements of that ethos with her to the Little Owls setting (though Little Owls is not a Steiner nursery). Anita has three children – one in Australia, one at university and a 16 year old.

Sobia is originally from Pakistan and moved to the UK 18 years ago. She has two children aged 9 and 14 and is married to a Consultant at Addenbrookes. Sobia has now worked at Little Owls for 5 years and is Level 3 qualified. She has worked with children for 12/13 years.

**The Early Years Framework**

The statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework underpins everything we do as a pre-school. It governs the education of children from birth to 5 years (up to and including the Reception year at primary school) and is split into three different categories: 1) Learning and Development; 2) Assessment; and 3) Safeguarding/Welfare Requirements and Review.

**Characteristics of Effective Learning**

The “characteristics of effective learning” are key to the EYFS. They detail the ways in which children should be learning from their environment, experiences and activities. They are: 1) Playing and exploring; 2) Active learning; and 3) Creating and thinking critically.

The “characteristics of effective learning” in action – breadmaking

We love breadmaking at Little Owls! During this activity, children discover what we add to the mixture and then explore those different ingredients (playing and exploring). They then enjoy the process of making the bread – fully involved and concentrating (active learning). They are encouraged to talk about what they are doing and we also sing during the activity which adds a different dimension to our learning and our experience (creating and thinking critically).

Prime Areas

There are three primary areas within the Learning and Development category:

**Physical Development:** There are many ways that children are able to develop their physical abilities at Little Owls. Tree-climbing is a particular favourite! Anita, with her past physiotherapy experience, particularly enjoys challenging the children with their tree-climbing. In addition to the physical skills involved, there are also problem-solving elements. We support children to develop fine motor skills, so using knives to cut fruit, dough on bread day and using playdough are all ways to strengthen little fingers which is also an important pre-writing skill. This area also covers health and self-care so how to be healthy and look after our bodies; we talk over lunch about different types of food and why we eat these.

**Communication and Language:** This covers speaking, understanding, listening and attention. We believe in giving children the time they need to communicate and we as we are a small preschool this is more achievable. The very best way to teach good communication is to model it so we ‘narrate’ a lot of what we do and encourage the children to do the same; we see this a lot during small world play where children add stories or songs to their play. We also repeat back what children have said to model correct pronunciation or tense, etc.

**Personal, Social and Emotional Development:** This is the area that focuses on children’s behaviour and managing emotions, which we will specifically talk about later. This is also about children developing relationships with children and adults. We are lucky to have a small and very caring team who know all of our children well. By extending the amount of time children have to play it has given more opportunities to support children in their play together, such as turn taking, sharing and negotiating! It also means there is more time to build confidence with trying out different resources and experiences in our environment and build independence.

Specific Areas

In addition to the prime areas, we support our children in the specific areas through which the prime areas are strengthened and applied:

**Literacy:** We have a daily ‘Together Time’ when we sing songs and read stories. We repeat these during the week so that children develop the ability to join in with songs and become ‘story tellers.’ They then have access to these texts in our reading area so they can ‘read’ it themselves, developing an early love of reading. Literacy is also weaved into all that we do. We follow ‘Letter and Sounds’ Phase 1 Phonics, which develops pre-writing and pre-reading skills, such as rhythm and rhyme, alliteration and segmenting and blending (e.g. c – oa – t). We play simple games e.g. hide an animal under the blanket and then segment and blend as we bring it out (p-i-g). In such games, these teaching methods can be incorporated very naturally. Please see our website for a helpful link to a phonics tool and an introduction to the concept of “schwa”.

**Maths:** Maths is everywhere without us even realising! It might not always be obvious looking at our resources but children use conkers to count, ‘weigh’ items in the home corner, make cakes to fill all the holes in a muffin tin in the playdough. We have ‘numicon’ which is a resource that aids children’s visual understanding as well.

**Understanding the World:** promotes understanding about children’s own world, experiences, culture and customs and also finding out about others. We aim to teach about the main Religious festivals, as well as any that are relevant to our children and their families, such as Australia Day.

**Expressive Arts and Design:** we have open-ended resources, such as blocks and material, so children can really develop their own imaginative ideas rather than having something already dictated to them, e.g. having building bricks to build a pirate ship, rather than a pre-made one. We also have a crafting unit so children have access to craft resources all the time.

We are mindful of the way in which the prime areas and specific areas are entwined. For example, it is interesting to note how certain aspects of physical development are necessary in order for other milestones to be met e.g. children need strength in their fingers in order to mark make. The finger-strengthening properties of playdough are extremely helpful (see the box below). We have chalks outside, and brushes and water for making marks on the pavement. All these activities really help towards mark-making and the first steps in writing.

**Playdough!**

We love playdough at Little Owls – there are so many benefits. Here is a list of a few:

It is wonderful for fine-motor-skill development….encouraging tiny fingers to work hard. And hand/eye coordination too as the children mould and shape their dough.

Children can be so creative and imaginative with it, expressing their ideas as they play.

It fosters co-operative play as our Little Owls gather round the playdough table together.

There are lots of fantastic opportunities to develop literacy and maths through playdough (e.g. the numicon tool mentioned above), and also science and discovery as the playdough is squidged and shaped.

The sensory element of playdough is fantastic for young children.

Playdough can help with behaviour! It is a calming and therapeutic activity - particularly if a child needs extra help with their concentration.

It is lovely to find an activity where there is no “right or wrong” way to play – with playdough, possibilities are limitless! Which means it is a great leveller and an activity in which all children, irrespective of ability, can participate.

**Section 2 of the EYFS: observations and assessments**

The developmental goals for our Little Owls are very approximate - not prescriptive or too defined. The aim is not to “test” the children, but to give practitioners more of an idea of where the children are with their learning, and then “track” their progress to help us identify next steps to support each child.

On our website we have a link to a useful document written for parents to give a broad guide called “What to Expect and When.” This is also what you would have been given when your child started Little Owls (from September) so that you can let us know how your child is developing at home.

“Development Matters” is the assessment document we use to provide us with approximate guidelines in all of the 7 areas of learning – it is very useful and there is a copy in our setting if you would like to have a look.

**Section 3 of the EYFS**

Section 3 of the EYFS relates to governance including matters such as how we keep the children safe and what underpins us as a setting.

Safeguarding

The safety and welfare of children – or safeguarding – is everybody’s responsibility. Safeguarding means protecting children from physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect in all environments including at home, in school, on the street and in the digital world. It also means helping children to grow up into confident, healthy and happy adults. Settings are required to have a “Designated Person” for child protection on site; we have two people at Little Owls: Sobia and Abby. Should you have any concerns at all then please do not hesitate to speak to one of them. If we ever have any concerns we normally speak to the parents first. Sometimes we need to have difficult conversations but it is our legal responsibility and the safety of your child is what is most important to us. You can find out more about safeguarding at:

[www.safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk/children-board/parents-carers/](http://www.safeguardingcambspeterborough.org.uk/children-board/parents-carers/)

It is also part of safeguarding that we keep a record of injuries your child sustains. This is also to make us aware of injuries children have before coming to Little Owls so we do not treat it again as young children often cannot remember. There is an “Existing Injuries” form to complete if your child hurts themselves at home which results in a bruise or other injury. Please ask one of us at if you need a form.

Key Persons

Each child at Little Owls is given a “key person”. Although all members of staff will get to know your child and ensure they are happy and safe, your child’s “key person” is a named member of staff who has particular responsibility for your child and will take time to “tune in” to your child’s specific needs. Children thrive on safe, loving relationships and the “key person” concept is a way of enabling your child to build up a solid relationship with a member of the pre-school staff.

Your child’s Key Person is likely to welcome them into the setting, get to know your child well and become their “communication partner”.

Medicines and Accidents

Our short opening hours mean that administering medicines is often unnecessary. We do, however, require your written permission before giving your child medicines on your behalf, and we keep an up-to-date record book (which is kept in setting).

Every time there is any sort of incident, this is recorded in a log book. Inevitably, with a 1 to 8 ratio, there are times when we will not see an accident and the child will carry on with their play without telling us. We do, however, keep a record book and will speak to you if your child is involved in an incident during the pre-school day.

**Day-to-day at Little Owls**

PLAY underpins everything – and we allow children to lead that play and make discoveries in their own time and way. The children have access to paint every day with easels. Playdough is a big part of our time together (see above).

We have also recently introduced a “rolling snack” – when children have their snack they sit in a group of 4 (with 1 adult joining them). This provides lovely opportunities for conversation and picking up skills as they cut and prepare their snack. Formerly, the snack-time was in one large group but it resulted in children waiting for a long time for their go, and also a member of staff being taken out of the setting to make porridge. Our revised system also means that play is less interrupted.

The indoor/outdoor play is free-flow now as well (on days where the staffing ratios allow it). Children thrive in the outdoors; it is so good for them developmentally and fresh air even helps them sleep! We go outside in all types of weather so ensure your child is prepared with appropriate clothing!

We have decided to implement a fruit rota to ensure that we have a good range of fruit on offer for the children. Please see the separate rota circulated via the Newsletter which was sent on 16th December 2018.

There is a tradition that during our sessions we talk about or thank “Mother Earth”, “Father Spark” etc. This is not a religious idea – it is the personification of nature and a great way of thinking about the world and cultivating thankful hearts. It all links to the EYFS and the children’s understanding of the world and seasons.

**Behaviour**

At Little Owls we are aware that a clear and regular rhythm supports behaviour. When a child knows what is happening next, a child feels safe and secure, which in turn is more likely to result in positive behaviour.

We support rich language at Little Owls, but 2-4 year olds are overloaded with new language and so we keep our instructions simple and positive. For example, instead of “don’t run” we would say “walking feet”. A lot of children bring these phrases home so you may here: kind/gentle hands, we use our words, no thank you (with a ‘stop’ hand), we look with our eyes…and many more! Another strategy we employ is singing rather than speaking (when you sing something you can’t give it a particular tone!). It is always so encouraging to see the children learning to resolve conflict using simple language. We also have a tidy up song sang to the tune of London Bridge is Falling Down: Everybody tidy up, tidy up, tidy up,

Everybody tidy up

Thank you, thank you!

Behaviour is one of the “prime areas” in EYFS-speak – we like to describe the children as “still learning” and we always remember that behaviour is developmental (there is no such thing as a “naughty child”). We do sometimes use a firmer voice where necessary, but we do not shout. We also do not force an apology from children. Abby has a separate article called ‘Say Sorry’ so please email or speak to her if you would like a copy of this, but in summary we find that modelling good behaviour and verbalising what has happened and how everyone is feeling is more effective – it is amazing how a quiet, low voice attracts the children. They never fail to gather round to listen to what is happening!

At Little Owls, we work to foster a “solution” culture rather than a “blame” culture. If a child uses their hands to grab or push, for example, we would give them a positive example of how we can use our hands (“we use our hands for making dough”!). If a child does hurt another one, we focus our attention on the child who is hurt and ignore the bad behaviour; this is very much good practice in Early Years and what behavioural experts recommend.

**Nutrition**

Public Health England estimates that a quarter of children between the ages of 2-10 years old are overweight or obese. We hope that our Little Owls are able to fulfil their potential physically and cognitively, and so we encourage the children to eat healthily. This means bringing in healthy packed lunches (no sweet treats!), and enjoying nutritious snacks together. This does not mean we believe children should not eat sweet foods; it is important for children to understand what are everyday foods and what are not. We feel we should leave giving sweet treats to you as often parents need this! Also, the children also use ceramic (rather than plastic) crockery to give them a “real life” table experience! We aim for them to develop confidence with mealtimes and food and pick up food habits and skills which will last a lifetime. Eating and food preparation presents a wonderful learning activity: washing hands, setting and clearing the table, preparing the fruit and vegetables, eating what they prepare. We include children ‘in the present’ as much as possible. Please email or ask Abby is you are interested in a separate article called ‘Early Nutrition’ that gives further details.

**Technology**

We are sure you are aware about the research showing how important it is to limit screen time so we do not want to ‘use up’ this time at Little Owls. We feel it is more important to spend their time with us learning in other ways. We are a “soft technology” setting which means that we tend to keep screens for home use, but we do use other helpful tools at Little Owls to encourage fine motor skills and technological progress such as conker screws, clicking an oven on and off etc.

**Summary**

At Little Owls we aim to experience everyday life with the children and be present with them in all their activities (the present is, after-all, where children live!). We hope this note gives you some insight into how we work and our ethos. Thank you to those of you who attended the Sharing Evening and contributed during the course of the discussion. Please do not hesitate to talk to Abby, Anita or Sobia if you have any questions about the above information.