

School Curriculum Policy



Black Firs School

An Analogy for how we view education at Black Firs

Education, like life, is a journey not a series of destinations. It is up to each individual, to make their journey, of the highest quality. We acknowledge we have to arrive at certain destinations in our lives at the correct time, but how we choose to travel there is our choice. To leapfrog from destination to destination is to misunderstand what education is about. It is about developing **knowledge**, **skills** and using them to broaden our **understanding**. Our understanding comes from the first-hand experience we gather on our journey.

"...education as a mission to learn how to live" - *MacMurray*

How we travel on our journey is also important - by car, in our own bubble; on a bike or walking, allows more reflection and interaction; on public transport – a bus or train, is great for sharing the experience with friends and colleagues.

There are also many routes to make this journey - the quick direct routes on motorways, the slower but less direct A-roads which take in more variety and interesting places or finally the more scenic B-roads, lanes and tracks some of which may be dead-ends but still worth the seeing what's there.

Sometimes you need to stop on your journey, get out of the car and walk for a time, smell the flowers, swim the lakes. Motorways are ok and sometimes even necessary, but they are sterile 'tunnels' which only take you from a-to-b quickly. Fast-food motorway services will fill your stomach and provide you with a toilet, but small restaurants and the country pubs will also inspire reflection and offer much greater quality.

Our curriculum design is all about the journey we create.

At Black Firs we believe in life-long learning; education is a journey we travel for the rest of our lives. Its quality is in the variety of experiences we gain. Learning is a personal activity; it's a consequence of thinking and reflecting on experience; it's a creative activity: teaching is something done to you by someone else.

Humans learn best by doing and being in the world not by instruction; so classrooms will never be the best place to learn - as educators, we need to think outside the box. We have to bring 21st Century thinking in to the practice of education at Black Firs.

We have to place the emphasis on building up our children's skills of learning. We have to continue to foster a growing desire to be independent, responsible and creative. The ability to think, to communicate, cooperate, persevere, make decisions, develop a growth mind-set - these are the 21st Century empowerment skills.

Our recent work on Relationships has changed our focus on life-long-learning. Being able to develop appropriate relationships, to judge a 'good' relationship, we believe is essential for a healthy life. Teaching children about building and developing relationships is part of evolving good emotional intelligence – a key feature in our School culture.

We have written a number of action research papers which illustrate and under-pin our shared philosophy; they are available online.

We must refocus the School curriculum to be a 'doing' curriculum; to teach the generic skills the children require for lifelong learning rather than the out-dated, transmission based knowledge curriculum define by the UK National Curriculum. The important 'stuff', the skills for life, often happen in the space between the curriculum

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parts; they are enquiry based. We must maintain curriculum breadth, balanced and *relevance*. The National Curriculum does address *some* of this need but definitely not all, demanding that teachers focus on teaching and justifying what has been taught, rather than focussing on how a child learns and children's learning.

Our teaching staff can be guides. They can help make the maps that may guide a journey but alongside the children; we also think it's important to let learners direct their own routes. To feel the uncertainty of not knowing which way to go. To sometimes even get lost.

Lifelong learning is about preparing children for these eventualities; educating them to be able to navigate their own way, to use a compass to find their own destinations. Gaining that sense of success and achievement about a journey well-made along a less worn route. The exhilaration in thinking they've discovered some hidden place along the way, to be the first that's ever travelled this path. The enthusiasm they have in wanting to share what they've found, to take you back to this special place.

Our curricula provision at Black Firs is to address the important area of how children 'learn to learn'. This places learning at the centre of everything we do, rather than leading with teaching. The taught input is still vital but the decision which teaching style or approach to use, is dictated by the children's individual learning styles, within the teaching group. Whilst this may seem a subtle adjustment it has led to fundamental changes in the way children and teachers work together.

It places greater development on independence and responsibility – children are no longer an 'empty vessels to be filled' but active seekers of Knowledge, Understanding and Skills. It is these three linked elements that now form the basis for the curriculum we offer.

Key lifelong learning skills include Speaking & Listening, Reading, Writing and being Numerate but also include Research, gaining and sharing individual opinion through Debate, understanding the Bias in information sources, being able to make a Presentation to a range of audiences. These are some of the essentials but we don't 'define' a definitive list of skills as this could limit the 'journey' through what we offer. As the world changes we need to keep re-defining, keep justifying what each new cohort of children require.

We use our holistic curriculum to develop Knowledge, Understanding and Skills so that we can then provide opportunities for children to then develop their Creative Thinking Skills. It is predominantly this Creative skill that will have the greatest impact on the child's lifelong learning. We use the term Creativity to identify the process of learning / thinking that allows children to engage in imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value. This happens within any area of our curriculum; creativity is not just something that happens in the arts.

We continue to develop our teaching and learning in this area. The teaching staff are excellent at trying out new ideas, evaluating them and sharing best practice. They model, daily, the creative process we want to develop in our children. We continue to evaluate and review our approach as new research becomes available; currently we are investigating Growth-mindsets and developing concepts of 'Struggle' and 'Grit' - perseverance on a task - through-out School. Previously we have investigated how children's self-directed learning allows children to instigate and direct their creative thinking skills to more 'real world' practical problem solving.

We still use Subject based coordinators. Each teacher is responsible for one National Curriculum subject; they act as 'subject champions' ensuring their subject is well represented in our holistic approach. They monitor quality and support and advise the other teachers. We do use some formal schemes for example, we use 'Linking Sounds & Letters' for teaching of phonics.

In Reception the curriculum is delivered through the areas of learning designated in the 'Early Years Foundation Stage' strategy. Children learn through structured play. Play is vitally important throughout School as it brings the 'real world' into the classroom letting children practice their skills. In Year 1 the play element is more structured and the Curriculum is formally introduced. Young children do not naturally learn in subject areas, so subjects are integrated, holistic learning.

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Thematic Study Work areas are chosen by the teacher which holistically cover many areas of learning. The titles of these thematic studies might be 'Ourselves', 'Water' or 'Colour'; more often, the title of a book or a series of books may connect the Study Work. In Years 2 to 6, the structure of a Study Work approach continues the 'hands on' approach of experiential, enquiry based learning by planning stimulating rich integrated learning experiences. In our planning we recognise the important contribution which all subjects make to the key skills of literacy and numeracy.

We continue to provide a broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated curriculum; so Study work Assignments will have science, technology, geography, history, art, and music focuses. Physical Education is sometimes integrated through dance but is often taught as a standalone subject; we place a great emphasis on PE and Sport. We believe that, as well as physical skills, PE and sport help to develop a child's emotional intelligences - inter-personal and intra-personal intelligences. These are essential for successful life-long learners.

Other areas of learning beyond the Curriculum are integrated into our Study Work assignments. These might include drama, health & safety, citizenship, philosophy for learning, multi-cultural themes, equal opportunities and health education.