Netherton Park Nursery School

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Nursery School

Understanding the World Policy

Review: September 2026	**Next review date:** September 2029

Related policies/documents:

- Birth To 5 Matters
- Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework
- Curriculum overview
- EYPP Policy
- Learning Aspirations
- Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment Policy
- Vocabulary Bank

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Intent

We recognise that children are naturally inquisitive and motivated to investigate, question and make sense of the world around them. Children develop knowledge and understanding through active exploration, play, conversation, sensory experiences and interactions with responsive adults and peers.

Understanding the World does not stand in isolation. Children's understanding develops through communication and language, imaginative play, physical exploration, emotional experiences, storytelling, creativity and meaningful real-life experiences.

Early experiences within Understanding the World provide important foundations for later learning in areas such as science, geography, history, technology, engineering and religious and cultural understanding. Through exploration, enquiry, discussion and first-hand experiences, children begin to develop understanding of people, places, environments, change over time and the wider world.

We believe children learn most effectively when they are given opportunities to explore, investigate, revisit experiences and make connections between their own lives and the wider world. Rich experiences help children develop curiosity, critical thinking, problem-solving, empathy and a sense of identity and belonging.

Children are also supported to develop care and responsibility for the natural world through meaningful experiences linked to sustainability and environmental awareness.

Our curriculum reflects the lives, interests and experiences of our children and families whilst broadening children's understanding of communities, environments, cultures and experiences beyond their immediate world. Themes such as family, home, celebrations, animals and growing are explored through meaningful experiences and high-quality interactions.

This policy sets out how Understanding the World is supported across the Nursery School through exploration, environments, teaching, play, investigation and responsive practice.

Understanding the World Principles

At Netherton Park Nursery School, we believe children's understanding of the world is strengthened when they:

- engage in meaningful first-hand experiences and exploration
- are encouraged to question, investigate and think critically
- experience rich opportunities for sensory exploration and discovery
- revisit experiences and ideas over time
- develop understanding through communication, play and shared experiences
- encounter people, places, cultures and experiences beyond their immediate environment
- develop care and respect for themselves, others, animals and the natural world
- are supported to make connections between their own experiences and the wider world

- experience inclusive and responsive environments which reflect their identities, interests and communities.

Our approach recognises that children develop understanding, curiosity and interests in different ways and at different rates. Practitioners provide responsive and developmentally appropriate experiences which support children's confidence, independence and curiosity.

Implementation

Children come to our Nursery School with different starting points, and their personal experiences will increase their knowledge and sense of the world around them. Therefore, our curriculum and provision is planned carefully to support and extend children's understanding of the world taking into account their family language, religion and culture and ability.

Children first develop understanding through sensory exploration, communication, movement, play, relationships and repeated opportunities to explore environments, materials and experiences. Early understanding develops through curiosity, observation, experimentation, interaction and shared attention with responsive adults. Our curriculum reflects this by ensuring that opportunities to encounter these experiences are available.

Our aims in teaching and learning of Understanding the World are that all children will begin to:

- Find out about and identify some features of themselves and observe similarities and differences between themselves and others.
- Find out about and identify some features of living things and observe similarities and differences.
- Investigate materials and objects to find out about their features using the senses and observe similarities and differences.
- Ask questions to find out how things work and why things happen.
- Select the tools and equipment they need to shape, assemble and join the materials they are using.
- Find out about and identify uses of everyday technology and use information and communication technology and programmable toys to support learning.
- Find out about past and present events in their own lives and in those of their families and other people they know.
- Look closely at patterns and change.
- Observe, find out about, and identify features in the place they live.
- Observe, find out about, and identify features in the natural world.
- Talk about features they like and dislike.
- Gain an awareness of people's jobs and functions in the local community.
- Gain an awareness of other countries and cultures.
- Participate in practical activities including gardening, cooking and ways to construct and build.

- Interact with adults, who are modelling and sharing enthusiasm for finding out new information.
- Make extensive use of the outdoor area in all weathers, e.g. shadows, windsocks, stamping in puddles, collecting rainwater and ice, salting the ice, planting vegetables and making dens. • Learn new language during discussions or explorations.
- Try out and extend their ideas and learn from mistakes.
- Answer open-ended questions such as “What can you see?” “What does it do?” “How can we?” “What would happen if…?”
- Learn about the local area by going on local walks, visiting wildlife areas, the local shops, and a library.

How will this be achieved?

- Providing opportunities to develop communication, attention, memory, observation skills, problem solving skills and confidence through exploration across the curriculum. This will help children gain the skills to help develop their understanding.
- Practitioners create enabling environments where children are encouraged to investigate, question, explore and make connections through meaningful real-life experiences and sustained shared thinking.
- Carefully planned teaching (small group time activities and adult led planned activities).
- Responsive everyday experiences including child led exploration and spontaneous learning arising from children’s interests, questions and fascinations.
- Providing activities that are open-ended, fun and thought provoking.
- Continuous provision-accessible resources, stories and non-fiction books to learn and find out about people, religion, language, cultures, traditions and the natural world.
- Offering children opportunities to observe, reflect, analyse, criticise, categorise, compare, predict, question, problem-solve, appreciate, hypothesise and interpret.
- Teaching specific skills and techniques where they are appropriate and relevant.
- Ensuring through careful monitoring that adults will observe, support, encourage and sensitively extend children’s open-ended exploration.
- Celebrating different festivals and events – e.g. Harvest, Diwali, Black History Month, Christmas, Easter, Eid, Chinese New Year.
- Tidy up time – Keeping the indoor and outdoor environment tidy and respecting the resources and environment.
- Family photo’s – these are used for self-registration as well as to support the children’s emotional wellbeing. Photos support children to gain awareness of different family make up and to value each as equally important as another.
- Visits and visitors – From the wider community and parents e.g. parents with specific talents/interests/ hobbies to share e.g. musical or reading story in a different language.

- Nature play sessions to find out about our world, learn how to respect and care for it and to appreciate the benefits of being outdoors for our emotional well-being.
- Carefully considering that both risk-taking and safety are essential factors to be born in mind and balanced when planning and implementing the curriculum.

Inclusion

All Understanding the World experiences reflect the aims of the SEND and Equal Opportunities Policies.

We recognise that children develop understanding and curiosity at different rates and in different ways. Practitioners adapt experiences carefully to ensure all children can access, participate and succeed within inclusive and supportive environments.

Teaching and support are planned carefully around the individual strengths, interests and development of each child. Children with SEND, EAL and additional needs are supported through adaptive teaching approaches, visual supports, sensory exploration, communication-rich interactions and collaborative working with families and professionals.

Outdoor learning

At Netherton Park Nursery School we place a very high priority on providing high quality learning opportunities for all children in our outdoor learning environments. Children have the opportunity to play and learn outside for a large portion of their session - whatever the weather!!! We provide the coats, waterproof trousers and wellies for the children to wear to enable them to learn outdoors without the stress and worry of dirtying their own clothing. Within all outdoor learning environments children have daily access to equipment and resources that enable them to explore, experience and learn about the natural world- this includes weather, textures, changes and plants and minibeasts.

Nature Play

At Netherton Park Nursery School have a woodland area within our grounds where groups of children access 'nature play' sessions. During these sessions children are involved in hands-on learning, developing skills such as risk taking, perseverance and independence. These are the foundations that children need to learn successfully within the classroom. Children explore the natural environments looking at weather, changes, plants, trees and mini-beasts. They use a range of tools and equipment which include magnifying glasses, bug hunters, binoculars and reference cards. They are encouraged to create craft and construct in our woodland area, including growing plants, creating artwork using natural resources, building dens etc. Our ‘Nature Play’ sessions are very child led and enable children explore their own ideas; problem solve, work together and socialise. We have 3 members of staff who have completed the Forest School Training programme who maintain the area and share good practice.

Celebration days and events

A calendar of events is in place - this identifies a range of cultural and national events and celebrations that all children will take part in each year. These are planned and enable staff to ensure a range of experiences are identified, resourced and available. Wherever possible/appropriate parents/carers are invited to take part too. Tapestry is used to document these events.

Visitors

A range of visitors are invited into Nursery to work with the children and provide a range of first-hand experiences. These vary each year dependent on children's interests and relevant funding. Visitors have included the fire service, ambulance service, Bhangra dancer and The Animal Man.

First hand experiences

A range of first-hand experiences are offered each year to the children. These vary according to children's interests and relevant funding. Experiences have included hatching chicks and ducklings, caterpillars and butterflies, cooking food from other cultures and a walk to the post box to post a letter home.

Impact

- Children will begin to notice and respect similarities and differences between themselves and others.
- They will care for the environment around them.
- Children's vocabulary will be increased and extended so that they can use words to describe and comment on the diverse world.
- Our aim is to narrow the cultural capital gap for all children by providing a full range of opportunities to broaden their experiences.

Monitoring

- Practitioners observe, assess and monitor children's understanding, curiosity and engagement regularly through observation, professional dialogue, Tapestry entries and reflective evaluation.
- Observation and assessment is used to identify strengths, interests and next steps and to ensure provision remains responsive to children's understanding, communication, curiosity and engagement.
- Daily discussions and weekly planning meetings form an important part of the nursery's reflective assessment process. During these discussions, practitioners collaboratively review children's

communication, curiosity, understanding, engagement and emerging interests in order to adapt provision and respond appropriately.

- Senior leaders monitor the quality of Understanding the World provision through observation, coaching, moderation, professional dialogue and reflective practice. Evaluation informs professional development, curriculum refinement and ongoing improvement across the Nursery School.