

CURRICULUM POLICY

Over the Rainbow Early Learning Centre Ltd is committed to offering the children in its care an inclusive, comprehensive, emergent and inquiry-based curriculum. Children will follow a play-based and Montessori Programme guided by Aistear (the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework) and supported by Siolta (the National Quality Framework) and other good practice methods.

“Encouraging each child’s holistic development and learning requires the implantation of a verifiable, broad-based, documented and flexible curriculum or programme” Siolta – the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education

“Active learning, relationships, play, language, and meaningful experiences are priorities for supporting children’s early learning and development”. Aistear-The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

Principle

This policy is underwritten by the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 and the Tusla Quality and Regulatory Framework.

Statement of Intent

Over the Rainbow Early Learning Centre Ltd offers a range of learning opportunities to children, which evolves as choices and connections are made by the children as they discover the world around them. We advocate learning through play but also that children should learn at their own pace and within the parameters of their own interests, age and stage of development. We are fully committed to being guided by the principles of Siolta and the curriculum framework Aistear.

We recognise how important high-quality early childhood experience can be in children’s lives and therefore use children’s and practitioners’ interests, questions and experiences as starting points for curriculum planning. At times, topics emerge from children’s interests and at other times practitioners introduce specific topics to support children’s learning and development.

This Curriculum aims to encourage active learning, problem solving, effective communication, creativity and socialization. It aims to give children a good start which will benefit their long-term success in life.

Over the Rainbow Early Learning Centre Ltd recognises the diversity of experiences and relationships that shape children’s lives.

Children learn best when they:

- Participate in making decisions as much as possible.
- Make choices and contribute to learning experiences.
- Share their opinions and diverse experiences and discuss their learning.
- Have positive role models within the staff team.
- Learn in a responsive and supportive social environment.
- Learn through multi-sensory experiences.

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- Participate actively in experiences that engage them emotionally, physically, cognitively and socially.

Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework

Our programme will follow the Aistear guidelines and principles. Aistear is Ireland's curriculum framework for children from birth to six years. Aistear contains information for parents and practitioners that will help plan for and provide challenging and enjoyable learning experiences that can enable all children to grow and develop as competent and confident learners in the context of loving relationships with others. Aistear describes the types of learning (dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding) that are important for children in their early years and offers ideas and suggestions as to how this learning might be nurtured. The Framework also provides guidelines on supporting children's learning through partnerships with parents, interactions, play, and assessment.

Aistear is based on 12 principles of early learning and development. These are presented in three groups:

1. Children and their lives in early childhood:
 - the child's uniqueness
 - equality and diversity
 - children as citizens.
2. Children's connections with others:
 - relationships
 - parents, family and community
 - the adult's role.
3. How children learn and develop:
 - holistic learning and development
 - active learning
 - play and hands-on experiences
 - relevant and meaningful experiences
 - communication and language
 - the learning environment.

Aistear also uses four themes that connect and overlap with each other to outline children's learning and development. The themes are:

- Well-being
- Identity and Belonging
- Communicating
- Exploring and Thinking.

Each theme includes *aims* and broad *learning goals* for all children from birth to six years. The aims and goals outline the dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge, and understanding that the adult nurtures in children to help them learn and develop.

Siolta, The National Quality Framework

Siolta is designed to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice and promote continuous quality improvement and planning.

We use it to evaluate our level of quality provision by recognising elements of practice that are successful, as well as identifying aspects in need of attention and improvement.

Emergent and inquiry-based curriculum

Emergent curriculum means a curriculum which evolves from the children and their experiences in their particular context, making this type of curriculum very inclusive and responsive to all children and their different interests, backgrounds and cultures.

An inquiry-based curriculum supports children to investigate their ideas and interests through many experiences, conversations and/or activities. An emergent curriculum is about WHAT children will be doing, and an inquiry-based approach explains HOW children will do this.

The play-based programme

Play is the collective language of childhood. It is through play that children understand each other and make sense of the world around them. Children learn so much from play; it teaches them many social skills including sharing, taking turns, self-discipline and tolerance of others. Play is children's means of assimilating the world, making sense of their experience to make it part of themselves. The play-based curriculum involves a range of activities and learning approaches - but the child's right to learn through play is at the centre.

Practitioners facilitate play and draw out and extend what children learn through play. The daily routine is structured so that there is time for free play, both indoors and outdoors, where children choose their activities and explore and experiment with the materials around them, either on their own or in collaboration with other children or adults.

Under the guidance of Aistear and Siolta, we encourage learning through free play with a range of activities including:

Imaginative Play

The children learn to play together, to share, to use their imaginations and to expand their vocabulary. This type of play encourages children to express their feelings and engage in imaginary situations such as doctors and nurses and going to the post office. This is a safe secure environment where children feel supported in their play.

Books

The children learn to listen when a story is being read. Acting out or reading stories and describing incidents from their own experiences helps to develop their language. Story telling is an activity, which fosters the enjoyment of books, and can be a motivating factor in learning to read.

Music Activities

The children enjoy singing songs, using percussion instruments and listening to a wide variety of music, from rhymes to classical and pop music. This helps to stimulate their awareness and enjoyment of music and gives them an opportunity to use music as a form of expression. We use the Ceol step into music programme

Creative Play

Children are introduced to activities such as Art and Craft, paint and play dough, sand and water play.

Sand and Water Play

Children have great fun, but they also develop manipulative and pre-math's skills through exploring and experimenting. Many children can express their emotions and feelings when playing with sand and water as well as finding it a very relaxing and soothing activity.

Arts and Crafts

The children paint, draw, print, use scissors, glue and use clay. This allows the children to develop their creative and pre-writing skills. All this work gives the child a different medium to express their feelings, thoughts and emotions.

Play Dough

This is not just a fun activity for children; it can also help strengthen muscles in their hands and develop hand eye co-ordination. Once again this is an activity where the children's imagination can be encouraged and developed. Play dough also allows the child to manipulate the material, which may relieve such emotions as anger/frustration.

Jig Saws, Construction and Manipulative Toys

In this area children's pre-reading, pre-writing and hand eye co-ordination are developed. The development of reasoning and problem solving is also developed and encourages small motor movement.

Energetic Play

Organised energetic activities, such as running, jumping and skipping, will be a part of the Curriculum and encourages large motor movement. As well as aiding physical growth such activities can be a learning area and a great reliever of built up stress or tension.

Montessori Programme

The Montessori approach was designed to help children grow by letting them explore the world. The classrooms are called "prepared environments" where children are given an array of stimulating learning and purposeful activities. The Montessori Curriculum is based on the research and findings of Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952). Montessori's method is structured around, and promotes, the child's natural, self-initiated impulse to become absorbed in an environment and to learn from it. Based on her observation Dr. Montessori developed specific materials, techniques and curriculum areas that assist each child in reaching his/her potential.

In Montessori classes the children follow a set programme of tasks or exercises. They learn everyday life skills such as dressing themselves, washing themselves etc. They learn social graces and manners but also cover a wide range of subjects including Mathematics, Reading and Writing, History and Geography, Science, Biology, Music, Art, Drama and Literature. Subjects may vary slightly.

Montessori Curriculum Areas

Practical Life

The Practical Life section lays the foundation for all other work to be done in the classroom. The activities are everyday tasks that a child needs to learn to master the care of self and care of the environment. Such activities include pouring, sweeping and tying, as well as courtesy. The activities are presented to the child in such a way that concentration, coordination, independence and order are developed.

Sensorial

The goal of the Montessori Sensorial Section is to educate the child's senses. The curriculum area contains Montessori-specific materials that help the child refine his or her experience of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. In addition, the materials of this section are modelled on scientifically based concepts. Sensory experience, with these specially selected materials provides children with the first step in understanding abstract concepts.

Math

Math in the Montessori classroom can be separated into a few major categories: beginning counting, advanced counting, the decimal system, rational numbers (fractions) and the operation of addition, multiplication, subtraction and division. Concepts are presented in a very concrete way so that children are not only able to count but work with square numbers and thousands.

Language

Montessori language curriculum is an integrated approach that combines phonetics and whole language. The child is introduced to letters and sounds. After several sounds, he can begin to spell and read words by linking these sounds together.

Culture

This topic integrates geography, history, Science art, music etc. The children study different areas of the world, and experience concrete examples of that area's language, literature, dress, food, artwork and music, both past and present. This increasingly important area introduces children to our planet's great diversity of people.

Planning for children's development and learning

With the help of the Aistear Siolta practice guide, we use children's and practitioners' interests, questions and experiences as starting points for curriculum planning. Practitioners are observant, skilled and supportive in harnessing child-initiated interest and inquiry. They also know when it is appropriate and helpful to provide new opportunities and topics for children to explore or when to use adult interests as a stimulus for learning to create a relevant, meaningful and stimulating curriculum for all children.

At times, topics emerge from children's engagement with people, materials, ideas and events, triggering their curiosity and motivation to learn. At other times, practitioners introduce specific topics linked to Aistear's learning goals to support children's learning and development. In partnership with children, practitioners identify ideas or inquiries that become the focus for learning.

Planning for play and learning is important but it is also critical to have flexibility around plans and to respond to the children's interests and inquiries. Planning is respectful of the uncertainty that is an integral part of children's interests and play.

Long-term planning

Based on our mission, vision and curriculum statement, our long-term plans outline, in broad terms, what we intend to do to support children's learning and development over a period of a year. These plans describe the types of experiences we intend to provide for children outlined under the four themes of Aistear and describes dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, and knowledge and understanding.

Medium-term planning

Our medium-term plans identify broad topics as well as seasonal events/celebrations that might interest children and shows how these topics might be approached with the children and the types of experiences and or resources that might be used. Practitioners make these plans meaningful and relevant by starting from what children already know and what they want to find out. Topics and ideas are introduced at a time when the children show interest in the topic or when a topic arises from something that happens in the children's lives. Preparation is done to deepen and enrich learning.

Short-term planning

Short-term planning responds to children's current interests and inquiries, events and news in their families or community. Practitioners ensure children's curiosity is aroused and valued and that the development of play and discussions are child-led and rich in learning by providing a wide range of experiences such as stories, songs, books, props, images, conversations and children's and adults' own experiences. This planning involves observing, listening, talking to, and playing with children and organizing interesting and fun activities and experiences with them. We use the Aistear short-term curriculum planning template to document planning.

Spontaneous planning

Practitioners allow for spontaneous planning or 'in the moment' planning when they respond to something that engages children's immediate interest, for example, on a walk, children see a spider's web and become enthralled by it. Meaningful documentation is required to show what occurred and the learning that took place.

Curriculum Evaluation/Reflection

Planned activities are evaluated weekly using a weekly evaluation sheet. Emergent interest activities are evaluated daily directly on the planning sheet. Staff supervision meetings provide support for staff regarding planning, documenting and evaluating curriculum. Daily informal brainstorming discussions between staff are also welcomed. Specific time is allocated to staff during working hours to assist with curriculum documentation.

Documenting children's development and learning

To create an emergent, inquiry-based curriculum, the practitioner needs to spend time observing and documenting what the children's interests, inquiries and theories are and to use this information for planning. Time is balanced between planning learning opportunities and documenting what children have been doing and learning as evidence of learning, and both processes are connected. Documenting can also help children to reflect on their learning and can be shared with others including parents and other team members.

Practitioners use the software management system ChildPaths to document learning as per our Observation and Assessment policy:

Formal observations

Practitioners use the Observation tab on ChildPaths which is based on the Aistear learning record template to formally document learning. A minimum of one formal observation per term per child is required.

Informal observations

Spontaneous learning is document with the help of a photograph of the children while engaged in learning and a short write-up which is directly uploaded onto the child's activity page in ChildPaths. Parent's can access their child's activity page on a daily basis and further develop learning at home.

Milestones

ChildPaths provide an option to activate Milestones for a child. Milestones will be activate for a child after consultation with parents in the case of a child who practitioners feel might need additional learning support.

Communication

All parents/guardians are informed of this policy on enrolment. Staff members will check with parents that they have read and understood the policy and provide any assistance needed.

A summary of this policy will be included in the parent handbook. This policy will also be reviewed with staff members at induction and annual staff training.

A copy of all policies will be available during all hours of operation to staff members and parents in the Policy Folder located in the setting or on the website www.overtherainbowelc.com

Parents/guardians may receive a copy of the full policy and procedures at any time upon request. Parents/guardians and all relevant staff members will receive written notification of any updates to this policy.

This policy was adopted by **Over the Rainbow Early Learning Centre Ltd** on:

Date: _____

Manager

co-Manager

Review Date: _____