

# Reflections Small School – Pupil Assessment Procedures

Date: 1.9.16

Review Date: 1.9.17

## 1. The purpose of assessment at Reflections Small School

We define assessment as:

*'The process by which, in their daily practice, educators observe children's learning, try to understand it, and then put their understanding to good use.'*

(Drummond, M.J. (2010) *International Encyclopaedia of Education* vol. 3, pp316-322 Oxford: Elsevier.)

Assessment in Reflections Small School exists to benefit children and to allow educators to reflect on and strengthen their abilities to meet the enquiring and expressive children in front of them. This means that assessment is ongoing and sits at the heart of our reflective educational practice.

In Reflections Small School we assess children's learning as a constantly developing range of dispositions and powers. These are valued and recorded in detail. Although all educators are familiar with the National Curriculum assessment practices, other than the EYFS Profile we do not measure children's development against external levels and standards. As in all other aspects of our school, assessment begins rather with our image of the child as:

- Rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent
- Confident in building relationships, having values and respect for others
- Having a curiosity and open-mindedness to ideas and explorations of all kinds
- Capable of independent, critical, divergent thinking

Our assessment practice focusses on these qualities, relationships and ways of learning:

- How well are we supporting and developing each child's powerful and rich potential?
- How is each child responding to ideas, materials, new knowledge and techniques?
- How is the depth and range of children's interest developing over time?
- How are they building strong and respectful relationships between themselves and with the wider world?

We assess each child's development over time, in terms of independent and individual learning, but also document their changing roles in collaborative projects and the social and emotional life of Small School.

## 2. Assessment using daily observations and the child's *Learning Journal*

Each child's learning and development is observed throughout the day in many documentary languages: written descriptions, photographs, project work, video footage, voice recordings, and observations from the child and from all educators with whom he/she has contact.

Observations come from any space in the nursery, forest, coast, garden and from any time of day including mealtimes. All educators work with notebooks, cameras and recorders as a matter of routine, and are confident in drawing from these different sources to assess the strengths and needs of the children, shape projects and develop curriculum.

Each child's *Learning Journal* brings together key observations about their learning and development. Learning Journals are individual and include observations from family members alongside Small School educators. The Learning Journal traces a child's development in initiating and sharing ideas; learning, testing and refining knowledge; expression in the 'hundred' creative languages of children; being part of a learning and social community; discovering and realising their own and each other's talents; assessing their own learning.

## 3. Assessment and Project Planning

Assessment is central to working with an emergent curriculum. All Small School educators bring detailed observations and thinking about each child and the Small School group to project planning meetings. It is from these observations and the discussions they provoke that decisions are made about materials, spaces, time, ideas and next stages in the school.

Project planning in Small School is daily (between the educators) and fortnightly (meeting with the Pedagogical Lead, and educators from Forest and Beach School). In addition Small School is included in Reflections' year-long focus (previous years' focus have included Sculpture, Storying, Sound and The Many Languages of Friendship), and educators attend focus planning meetings bringing observations, thinking and ideas for development, based on Small School children's interests, past and current work.

## 4. Assessment and Communication with Parents

Each child's Learning Journal is shared online with his/her parents via Tapestry. This is a two-way system through which family members can also add observations from home and the child's wider social life. In addition, parents have day-to-day contact with Small School staff, when they drop off and collect their children, and know that we are always able to make time for discussion about specific questions to do with a child's learning and development, both individually and as part of the Small School learning community.

Formal parents' evenings are held twice a year to discuss in detail the children's dispositions and powers, their Learning Journals, and for parents to experience the classrooms/learning environments which are rich in evidence of children's thinking and expression. We also make an ongoing and open invitation to all parents to attend Reflections Professional Development Days<sup>1</sup> in which we present children's project work as part of an exploration of practice and pedagogy, to national and international delegates.

Many of our projects are documented in the form of printed publications and films. These are given free of charge to the parents of children involved, and allow them to see in detail how their child's work has developed over time and how each child has contributed to the social and collaborative dynamic of Small School learning.



## 5. Children's learning dispositions and powers

We begin with the belief that learning is not something children 'have' (and therefore can be assessed to have 'more' or 'less' of it) but something children *do* from birth and continue to do throughout their lives. By 'learning dispositions' we mean the characteristics and desires that dispose children to want to learn, be able and enthusiastic to learn, and to build their powers of learning over time.

We are inspired in this respect not only by the educational practice and philosophy of education in Reggio Emilia (see *Curriculum Policy*), but by New Zealand educators Margaret Carr and her colleagues (Carr, M. (2001) *Assessment in Early Childhood Settings: Learning Stories*. London: Paul Chapman).

<sup>1</sup> Reflections receives many requests to visit the setting and twice a year Reflections opens its doors to visiting educators from the UK and abroad to share our approach to working with young children. The Professional Development Days offer a tour around the setting and presentations about our approach and in particular project work. Since 2011 the nursery has received over 2000 educator visitors from 15 countries. Parents also attend.

Carr and her colleagues describe five learning dispositions connected to the five broad strands of their national early childhood curriculum. These are:

- taking an interest
- being involved
- persisting with difficulty
- communicating with others
- taking responsibility

And connected to the five broad strands of:

- belonging
- well-being
- exploration
- communication
- contribution

At Reflections Small School we observe children's learning through the medium of project work and so have chosen to group our areas of assessment according to individual and collaborative aspects of project development. We look for and track developments in four main learning dispositions, recognising the child's growing powers in each of these:

1. The desire to know and find out

- initiating, expressing and explaining new ideas
- developing initial ideas into longer enquiries
- working sequentially to build detail and depth in learning
- recognising the value of leaps of imagination and inspiration
- recognising and developing the skills of a researcher – close observation, thinking, reading, consulting, encountering other perspectives, testing their own knowledge, connecting learning from different contexts
- working with individual strengths and weaknesses to develop projects
- persisting with difficult techniques and understandings

2. The desire to communicate and to form relationships

- developing fluent speech and careful listening
- putting ideas and experiences into words – verbal and written
- using visual illustration and 3D construction to communicate ideas and learning to others
- reviewing, planning and proposing new developments in project work
- sharing project work with parents and other interested adults – through exhibitions, films, animations, publications, installations
- being able to communicate about past as well as present and future learning
- working individually and collaboratively within the Small School learning group
- building authentic and respectful relationships with each other and the wider community
- accommodating different points of view and ways of thinking from other children and adults

- acknowledging and expressing emotional development in project work and other contexts
3. The desire to imagine and question
- developing skills in a wide range of creative 'languages' to express thoughts, concepts, emotions, understandings and questions
  - developing unexpected connections between ideas, thoughts and knowledge
  - developing analogy, metaphor, figurative and symbolic ways of thinking and understanding
  - questioning/exploring received knowledge, conventional ideas and assumptions
  - building projects in imaginative and fantastical as well as practical and logical ways
  - developing and valuing their own and each other's powers of invention and imagination
4. The desire to remember and connect
- reviewing learning, remembering and re-using past knowledge and experience to develop new projects
  - becoming aware of their connections to older and younger generations and individuals
  - exploring time and memory from a personal perspective
  - thinking about local history and how things used to be
  - imagining and exploring visions of the future, their own and other people's
  - connecting learning across spaces (e.g. Small School, beach, forest) and projects
  - researching wider cultural precedents for project work in the fields of creative arts, science, social science