



Saint Brendan's Nursery Class



Participation Policy

Introduction

At Saint Brendan's Nursery Class, we believe that children are active learners and capable contributors to their environment. We value the voices of children, parents/carers, and staff, and are committed to ensuring that everyone has meaningful opportunities to participate in shaping nursery life.

Principles of Participation

In Saint Brendan's Nursery Class:

- Children, parents/carers, and staff will be given opportunities to express their views, be listened to, and have their views taken into account.
- Methods of involvement will be accessible, inclusive, and sensitive to individual needs and circumstances.
- The contributions of children, parents/carers, and staff will be recognised and reflected in nursery practice.
- Participation methods will be continually monitored, reviewed, and expanded.

We acknowledge that children are highly aware of their surroundings. Supporting them to speak out and take part in decision-making enriches their experiences and challenges adults to share power and trust children's insight.

Respectful Practice with Children

Within the nursery, staff will:

- Treat children with respect, patience, and understanding. Staff are encouraged to reflect on how they themselves would wish to be treated.
- Allow children to speak for themselves and resist unnecessary adult interruption.
- View children as individuals with their own thoughts, interests, worries, and ideas.
- Value children's prior experiences—recognising that even very young children have already learned much about their world.
- Support children to be themselves rather than shaping them to meet adult expectations.
- Take children's opinions seriously and act on them whenever possible.

Staff Self-Reflection

Effective participation begins with reflective practice. Staff are encouraged to consider:

- Am I a good listener?
- Do I show genuine interest in what others say, or do I focus more on my own questions and responses?
- Do I avoid interrupting?
- Do I enjoy being with children?
- Can I take children seriously as individuals with their own feelings and viewpoints?
- Can I occasionally allow children to lead or direct activities?
- Am I comfortable with the idea that children may know more than me about some things?
- Am I open to having my assumptions challenged after listening to children?

Supporting Children's Expression

Allowing Children to Change Their Minds

Children may explore their thoughts as they speak. They might contradict themselves or exaggerate as they find the right words. The focus should always be on the child's perspective, not the precise accuracy of their narrative.

Summarising Children's Views

Summarising helps ensure understanding and demonstrates active listening. Effective summarising:

- Reproduces the core of what the child has said
- Keeps the summary short
- Uses the child's own words as far as possible

Summarising supports the adult to:

- Check understanding
- Show attentive listening
- Highlight important points
- Bring structure to confusing stories

Summaries can be used at the end of conversations, though adults should be mindful that children under ten may find reflective techniques challenging.

When Difficulties Arise

Children rarely struggle with participation when they feel respected and taken seriously. However, external factors may affect their focus or behaviour.

If a child appears restless or disengaged:

- Avoid telling them off or expressing frustration.
- Consider finishing the activity gently or switching to something more suitable.
- Focus on small successes so both child and adult feel the time was meaningful.

Recognise that children participate differently—some thrive in group discussions, while others communicate better through drawing, role play, writing, or other creative approaches.

Types of Participation

Saint Brendan's Nursery recognises different forms of participation:

1. Child-initiated, shared decision-making
Children generate ideas and seek adult support. Adults advise but do not lead.
2. Child-initiated and directed
Children develop the idea and carry it out; adults are available but do not take charge.
3. Assigned but informed
Adults create opportunities; children choose to volunteer and understand their role and purpose.
4. Consulted and informed
Adults design the project; children are consulted and their views influence the process.
5. Adult-initiated, shared decision-making
Adults propose ideas, but children are involved throughout planning and implementation.

Benefits of Participation

Participation:

1. Strengthens children's sense of ownership and increases motivation.
2. Provides adults with valuable insights, improving relevance and quality of services.
3. Helps develop confident, responsible future citizens.
4. Builds communication, cooperation, negotiation, and problem-solving skills.
5. Increases children's confidence, self-esteem, and sense of value.
6. Encourages appreciation of different viewpoints.
7. Helps children understand and respect their own rights and the rights of others.

Examples of Participation in Practice

Planning, Design & Evaluation

- Circle Time discussions to gather children's ideas.
- Collaborative planning sessions where staff and children plan steps to achieve chosen activities.
- Use of photos or videos to celebrate achievements and provide feedback to children, families, and all stakeholders.
- Daily evaluations using creative tools (smiley faces, thumbs up/down, drawings).
- Involvement in creating and refreshing play corners.
- Participation in planning longer-term programmes.

Purchasing Materials and Resources

- Children help choose playroom resources (books, toys, games).
- For older children, discussion can include budget, quality, and group vs individual benefit.
- Visual tools (e.g., picture collages) may support the process.

Environment

- Children take part in designing safe and inclusive playground spaces.

Participation in decisions about nursery environment such as wall colours, artwork, furnishings and plants.

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure that participation practices remain meaningful, effective, and aligned with children's rights and best practice in early years education.

Reviewed: March 2024

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