

Pre-School of the Year

Nature to Nurture, Liverpool



'Wonderful practice, clear links to principles and stands out with its vision of pedagogy'
Judge

Nature to Nurture is Merseyside's only outdoor nursery and Forest School, and combines the physical and educational benefits of learning in the outside with a focus on the emotional importance of maintaining nurturing relationships between children, staff and parents.

To ensure this nurturing approach, the nursery employs a well-being co-ordinator to support the emotional needs of the children, in particular those who struggle with separation, looked-after children and those with SEN.

A third of children at Nature to Nurture have SEN, and the nursery has looked closely at how to support them using the outdoor environment. Rope swings, hammocks, balance and wobble logs, running on uneven ground, climbing trees and crawling through bushes all support children's foundational sensory systems (tactile, vestibular and proprioception).

Any child who has difficulties with the remaining four senses, such as issues relating to bodily awareness, reflex maturity, postural stability, visual and ocular motor difficulties or language delay, will often have difficulties with cognitive learning as well, so the nursery ensures the first part of every session is heavily focused on developing physical skills. A sensory diet is available for children with sensory processing disorder.

Practitioners have also purchased ear defenders and a black-out pop-up tent with a torch for children with autism, as while the nursery environment is very calming, when it rains it can overwhelm the senses and pose a challenge.

Staff pride themselves on their process of settling children in to nursery life. During a child's initial settling-in session, the parent and child are left alone together within the site so they both feel safe and secure. Once the child has physically separated from the parent, a practitioner will begin to engage in activities

that allow the child to see positive interactions between the parent and staff member.

The nursery also runs parent and toddler sessions for the wider community, providing local families with the opportunity to spend time in the outdoors, as well as running Forest School sessions for schools across the city, and delivering training to nursery practitioners, teachers and university students, promoting outdoor education.

The setting is collaborating with the Nurture Group Network to roll out a pilot programme focusing on the well-being of children aged between two and four. The group currently delivers the Boxall programme to primary and secondary schools across the UK, but Nature to Nurture was concerned that the programme did not cater for the early years, and was invited to get involved in developing a pilot for younger children.

Nature to Nurture is also applying to become an accredited Forest School Centre with Open Awards so it can deliver Level 3 Forest School training alongside an added unit to cover Special Educational Needs in the Outdoors.

It plans to set up a second site on the Wirral, giving more children in the area access to outdoor provision from September.

Highly commended

Little Marlow Pre-School, Marlow

Nestled in the heart of the village community of Little Marlow for more than 35 years, the pre-school is a family-run organisation that prides itself on a 'warm and caring' approach that sets up children for the future from both an education and emotional perspective.

The nursery has developed its own school-to-home books to keep parents involved in their children's learning and narrow the gap between school and

home. The nursery runs one-to-one morning sessions with parents to discuss progress, and offers an open-door policy inviting them to come in and see the setting at any time.

The nursery staff are still in touch with 40 per cent of their previous students, many of whom bring their own children to attend the pre-school a generation later.

Janice Beard, early years awards tutor, assessor and moderator, said of Little Marlow, 'There is a good balance of creativity, learning and activity, with routines that promote emotional well-being and independence.'

Finalists

King's Pre-School, Byfleet
Noah's Ark Playgroup, Northampton

Criterion

Open to registered settings offering sessional care and education