

SOC Meeting – 30th January'24

Attendees – Chris Young (CY) - Chair

Cara Ratukalou (CR) – Nursery Manager

Lucy Farr (LF) - Deputy Nursery Manager

Tamsin Willis-Stovold (T W-S) – Parent representative

Shamin Sadrafshari (SS) – Parent representative

1. Introductions

Attendees provided introductions and Cara Ratukalou (new Nursery Manager) was welcomed to the meeting.

2. Matters Arising

CY noted that some of the matters arising around Forest School, curriculum) will be picked up through CR's Nursery Manager's report. CY also noted that any actions that are outstanding from Pauline will now be taken up by Cara to action.

a. Reduction of Meat Options / implementing one meat free day per week for all children

CR explained that the provider has been trialling different meals and there is a new menu with the changes starting from next week. It was noted that the provider is very accommodating and work well with us, and they are open to suggestions for changes. LF advised that the new menu has been sent out to all parents via email.

It was agreed that we need to be mindful of the University of Bath's commitment to net zero carbon footprint. Reducing our meat consumption helps to achieve this but it was noted that some children can find the meat free options challenging and therefore we need a balance between this approach and ensuring that children are being adequately fed. It was agreed that we need to get further feedback from the parents as to how they wish us to proceed with this. **Action: Parent representatives to provide feedback.**

SS asked where it would be possible to get more information on the food that is provided by Bath Spa. In particular, it would be helpful to get information on how the meals provided support the [Early Years Foundation Stage welfare requirement](#) to provide 'healthy, balanced and nutritious' meals for children. **Action: LF to follow up with Bath Spa.**

b. Finance

The Fee Schedules were issued as agreed in the lead up to this academic year. It was noted that we have some parents that are requesting frequent changes to days and hours and that this has a knock-on effect in terms of the administrative time needing to be spent on changes to fee schedules through the year. It was noted that there have been several parents who have made up to 4 changes to their fee schedule during this year. This makes planning difficult and can have a significant impact on occupancy and resources. We may need to consider restricting the number of in year changes or to consider whether such changes should incur an administration fee to cover costs.

LF noted that there is not much availability now in terms of spaces so this will mean that the nursery is going to have less flexibility to accommodate requests for changed hours and days. This is likely to be the case well into 2025.

c. Field Area next to nursery

CY advised that he has spoken to members of Campus infrastructure and there may be planning implications in terms of enlarging the garden space. CR explained that she has been reviewing the use of outdoor spaces and she believes that the existing garden is under-utilised. CR is looking at how more use of this can be encouraged by adopting a greater degree of free-flow than has previously been in place. CR also identified that she intends to also increase use of the Woodland area. Both areas need work to be used more effectively than has recently been the case. CR stated that she wants to get some of the staff Forest School trained (currently we can't call the area Forest School as we don't have the necessary trained expertise, it will be called the Woodland area) but noted that this will take time. This will not, however, prevent the areas being used in the interim.

CR noted that ad hoc use of the field area adjacent to the gardens is something she will be encouraging. CR suggested that she would like to hold a family Sports Day on the field area later in the year. CY noted that we will need to inform Security / Campus Services so we don't get a clash in terms of any maintenance or other activities but that this should be a formality.

d. Nursery policies.

The publication of nursery policies was discussed. It was noted that some parents continue to be concerned that certain policies, notably the "Sickness Policy" seems to be being applied inconsistently and parents and carers do not feel that the requirements of this are clear. CR agreed we need consistency throughout the setting and advised that in the case of sickness, the setting will follow the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) guidance on sickness exclusions for Early Years. The policy will be followed, especially regarding temperatures they need to be 38C+. It was agreed that a link to the UKHSA will be provided to parents and published on our web pages. **Action CY/ CR to publish link to UKHSA guidance and Sickness absence policy to be prioritised.**

CR noted that most of the nursery policies require some tidying up and for her the priority is to look at the safeguarding and behaviour management policies. Over time, though, all policies will need to be reviewed to ensure these are current.

e. Nursery Roof

We have continued to have ongoing issues with leaks in the new roof. CY advised that he has spoken with Campus Infrastructure project team to say that the continuing issue is not acceptable and must be addressed. The Deputy Director of CI (Projects) has advised that he has had a meeting with the Roofing Company's Managing Director to have this matter addressed as a matter of urgency. Subsequently, further repairs have been carried out and the condition is being monitored to check for leaks. Once we are assured that this is resolved, internal decorations will be completed. **Post meeting note – No subsequent leaks and internal repairs are scheduled for 9th March.**

f. Occupancy

CY noted that we are in a good place so far as our occupancy levels are considered and thanked LF for the work she has done to ensure we are operating close to capacity. LF reported that Nursery is currently running on around 92%-94% across all rooms.

CR advised that she was concerned that nursery is being heavily advertised to new staff when they join the university and that this is causing quite a few complaints as the nursery has no spare capacity to accommodate these children. **Action: CY to speak to Recruitment about how Nursery is advertised in recruitment campaigns.**

LF advised that there are around 34 families on the baby room waiting list, with a further 25 on the Nursery room and preschool waiting lists. There is currently a great demand and on current lists, this will keep the nursery full for the next 3 years minimum. It was noted that we will need to revisit our admissions policy to make sure that people on the waiting list are clear on how this works so that we can be sure that places are being allocated on a fair and equitable basis. **Action: CR to include admissions policy on her priority policy list.**

g. Staffing

CR provided the following update: Sarah Ellis has resigned and left the nursery from the BR. Sam Lemana has passed her probation and been conformed in post. Jess Whalley is covering maternity cover in the BR on a temporary contract.

Nursery Room Leader position. Sophie is returning from maternity leave at the beginning April, 2 days per week but has requested that she returns in a part-time Nursery Nurse position. The Nursery Room Leader role will be advertised shortly once Sophie's new position has been confirmed.

3. Nursery Manager's Report

CR provided an overview of the key findings of the Jigsaw report for each room and the work that she has initiated to address matters arising.

Across all rooms, it was noted that there is quite a lot of clutter and as a result the Nursery may not be making best use of the available resources. This is also creating issues in terms of storage. There is also a concern that there may be lots of resources for certain activities whilst other areas may not have enough resources. It was noted that better use of free flow principles and use of the Woodland area (and other parts of campus) would be beneficial across the setting.

CR explained that she is already looking at resources and will be coming into nursery over a couple of weekends to declutter and to audit resource availability. As previously noted, there will be an increased emphasis on free flow and use of campus resources (Woodland, lake and other areas).

Baby Room provides a nurturing environment where children feel secure and welcome. Staff interact well with children and encourage communication and development of language skills. Activities promote development of fine motor skills, both through play and during other activities such as at mealtimes.

It was noted that at times activities are too centred around specific rooms which can make them feel crowded and possibly overwhelming for the children. Work is required to ensure that play is consistent and makes full use of all indoor and outdoor spaces. There also needs

to be a focus on introducing age-appropriate activities for the older babies to develop greater independence and confidence and to prepare them for their move to Nursery Room. Makaton is used for some activities but should be more widely used to further support children with limited vocabulary.

CR reported that a member of staff has recently undertaken some additional Makaton training to widen Makaton use beyond storytelling. CR is exploring the possibility of baby room staff undertaking a higher-level Makaton qualification as part of their personal development.

Nursery Room – Children are happy and confident and have good bonds with staff. Language and communication skills are developed through circle time activities. Children who have English as an additional language are provided with additional resources and nursery room includes celebration of other cultures and cultural events within its activities. Learning records are completed and observations are carried out to monitor development.

The report identified that it would be beneficial to develop policies and processes around challenging behaviours and the setting of age-appropriate rules and boundaries. TWS raised an issue that had been brought to her by a few parents and carers around the use of “Time out”. There is some concern that parents did not know what was meant by this and whether that was appropriate. There was some concern that children had been made to sit in the office as a punishment. CR advised that this was not a principle she had seen used in Nursery and that she would not have children in the office for this reason. CF explained that she expects an approach that considers how a child may be impacted by any enforcement of rules and which supports development. LF advised that this had been used previously in the nursery but more consisted of children coming into the office to see Pauline and to have a cuddle and chat about behaviour as opposed to it being a punishment.

The report highlighted that supporting other cultures could be enhanced by using different languages in displays or in activities such as songs. There was also a recommendation to introduce more activities to enhance the children’s independence, such as getting the children to help prepare tables at mealtimes and to pour their own drinks.

Pre-School Room – Children build good and secure relationships with peers and the staff. Staff engage with children in an age-appropriate and meaningful way by having conversations with the children about the child’s life and experiences. Staff provide support to children who may require additional help with fine and gross motor skills. There is a variety of resources available for the children which cover the seven key areas of learning. Play and other activities are based on the children’s interests and past learning. Development observations take place and are recorded with learning journals being updated.

The report recommended changes to the environment including removing some of the tables and moving resources down from high shelves so that the room is more spacious and provides an environment the children will find stimulating and which they can more readily explore. It was also noted that greater independence could be fostered by involving the children more in routine tasks, such as preparing snacks, pouring drinks and clearing the tables after mealtimes.

CR spoke about changes that she has already made which relate to the report’s other recommendations. These have included the review and revision of the observations and recording processes to ensure that these are consistent for each child regardless of who their

key worker is. These observations need to be purposeful, and CR advised that there would be greater focus on what the development or learning outcomes are expected to achieve. CR reported that all staff had been shown what is expected of observations and how and when these should be completed. **Action: CR will have timetabled reviews and will be monitoring to ensure that these are completed. CR advised that she would also ensure that parents and carers know who their child's key person is and would send out communications setting out how the system works and arrangements for parent and carers to meet with key persons.**

CR noted that parents had raised concerns around the curriculum, with some having differing experiences with how this is explained to them and how they could gain access to Learning Journals. CR told the meeting that she was planning parents Evenings for all rooms to enable parents and carers to discuss their child's development and learning journey and that these would take place in the coming months. Learning journals can be taken from the Nursery but it is important that these are returned so that they can be maintained up to date. **Action: CR to organise Parents and Carers Evenings.**

CR advised that parents and Carers are now able to come into the Nursery at drop-off and pick-up. TWS and SS said that parents had welcomed this, and feedback was that people felt like they had a better feel for what their children were doing during the day by seeing the environment in person rather than through the window.

4. Parent and Carer Reps (issues not covered elsewhere in the meeting)

TWS said that parents and carers are keen to find out more about CR's leadership style and her wider plans for the Nursery. CR advised that she has been trying to be present for as many drop-offs and pick ups as possible to get to know parents but that she would also like get to know people and give them an opportunity to ask any questions that they might have. **Action: CR to organise a meeting with parents and carers regarding current and future changes.**

SS noted that the whiteboards outside rooms setting out activities that have been done that day are only present at the end of the day. This means that parents of children attending morning only sessions are less clear on what the children have been doing. SS asked if it would be possible for these to be also posted at the end of morning sessions. **Action: CR agreed that this would be easy to implement and will ask Room Leaders to provide updates for these parents.**

5. AOB

CY noted that we are currently one parent rep down. **Action: LF to send out letter to parents to invite nominations ahead of next meeting.**

6. Next meeting:

26th April 2024 – 09:30 to 11:00, Human Resources Meeting Room

