

The value of pre-school

Written by
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Hayley Pitt is the manager of Madley Pre-school and a DfE-accredited Early Years Professional. She used to be a childminder but now appreciates the motivation, support and learning she gets from working closely alongside other childcare professionals.

“Each individual in our team brings a unique strength or ability to the setting, allowing us to learn from each other,” says Hayley, who enjoys leading the team to provide the best outcomes for the children they care for.

Madley Pre-school is a values-based setting in Herefordshire. It is on the primary school site in its own purpose-built facility. They take care of children aged 2 to 4 and work closely with the primary school using the ICT facilities and extensive outdoor space, which includes a small forest, exploration garden, muddy mountain and large field.

A typical pre-school day

Pre-school begins with a daily staff planning meeting. Families are then invited into the setting with their children to allow a gentle transition. Staff and children come together for welcome time, where they greet each other and talk about a focus for the day. Following this they have an indoor/outdoor free flow period where staff observe and support the children’s learning.

“To extend their experiences from that morning, the children sit down with us to reflect on their play and the skills they have used,” explains Hayley. A period of relaxation comes next with a short meditation story before children either go home or stay for lunch. “In the afternoon I appoint a lead to continue the session while I carry out children’s assessments, add observations to the learning journeys and do general paperwork,” adds Hayley.

Hayley is enthusiastic about

her role with the children, “I love to watch children’s confidence grow as they begin to talk, build relationships and solve problems. Personal, social and emotional development is a huge focus for us.”

Values-based childcare

Madley Pre-school was awarded a Values Quality Mark alongside the primary school. Values-based education is about allowing the children to learn about themselves, and develop the skills they need for independent learning. The daily relaxation period is part of this and allows for reflection time for the children and staff.

Childcare professionals use language that nurture positive values such as respect, honesty,

compassion, trust and integrity. “We have a display board at the children’s height which demonstrates them using these values,” says Hayley. “It provides a great discussion point.”

Seeing children highly engaged in their play motivates Hayley. She says, “Their high level of fascination in the world around them is remarkable!” This is very much evident in the outdoor play that children experience at the pre-school.

Outdoor learning

“We are passionate about outdoor learning and believe that children need access to the natural light, fresh air and space that being outside provides,” explains Hayley.

Being outdoors gives the children the opportunity to be





more physical – promoting their fitness, energy levels and gross motor development, all of which are essential to children's health and creates a solid base for independent learning to develop.

Madley Pre-school's outdoor

space consists of a covered area to allow free flow in all weather conditions; they also provide children with all-in-one waterproof clothing. Hayley outlines the different areas available: "A barked area allows children to rake, dig, fill and empty wheelbarrows, and a mud area encourages children to search for worms, use large gardening tools and make mud sculptures." Logs are placed on the grassed area to encourage children to explore underneath for minibeasts. A camera and clipboards are available for children to record their learning.

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A log circle with a fire pit is used to teach the children forest school log circle rules. "We hope to raise money for forest school training so that we can build fires in the pit," says Hayley.

Working together

Hayley recognises that every child is an individual and some may benefit from a one-to-one relationship with a childcare professional, some from a group setting and some from a mixture of both. "As a childcare professional, I work closely with childminders as we both care for children who split their time with us. We also run parent/childminder sessions to discuss children's development and next steps."

Hayley appreciates the services that PACEY offers such as training and telephone advice, "Childcare professionals are often so busy that quick advice at the end of a phone line can be very helpful. I am very supportive of PACEY offering membership to nursery workers." ■

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VALUES EDUCATION

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