

Curriculum and Assessment Policy

August 2021

Our Vision

We provide time, space, resources and skilled, understanding, experienced staff who facilitate the development of our children and joy of childhood in a most holistic way. Our environment allows children to grow in all areas of their development and learning; a place where they can develop their innate inquisitiveness and that allows their natural curiosity to flourish whilst at the same time making magical memories.

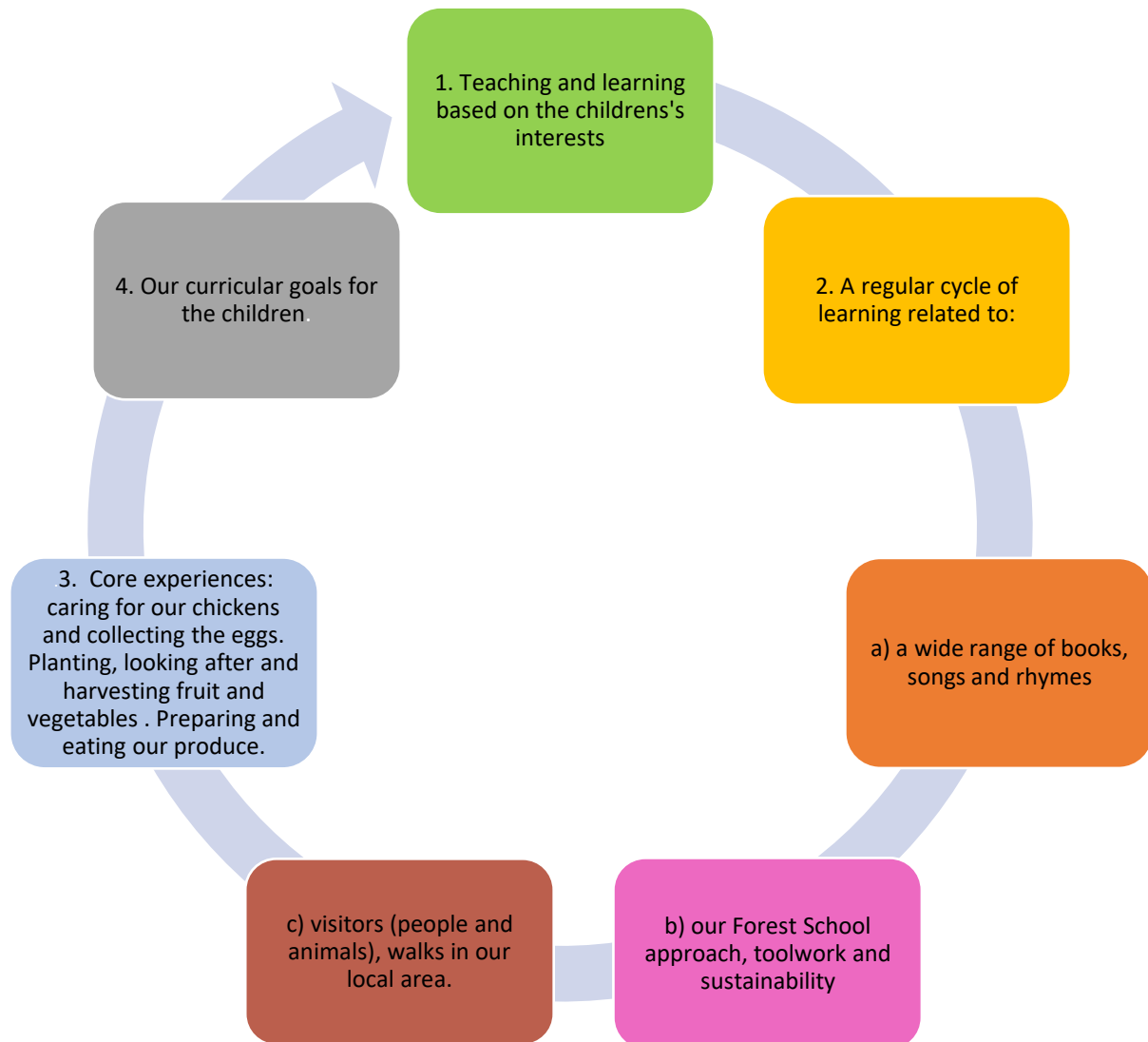
Whilst we take the children's lead and encourage them to follow their interests, we offer skills-based activities because we strongly believe that children deserve more! By working in this way, we can provide new, different and exciting experiences; things that the children may not have encountered before and to increase their cultural capital. Risk taking is embedded in our practice sparking joy and a pleasure in learning. By spending so much time outdoors the awe and wonder of the natural world runs through everything we do.

It is important to us that when children leave The Shepherd's Hut to start the next stage of their life they are **'ready'**. To us this means that they are confident, enthusiastic, independent and self-motivated little people ready for life in school. Our ethos encourages them to develop good social skills and empathy. Happy, polite, helpful and willing children who know that it's ok if things don't go right all the time and have the confidence to try again or just put it down to experience.

To sum up...we strive for children to leave us with a love of learning & confidence for life!

Curriculum Overview

We offer a high quality, diverse and balanced curriculum which has four main elements:



1. Teaching and learning based on the children's interests	All aspects of our curriculum require practitioners to be flexible and take account of the children's interests.
2. A regular cycle of learning	When we are building on children's interests, we are planning to broaden or deepen those interests.
3. Core experiences	<p>For example, we have a wide selection of books from very simple, repetitive texts to others that the children can progress onto over time, with more complex vocabulary and structure.</p> <p>In this way we ensure that children, from babies to school-starters have access to books and texts that are appropriate for them, and that meet the needs of each individual.</p>
4. Our curricular goals	

Learning at The Shepherd's Hut

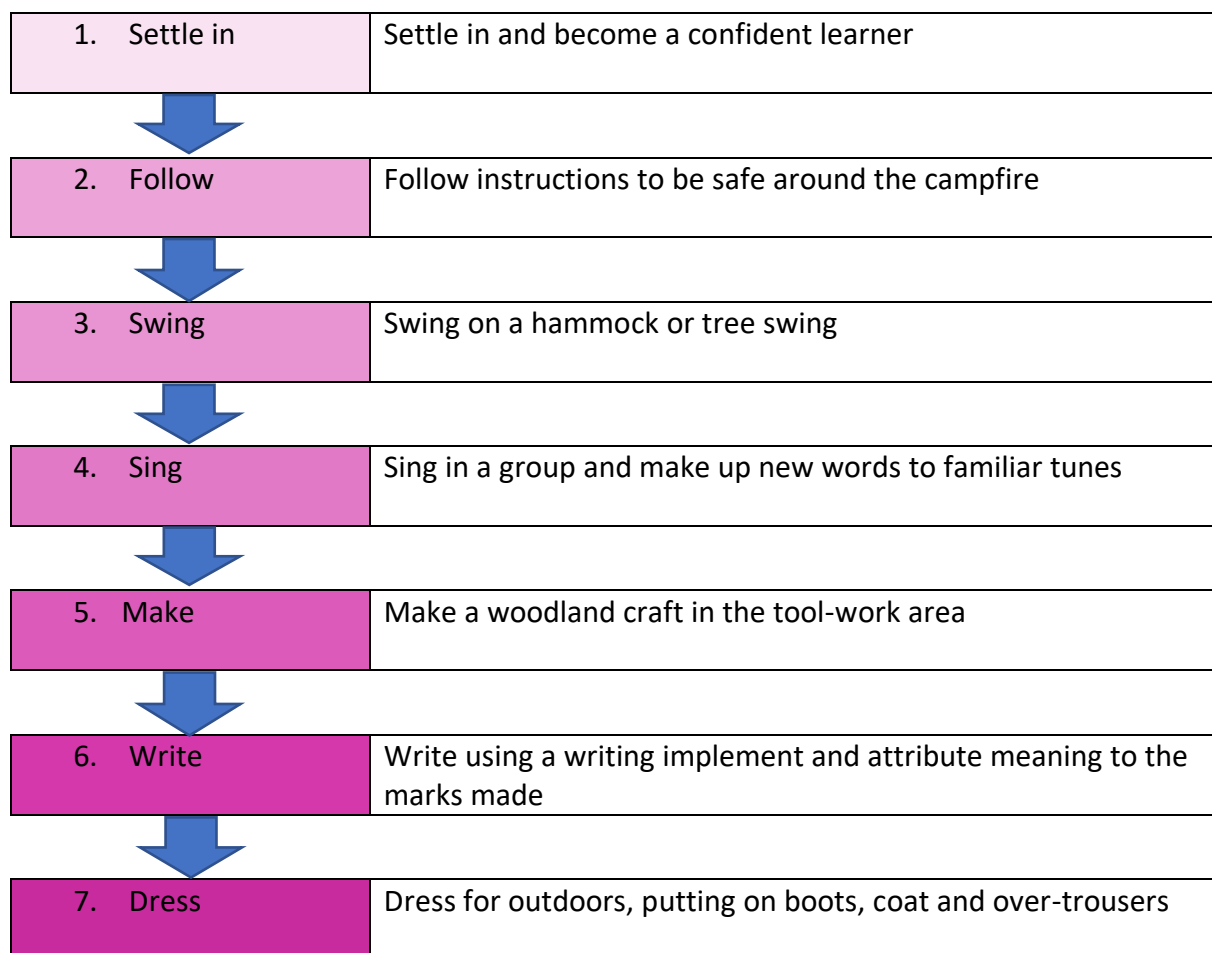
- The high majority is play-based and mainly takes place in the outdoor environment. Indoor areas provide opportunities for learning in extreme weather when we cannot be outside.
- There is a balance between child-initiated and adult-led experiences (guided learning).
- Adults take children's interests and strengths as a starting point, viewing each child as a competent learner.
- Parental involvement: We communicate with parents through face-to-face communication, regular meetings, on-line updates and use of social media. We also circulate a half-termly Newsletter to keep parents informed and supplement this with a wide range of useful information (copies of which can also be referred to on our website).

We designed our curriculum with the particular strengths and needs of the children in mind. For example, some of our children are bi-lingual: we celebrate the different languages they speak and staff have learnt some vocabulary which they use when interacting with children. We have learnt songs in those languages and share these with all children. In addition, we put a strong focus on helping children to learn English.

Our goals are ambitious. They provide an overview of many different things that we would like the children to know and be able to do.

The goals are adaptable and we offer scaffolding and extra support to help every child access our curriculum, and progress well. However, we recognise that not all children will progress at the same rate in all of the curricular goals.

Our 7 curricular goals



Our curricular goals have evolved over time, taking into account the views of parents, staff and management. We share these with parents throughout the year as part of our half termly newsletters. This helps parents to get involved and support their children's learning at home.

We regularly review the activities we offer and the resources we have available.

Case study of a child with SEND and our curricular goals

Adam was an energetic boy with a diagnosis of Autism. He particularly enjoyed our bubble machine; running round to pop the bubbles. Because of his difficulties, he could not remain focused on anything (other than the bubbles) for more than a minute or so. He did not engage with his peers and was very self-directed, sometimes pushing children out of the way or grabbing them. He often watched other children using the hammocks, but had no desire to have a go himself.

Through discussions with his parents, we discovered that he liked toys that made sounds and when playing with this type of toy at home his attention was considerably more focused. Together with his parents we decided that we would like to focus on curricular goal 3. We felt that this would be something that would help to develop his PSED as well as having physical benefits.

With support from SALT, communication between Adam and his key person improved and together they started to play with his favourite toys in the hammock area. This progressed on to Adam and his key person sharing a hammock whilst playing with the toys. Over time Adam asked to go in a hammock with his key person and even slept on her lap whilst in a hammock.

Adam now regularly goes over to the hammock area and will wait for one to become available rather than pushing other children out of the way or becoming upset. He still likes his key person to be with him, but he has achieved an exciting milestone in his PSED.

Planning and assessment

In the first term, the majority of our planning is focused on the three prime areas:

- personal, social and emotional development
- communication and language
- physical development.

Our staff spend time getting to know their key children and their families.

A trusting relationship helps children settle into nursery and grow in confidence in their new environment. Our assessment starts from meeting families at pre-starting visits, completion of an 'All About Me' form and a 5-Day settling-in.

5-Day assessments

We meet with parents after their child has attended 5 times with us, or later if the settling in period is prolonged. We discuss how their child has settled in and what we have observed. This is a snapshot of a child's starting points and is a joint assessment with the parents. We will refer to Development Matters to check the child's development in the three prime areas. In doing this we can discuss with parents how well their child is settling in and help notice children who may need extra help.

Next steps from the child's starting points are usually linked to how the children have settled in, or anything of significance e.g. toilet training. If children settle quickly and engage in a wide range of play during their first 5 attendances, there will be no need to set out 'next steps'.

Once children have settled and can access the nursery environment, we begin thinking with more detail about how they will access the curriculum and we support learning around their interests. For the children who settle quickly and are confident, especially who were with us in the previously, we can move into using the wider curricular goals quickly.

If we notice that a child might be having difficulties with their development, we will take action quickly. It is important to get to know and understand these 'vulnerable starters' so we will spend time observing them and reflecting on what we notice. We will continue to develop a strong relationship with their parents, supporting them to also give their child the extra help they need. The curriculum for these children will remain ambitious and inclusive. It is important that we focus on support, scaffolding and helping children overcome barriers to learning.

Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

For children with SEND, precise assessment needs to focus on what that child can do and what the barriers to their learning are. If a child has specific difficulties with their communication, for example, they may need specialist intervention. We work closely with outside agencies such as SALT to ensure key people have the necessary training and support in these areas. All children are entitled to the whole of the early years curriculum. Of course, they won't all manage to do and know everything that's mapped out, but some who appear vulnerable at first may thrive later in the year.

Rather than 'differentiating down', we endeavour to 'scaffold up' in our approach and commitment to inclusion. In this way, children with SEND are exposed to the concepts and skills in our wider curriculum and are not segregated from their peers.

What is 'scaffolding up'

There is always a difference between what a child can do independently and what they can then do with some support (known as Vygotsky's '[zone of proximal development](#)'). This is where scaffolding comes in, as it allows children to solve a problem or carry out a task that is beyond their current abilities.

We are there to build a bridge between a child's existing knowledge and their new knowledge. With the right level of support, they will achieve much more than they would without our help and of using that knowledge independently.

Traditionally, supporting children was all about telling a child how to do something until they got the knack of it. And of course, scaffolding may still require specific instructions from time to time. But in general, we now know that there are better ways to transfer knowledge down to small children including:

Hints -we help advance the children's performance, but without giving away too much

Suggestions – we offer a range of ways to complete an activity

Resources – we provide open-ended and authentic resources

Prompts – we 'wonder how?', 'wonder why?', 'wonder what?'

Model and demonstrate – we do this without 'telling' the children, then step back

Feedback – we provide appropriate support, feedback and encouragement

Questioning – we use open-ended questions

Scaffolding is how we provide support for children's learning in a way that is well-timed and well-matched to the situation and child: through observing, providing a suitable learning environment, guidance and feedback. Our aim is to promote success by supporting children's independent functioning. We want children to be interacting with their environment and the materials we provide, giving them opportunities to meet their own needs, solve their own problems, and make their own choices.

Assessment and tracking overview

We are not driven by assessment and tracking.

Assessment serves children's learning and our curriculum.

Most of our assessment is formative, so that it quickly helps us to make a difference to children's learning. However, we also need an overview of children's progress, so that we can take further actions where needed. We aim for our assessment system to be proportionate and not overly burdensome.

Activity	Key feature of the activity	Planned outcomes
AUTUMN TERM		
Settling-in assessment	Discussion with parents. Will include next steps in settling-in if needed	<p>Most children will have settled and be accessing the curriculum with appropriate scaffolding and support.</p> <p>Some children may be identified as needing additional help e.g. with language or other interventions.</p> <p>Some children will be referred to SENDCo to assess whether they have emerging needs.</p>
Two-year old check	This is integrated into the settling-in assessment.	This consists of a short report in the 3 core areas of the EYFS
Progress Meeting	<p>We meet with children's parents to celebrate their learning. We discuss and evaluate how we are working in partnership and agree on what we will do next. This is stated plainly and briefly, in the form of a SMART target that requires all parties to work together.</p> <p>This discussion may include any difficulties a child may be having and how we can work together to help the child overcome these.</p>	This discussion is central to our partnership approach. We ensure that parents are kept fully informed. We act in the best interests of every child. Our approach is open, honest, supportive and accountable.

Activity	Key feature of the activity	Planned outcomes
SPRING TERM		
Two-year old check	This is integrated into the settling-in assessment.	This consists of a short report in the 3 core areas of the EYFS
Progress Meeting	Meet with parents of any children who joined us after the Autumn Progress Meeting and any parents of children who have additional or emerging needs.	As Autumn term

Activity	Key feature of the activity	Planned outcomes
SUMMER TERM		
Two-year old check	This is integrated into the settling-in assessment.	This consists of a short report in the 3 core areas of the EYFS
Progress Meeting and summative feedback	Focus is on progress, access to the curriculum, and any barriers to learning identified and how these have been overcome.	This supports the child's transition to school.

Assessment and planning

One of the most powerful forms of assessment takes place in the here-and-now, not on-screen or in learning journals. This is when we notice something important about a child's learning and respond to it to help them build their learning. That response can take different forms. We might:

- stand back and be encouraging (watch, wait, wonder)
- get involved to extend learning, by joining in with the play, engaging in conversation, or showing the child a specific skill to help them accomplish what they want to do
- reflect afterwards and bring in new resources or plan something special in response to what we noticed

This type of assessment is not written down. It often focuses on our curricular goals. It shows how we can assess what children know and can do, and help them to progress through our minute-by-minute interactions.

Examples of assessment in the here-and-now

Sam was in the mud kitchen, mixing mud and water, stirring, pouring and dolloping. He said he was making a chocolate cake. His key person joined in play, being a customer in the 'café' and encouraged Sam to think about what other food might be available. She moved the chalkboard nearby and together they wrote a menu on it. The next day the adult set out old telephones, clip boards, takeaway menus and notebooks so that Sam and others could ring the café to place their order, encouraging them to note down their orders. This led to some emergent writing ... the children were now well on their way to achieving curricular goal 6.

Ellie was playing with wooden farm animals with focused attention. A practitioner wondered what the babies of various animals might be called and they had a long discussion about male, female and baby animals. The practitioner then put out several 'lifecycle' books including one about eggs and chickens, which the children shared and talked about. Later in the day the practitioner asked Ellie if she would like to check the hen house to see if there were any eggs. Together they collected the eggs and also checked the chickens had plenty of food and fresh water. This deepened Ellie's learning about animals and fulfilled one of our core experiences.

The focus of our assessment is on clear and specific things that a child needs to be able to do, or needs to know. In order to do this, practitioners need to know how the different elements of our curriculum fit together to help children build their learning over time. Reflective discussions about key children once they have gone home at the end of the day and during team meetings support this understanding.

Practitioners need to have a secure understanding of child development, as well as the features of effective pedagogy. This will help with judging when to get involved and when to encourage and knowing when to scaffold children's learning so that we support them without over-helping.

Some children will need more support and scaffolding to access the curriculum. This is one of the strengths at The Shepherd's Hut. We will notice what children can and can't do. We are good at deciding when it will be helpful to step in and support, and when it's best to be encouraging but hang back. It is important that we are certain that children are secure in what they know and can do, before introducing them something new.

Our curriculum must be balanced with learning that stems from the children's interests. Plans must be flexible and go with the children's fascinations. Children learn a huge amount through the play that they choose. We will help maximise this learning by making sure we provide a high-quality learning environment. We can then sensitively get involved and extend their play. It is important that we have a systematic approach to evaluating the quality of the environment and those interactions, so that we can build on what we do well while at the same time improve where we need to.

Feedback

The majority of our assessment of children's learning is done through feedback in the here-and-now, encouraging the children to think about what they are doing and why something may not be working how they would like it to. In this way children become more independent learners, which in turn supports their approach to managing their own learning when they go to school.

A practical example of this:

A child is trying to build a tower using blocks. It's wobbly and keeps falling down.

Practitioner says 'Oh no, it's fallen down. I wonder why that happened?' This encourages the child to think about why the tower has fallen down rather than continuing with the same strategy.

Child replies 'It's too wobbly!'

Practitioner responds 'I wonder why it's wobbly. Let's have a look at the shape of the blocks you've used.'

Whilst the child looks at the blocks, the practitioner talks to the child asking 'What do you think you need to do differently?'

If the child isn't sure, then the practitioner could model by building their own tower alongside the child. They can think out loud to model the process 'I need to make sure that I balance these blocks on top on one another to make my tower sturdy.'

The child builds a sturdy tower and the practitioner provides instant feedback by saying 'That is amazing. You took your time to look at the way you were placing the blocks and worked out that you needed similar shapes, and you kept trying until you build your tower.'

Feedback needs to be age appropriate and tailored specifically to the child: it should be kind, specific, helpful and related to the work, not the child.

Our 7 curricular goals

1. Settle in and become a confident learner	
Children make a strong relationship with their key person. Increasingly they separate confidently from their parent at the start of the session and become involved in play. They use their key person as a 'secure-base' to return to during the session as and when necessary.	<p>Where children need individualised and additional help this will be offered promptly. Help may include: an individual meeting with parents to plan a way forward.</p> <p>As children grow in confidence, their involvement in our activities deepens. They explore a wider range of available resources and play for longer periods of time. They play collaboratively alongside their friends and develop their play.</p>
Children take part in play, communicating and negotiating with their friends.	As children's engagement and perseverance grows, they either challenge themselves with more difficult activities, or they respond positively to adults challenging them.
Children persevere with difficulties. They show pleasure and pride in what they have done.	As children play and learn more collaboratively, over longer time period and taking part in more challenging activities, they talk about and reflect on their learning.
Children become more confident with adults and peers. They are able to ask for help and communicate their thoughts, needs and ideas.	

2. Follow instructions to be safe around the campfire

Children will be introduced to the fire circle

Children will be introduced to the fire circle area and an adult will explain what the fire circle is and why it is there.

The children will be encouraged to share their ideas about what the dangers might be when a fire is lit.

The children will help to set rules to keep everyone safe in this area.

Children learn our fire circle song, talk about and follow safety rules during singing times in this area

During singing and signing the children will learn our 'fire circle song' to help them remember the rules and about keeping safe.

As the children become more familiar with this, they will sit around the fire circle for singing and at other times.

Children have repeated experience at the fire circle. They know how to keep safe

Once everyone is happy that the children know how to be safe in this area and have demonstrated that they can safely follow the rules and fire will be lit. There will be plenty of adults to support the children.

Children can independently enter the fire circle when invited in by an adult, perhaps to help with the fire or to do cooking. Children understand the need for rules and can follow instructions.

3. Swing on a hammock or tree swing

Children sit on a swing or hammock

Children are supported by adults to sit on a swing or hammock. If unsure they are shown how to hold on in the most effective way.

Balancing on a swing can strengthen the core. Holding the rope of a swing strengthens grip and finger co-ordination.

Children can use legs and body to create movement. Children help each other by pushing other swingers

As children's confidence grows, they start to pump their legs to create movement on the swing or hammock.

Pushing others, pumping legs to gain height and jumping out of swings all aid locomotion, balance and co-ordination.

Children confidently swing themselves

Swinging helps with sensory integration: spatial awareness, inner ear balance and gives the child's brain practice at organising and interpreting spatial information.

Children are confident to try twisting and untwisting on swings. This stimulates important pathways in the brain for balance, muscle control and rhythm.

Children can confidently and safely use a swing or hammock. They help their friends by pushing them or helping them in/out of hammocks, or on/off a swing.

4. Sing in a group using signs and actions

Children sit around the fire circle with others

Children are supported when first sitting around the fire circle. Younger children with high adult ratio.

Children hear and begin to learn songs, some may be familiar to develop confidence, some new.

Singing is led by an adult and children learn words to new songs as well as revisiting familiar ones.

Children join in singing and add signs/actions as modelled by the adults

As children develop confidence, actions or signs are incorporated and the children supported in joining in.

Some words from other languages are included in familiar songs. And songs from other cultures are included.

Children use a number of percussion instruments collected from around the world.

Children join in enthusiastically with singing and signing. They have the confidence to solo if they wish, request their own songs and make up new words to familiar tunes.

5. Make a woodland craft in the tool-work area

Children explore using tools such as scissors, fruit cutters and kitchen implements (wooden spoons, whisks)

With adult support children learn how to use these tools correctly and understand their use. Children start to understand how to use these tools safely and are supported to do so by adults. Children use implements in the mud kitchen, mixing, stirring, pouring.

They assist in the preparation of fruit snacks using a range of cutting implements.

They use scissors to cut paper or large leaves.

Children confidently use tools to create changes in materials e.g. use a vegetable peeler to peel carrot

As children grow in confidence, they are introduced to woodwork tools and are shown how to use these safely. They use tools with adult support e.g. hammering nails into lengths of soft wood, sawing or splitting wood.

Children are introduced to other tools including a 'bit & brace' hand drill and mallet

With support children use the tools to drill a hole through a circular disc of wood (tree cookie). They then thread a string through the hole and decorate their work.

With support children use a mallet to create their own hapa zome design on fabric.

They have an idea of what they want their tree cookie and hapa zome to look like.

Children decide on the materials they want to use and use the appropriate tools. They design their tree cookie and arrange flowers and leaves for their own hapa zome design.

6. Write using a writing implement and attribute meaning to the marks made	
Children explore our outdoor environment including climbing, swinging, running, jumping and balancing, mixing, stirring and pouring	Children are supported in their physical development engaging in a wide range of opportunities to develop fine and gross motor skills, co-ordination, balance, strength (pre-writing skills).
Children engage in mark making using materials such as cornflour & water, sand and playdough.	<p>We take advantage of the weather conditions to encourage mark making. This can include: using a stick in mud, snow or frost, paintbrushes and water, shadows in the sun.</p> <p>Other opportunities include puddle jumping and making track marks with wheelbarrows.</p>
As they progress children use mark making implements such as paintbrushes, chalk, crayons and pencils.	<p>We provide children with a wide range of resources and support to develop children's mark making skills.</p> <p>Authentic resources encourage 'writing for a purpose' e.g. vintage telephones to encourage 'message taking' and old typewriters for letter recognition.</p>
Children have developed core strength, as well as muscle tone in fingers, wrists, arms and shoulders to enable them to hold and control a writing implement. They can make marks and attribute meaning to the marks they make.	

7. Dress for outdoors, putting on boots, coat and over-trousers

Children understand why outdoor clothes are needed

Adults talk to children about the weather on any given day and through the seasons. We talk about the layers we might wear and the order that clothes go on. It is important to think about keeping warm and dry, but also cool and protected from the sun.

Children help when putting outdoor layers on

Adults support children, helping and demonstrating methods & techniques that make putting outer layers on easier ie the order of dressing

Children are able to put their coat on unaided. They can do the zip with minimal support

We set children up for success ie by holding the bottom of the zip for them to pull zip up. This allows them to finish the job, be independent and develop their self-esteem

Children can put on their own coat, trousers and boots. They help their friends.