Barnfields Primary School

Challenge Strategy

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At Barnfields, we are committed to providing challenge for ALL learners and that includes more able learners. We implement a pedagogy of listening and observing, alongside formal assessment in order to identify children's unique gifts and talents. We recognise that high-ability learners demonstrate observable characteristics e.g. curiosity, agile thinking and high motivation and look for these through our interactions. High ability is made up of three elements: above-average intelligence, high levels of task commitment and high levels of creativity (Renzulli, 2011) and we look for children who are highly achieving in all three elements.

We believe that a crucial pedagogical strategy for these learners is cognitive challenge. Offering suitable challenges prompts learners to move beyond their comfort zones, helping them to tap into their full potential and achieve new levels of success.

We have identified 5 key ingredients we use to provide challenge within our setting.

INDEPENDENT LEARNING

Our indoor and outdoor learning environments provide opportunities for challenge by promoting active independent learning. Children access resources independently and take a lead in their own learning enquires. Resources are regularly added to encourage children to deepen their learning and conditions for rich play are provided. A strong emotional learning environment is crucial for all children, including more able children, helping them to build resilience and self-esteem, become confident and independent learners, make decisions, engage in new and unfamiliar experiences, and feel safe enough to take risks in their learning. Each week, children complete three tasks in their independent learning log, giving them responsibility for their learning and promoting a real sense of purpose in their play. More complex activities are labelled as a 'challenge' and more able children are directed to engage with them.

ADAPTIVE TEACHING

As a school, we use adaptive teaching methods to tailor our Curriculum to meet the needs of our children. For the more able children this will include adapted tasks which may be more open ended or require using more abstract concepts or ideas. During teaching sessions, the level of questioning will be targeted to the ability of the children.

DEEPEN THE MOMENT

During maths lessons, children's mathematical development in Reception is stretched and widened by the use of 'deepen the moment' challenges. These extension activities are carefully planned to provide opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of maths concepts rather than providing more of the same questions.

PHONICS AND READING GROUPS

Using our phonics assessments and progression mapping, children are split into ability groups for reading and phonics. This allows the higher ability children to work at a faster pace during their sessions, spending less time reviewing the GPCs and more time applying their knowledge through reading more complex words, building fluency and applying their phonic knowledge in their writing by spelling more complex words and writing sentences.

HIGH ORDER INTERACTIONS

Through our constant professional dialogue, all staff know children in the setting really well and use this knowledge to tailor their positive interactions with children. For more able children this will involve higher order questioning, asking them to explain their answers, encouraging them to make links in their learning and form their own opinions. The vocabulary and grammatical structure of the language will be more complex in interactions with these children and instructions given to them will involve several steps to be carried out in a certain sequence.