

Q: What is Spontaneous Planning or In the Moment Planning (ITMP)?

A: We have high expectations for every child; we believe that children are inquisitive and primed to learn and so our planning system is designed to harness this. We focus on the child, in a quality not quantity manner, as our experience shows that structuring activities with the individual in mind is very powerful. In essence, this means that we base our activities each week around one or two children – focusing on what they are currently learning interested in.

‘Planning in the moment’ means that we don’t have topics, as we literally ‘plan in the moment’! We work with whatever interest the Focus Child is showing, then extend the interest and engagement throughout the week. The theory behind this method is that young children are pre-programmed to learn, so we use their interests to lead the way and ensure we cover the whole of the early years curriculum.

Q: Why is ITMP ‘good’? What’s the big deal?

A: Children change their interests in a moment, and we need to be poised and ready to change pace and direction at the same time. We believe there is no point in planning to cover dinosaurs in 3 weeks’ time; we don’t know what the children will be interested in. Our experience tells us it’s better to let the children set the agenda and pace. As we’ve said, children are inquisitive and primed to learn. We therefore take our lead from the child and continually help / teach / support / harness this natural inquisitory to help the children grow and develop.

During your child’s ‘Focus Week’, we sensitively set up activities that will interest and support them. In this way the range of activities and experience is almost limitless as it is tailored to the individual. It is done in a relaxed manner; your child may not even know they are our focus (that would be ideal as it should feel as natural as possible). The adults aren’t with the Focus Child all of the time, and so this works in a fluid, intuitive manner. Non-Focus children can choose to join in with planned activities if they are interested, or play with the other children and the rich variety of toys and resources we have on offer in the room and garden.

Q: How often is each child a ‘focus’?

A: We plan for every child at least once a term. This means that we take one or two children, called the ‘Focus Children’, in each room and focus on them for the whole week, structuring activities based on their interests to try and help them make the leap to their next stage of learning.

Q: What is my role in this?

A: The week before your child is our focus, we will ask for your thoughts on your child’s learning and development on a Parent Planning Form. You will be sent an email the week before. Please complete the form as fully as possible to update us with what you have noticed your child doing and share photos and video in Family.

This form should only take 5 – 10 minutes to complete. Please just give us a snapshot of what your child seems to be interested in, curious about, persistent with at home and let us know if you have any questions or concerns too, so that we can be mindful of these over the course of the week.

The feedback provided by you will then be used in conjunction with any observations you have previously entered onto the Family app, to provide us with a base to plan for the week ahead.

At the end of the focus week you meet with your Key Person and discuss your child and their learning, plan the next steps and also explore ideas for learning at home. We are offering these late mornings during the pandemic on Zoom.

Q: Why can't we meet at the end of the day?

A: During the pandemic we have decided not to run out parent focus meetings at the end of the day. This is so that we can try to get the children home quickly both to minimise waiting times for you at the gate and also to help with social distancing.

Q: Why didn't you follow what I said my child was interested in?

A: We use the parent planning form to get a picture of what the child is doing at home and so help to paint an overall picture of your child. We combine this with our own observations of your child and then what your child is actually interested in during the week. As we follow your child's lead, the result might mean that you cannot see any link or connection with your answers on the planning form.

Q: I asked a question on the planning form but you didn't cover it in my meeting

A: We are sorry if a question does slip our mind. If during the course of your meeting with your key person any questions aren't answered, please just remind your key worker.

Q: How often will I get observations from you on Family?

A: The way we plan, results in the majority of our observations being made during your child's focus week. If your child is observed doing something new outside of this week however, this will always be captured and loaded onto Family (if you have given permission for group observations, you may also see some group observations too)! We always have our eyes open and agree with Ofsted guidance that record keeping should be kept to a minimum. Excessive periods of paperwork on our part would mean prolonged breaks in our interaction with your child; therefore, please do not be alarmed when most of our observations fall during your child's Focus Week (especially so as your child gets older and age brackets widen).

Q: How do I get to see observations on Family?

A: You can access our observations on your child at any time using Family.

If you need any guidance on accessing or reading the information, there are lots of helpful guides. We can also be on hand if needed too.

Q: How often will I get photographs of my child?

A: In the first couple of weeks, as your child is settling into nursery, we will send you more pictures to reassure you all is well. We will also shortly run a focus week on your child, to get to know them better. This results in a flurry of photographs to start off with. This then settles down.

We tend to take one main photograph for the day and load this onto Family. This captures what most of the children were interested in. Your child might not be in this photograph. It is used to 'paint a picture' of what the children were doing that day. It is important for us to balance how many photographs we are taking. We want to be playing with, and teaching the children, and when we are behind our tablets, we can't do this.

It is important to note that sometimes your child might be on another child's photograph, but not as the primary child, that may be used in another child's learning journey. Also, in group observations they will be loaded onto a number of children's accounts. This means that parents can comment on the photograph and you will see these, much like you would on a private social media group or feed.

Just in the same way that it is great for you to see photos of your child at nursery, we find it just as helpful to see your at play and learning at home, so please do keep loading your photos up. It is also a great way to celebrate everyone's family and our uniqueness as individuals.

Q: What about the children who aren't a focus? Are they still learning?

A: Children learn through play; in fact they are biologically primed and created to play, and play, and play. Nursery is perfect for this as the children will either play in small groups with other children; in pairs; or by themselves. We have lots of toys and equipment out for the children to play with but so much more than that; we know that we are the 'biggest' resource that a child will ever have. Whilst we are busy with the Focus Child, we aren't all on top of them all day so there is plenty of time, care and attention for all of the children where we are able to join their play and learning. We also know if we have helped to set something up that is interesting and engaging for the focus child that other children will be keen to join in this too! And so the learning and play cycle continues.

Q: How do I know what my child has been doing all day when they are not the focus?

A: We tend to take one main photograph for the day and load this onto Family. This captures what most of the children were interested in. Your child might not be in this photograph. It is used to 'paint a picture' of what the children were doing that day. It is important for us to balance how many photographs we are taking. We want to be playing with, and teaching the children, and when we are behind our tablets, we can't do this.

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Q: I've got some concerns about my child, what should I do?

A: Every parent has concerns about their child from time to time, its only natural. If you do have concerns about your child's development, want some advice or maybe behaviour is an issue or you've just got some niggling doubts about something, then running a focus week is often a good place to start. Please just drop us a message on Family and we will add it into our plan. There is a certain amount of fluidity about who is picked and when, and so by letting the room team know the Room Manager can forward plan. In the meantime, we will also look to find out more about the issues that are troubling you.

Q: How can I find out more about ITMP?

A: We run a parent talk on the way that we work usually twice a year, to coincide with when many families start with us. This is in September and then either in January or March. If we haven't highlighted our next talk, please let us know if you are interested so that we can put you in the invites list.