



What makes Grindleford and Eyam Playgroup special?

A guide to our educational approach

"Every child deserves the best possible start in life and support to fulfil their potential. A child's experience in the early years has a major impact on their future life chances". Early Years Foundation Stage 2012

What is our approach?

Grindleford and Eyam Playgroup is a rural Peak District Pre-school which provides a forward-thinking, unhurried and playful approach to early learning. We draw on a wealth of best practice in early years care and aim to help children develop the skills and experience they need to make the most of their early years in school.

We recognise parents as the first and most important educators of their children. All of our staff see themselves as co-workers with you in providing the best possible care and education for your child. We foster the individuality of each and every child, meeting them where they are and helping them to develop at the right pace for them. The most important part of our job is to love each and every child who walks through our door, to support them and their families, and to make sure that they love coming to a pre-school which resounds with fun, love and laughter.

Because of this, we don't follow any particular philosophical approach to early years childcare. We're not dogmatic and we don't accept things without question. Like a parent, what we do, we do because we believe it allows us to provide the best care and learning opportunities for the children in our care. To help us do this, we have eight core principles that we apply every day:

1. We believe that children learn best through play
2. We prepare children for school, but we don't mimic school
3. We promote child-led free play as an essential part of children's learning
4. We balance free play with focused, structured adult-led group learning
5. We believe that children should be engaged, not occupied, at pre-school
6. We provide experiences which are meaningful to our children
7. We manage behaviour positively
8. We value outdoor play as a vital childhood experience

Our approach is rooted in the Government's 2012 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS 2012) and was welcomed in our recent Ofsted report: *"Staff get to know individual children well ... so that they know how to respond and support them in their individual learning and development ... Children are making good progress in their learning and development"*.

This leaflet helps explain in more detail what we think is special about Grindleford and Eyam Playgroup's approach to pre-school education.



Grindleford and Eyam Playgroup

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We believe that children learn best through play.

"Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others."
EYFS 2012

Play is a human right: *"Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts."* UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The value of learning through play for pre-school children has been shown through decades of research and now underpins the whole of the Early Years Foundation Stage. *"In their play children learn at their highest level. Play with peers is important for children's development."* Key Elements of Effective Practice, DfES, para 4.1.

Many pre-schools value learning through play but in reality the traditional, highly directive teaching methods are still very prevalent. At Grindleford and Eyam Playgroup, we apply our child-led principle across the board: whatever development goals we identify for your child, we pursue through playful activity rather than through instruction. Our approach to learning is to treat the children in our care as plants to be nurtured rather than buckets to be filled.

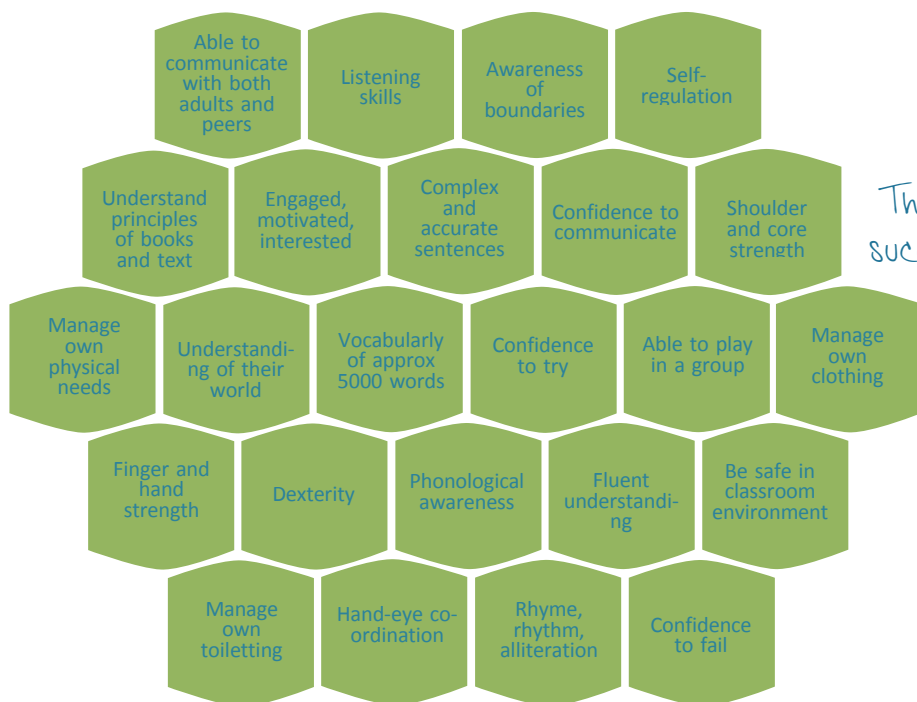
Whether at Forest School, at our allotment or in the Pavillion, we foster an environment in which children can achieve the kind of play where they light up with the joy of what they are doing, where they play for extended periods of time, where they are imaginative and creative and where they disappear into a world they have created.

We prepare children for school, but we don't mimic school.



This stage of a child's education is called the Foundation Stage for good reason. The new EYFS sets out the foundational skills a child needs in order to succeed in school, from finger strength to listening skills (see diagram below). It doesn't take many of these skills to be missing before those foundations start to look shaky, which can lead to children struggling to make progress later on through school.

So our aim is to prepare your child as thoroughly as possible for school. To do this we focus on the three Prime areas identified by the 2012 EYFS – language and communication skills, physical development and social and emotional development. For example, we help nurture a curiosity for emergent writing amongst our children, but we also help our children to develop core stability (giving them the strength to sit at a desk for extended periods in school), fine motor control and finger strength (allowing them to hold a pen and manipulate it to form letter shapes), and a large vocabulary. These vital pre-literacy skills form the foundations of children's later success in the classroom.



The foundational skills a child needs to succeed in the classroom, EYFS 2012



We promote child-led free play as an essential part of children's learning.

We always start the day with a long period of free play, which is child-led with only carefully considered minimal intervention by adults, who focus on the craft table and reading corner. As well as helping the children to settle in to the pre-school day, sustained child-led free play provides opportunities for superbly rich, imaginative role play.

Imaginative or 'socio-dramatic' play enables children to process experiences, practise skills and rehearse situations; negotiate, create and explain; explore their world and the worlds of others; and develop communication and social skills with their peers.

The environment that we provide supports truly child-led play by offering a wealth of open-ended play resources – from conkers and pine cones to crates, clothes horses and cloths. These non-directive resources allow the children to tell the stories that are happening in their lives that day, rather than an arbitrary theme imposed on them by adults.

Creating their own props also encourages children to be more creative, imaginative and resourceful – skills that research has shown support not only academic success, but better outcomes in all aspects of adult life.

We balance free play with focussed, structured, adult-led group learning.



Our routine provides vital daily moments of structured adult-led group activity in the form of circle time, snack time and story time, which are carefully planned and varied to help to develop children's concentration and listening skills, and start to prepare them for formal schooling.

During circle time, we help the children develop their phonological awareness through songs, rhymes and simple listening games. Music has a vital role to play in the early acquisition of language and these activities build key pre-literacy skills for the children, delivering the preschool phase of the Government's synthetic phonics programme 'Letters and Sounds'.

Snack time follows a familiar routine each day. A group of children work as a team to prepare the food and the table. A moment of quiet is signaled by the ringing of a bell and the lighting of a candle. All the children sing grace and wish each other 'bon appetit' before beginning to eat. We use china cups and plates, which the children treat with great respect.

Although we read lots of books with individual children or small groups, the group story time at the end of a session is often an oral story with props or puppets, and is repeated every day for a week. This allows children to understand and imitate the mechanics and language of story, and become confident in their abilities as story-tellers. They learn to sequence events and make predictions: key pre-literacy skills that will play a vital role in their later development as fluid readers and writers.



We believe that children should be engaged, not occupied, at pre-school.

Our activities and resources are carefully planned in order to ensure that our children are genuinely engaged, inspired and motivated to learn. Only then can our children flourish: developing their imagination, creating, solving problems, negotiating social scenarios and communicating with their peers.

As part of this, we work hard to create a calm and harmonious environment for the children which, in turn, encourages them to concentrate and engage in their play in a sustained fashion. A predictable, structured routine with periods of high and low energy also ensures that the children know what to expect from their time with us. This familiarity gives the children the security and confidence that they need to engage and experiment with their play.

We provide experiences which are meaningful to our children.



As children grow and develop, their experiences expand and their ability to understand the world increases. A pre-school child's experience is very limited, so they learn best and internalise what they have learnt most effectively through tangible experiences, and through doing, rather than through being told. We prioritise learning through doing – from developing pre-numeracy skills through the measuring and weighing of ingredients to make soup, to exploring engineering with an apple press, to encountering natural processes and rhythms and understanding the importance of healthy eating through tending an allotment.



We manage behaviour positively.

We believe that children should be offered a calm, predictable and positive social environment which enables them to remain happy, engaged and responsive at pre-school. Familiar routines mean that children are prepared for changes in activities, and these changes are signified in a gentle way, for example by the use of songs. Adults provide clear boundaries and demonstrate their high expectations of the children's social capability. One of the important ways that pre-school children learn is through imitation; adults strive to make their own interactions worthy of this.

To engage children's co-operation, rather than focussing on the behaviours that we don't want to see ("Don't run!"), we concentrate on what we do want children to do ("Use walking feet!"). Adults often give children a choice of two options: "Would you like to put your gloves on first, or your coat?".

We believe that it is important for young children to begin to learn how to manage more difficult social situations, and develop confident, positive strategies to assert themselves. We provide children with the phrases that they need, but encourage them to practice these interactions. Eg: Child A to adult: "Child B is chasing me!", Adult: "Well you can say 'Stop! I don't want to play that game, thank you'", Child A to Child B: "Stop! I don't want to play that game". Child B will usually listen and respond to this kind of peer-to-peer interaction. With repetition, children will begin to use these positive assertions independently, and manage conflicts autonomously.

We value outdoor play as a vital childhood experience.



The outdoor environment plays a vital role in children's development and the 2012 EYFS now requires that all pre-schools provide daily opportunities for quality experiences in the outdoors.

During our daily outdoor play, the children work on our community allotment, go for walks in the village, play in the churchyard, run around on the playing fields and hard courts, climb on the primary school's trim trail and explore local woodland during our Forest School.

For many years, research has shown that regular play outside is vital for children's health, well-being and learning because:

- outdoor play inspires different movement from indoor play which is vital in giving children the core stability they need for sitting at a desk
- the air outside has a 25% higher concentration of oxygen than inside, promoting brain function
- the outdoor environment provides greater freedom and fewer physical boundaries, promoting risk-taking and boosting confidence levels
- children gain a sense of liberation and develop increased attention spans when they have the room to be noisy, messy and active on a larger scale
- the outdoors is an unpredictable, dynamic environment and as such it provides opportunities to experience, develop and manage emotions

In addition to this, we ensure that during our free play time in the mornings, children are able to let their play flow seamlessly between our well-resourced indoor and outdoor spaces: this enables them to develop their ideas and learning without unnecessary interruption. We take great pride in the quality of our children's outdoor learning and believe it is the quality of their experience and the enthusiastic and engaged attitude of our adults as well as the range of equipment they have access to which turns it into such a valuable learning opportunity.