



Toucan – Specialist Provision for Two Year Olds

Rationale

Toucan is a specialist childcare setting for children aged two years who are coping with a range of challenges to their health and/or development.

Our belief that early intervention is important is based on research showing that this sort of early provision can provide best outcomes for children and also avoid some problems from occurring e.g. postural problems.

Staff in Toucan are experienced in working with young children with a range of special needs. They include a teacher and level 3 LSA who have specialist knowledge of early child development.

Provision

We are fortunate to be based at Willow Dene School which allows us to share both expertise and also training and research opportunities to enhance our knowledge and skills. This has a positive impact on our work with children attending Toucan. This includes areas such as the MOVE programme, specialist equipment such as the AKKA platform and the Medi-Bike, sensory processing, music therapy and specialist technology, all of which helps inform our assessment of children.

Working with families

In Toucan, we are committed to working closely with families to achieve the best outcomes for each child. Building strong, trusting relationships helps us understand what each child enjoys, what supports their learning and what families value most in their child's life.

Families are welcome to spend as much time with us as they wish, particularly while their child is settling. We listen sensitively to families' experiences and follow their lead in sharing information, building relationships gradually with compassion and flexibility. Many families have faced challenging circumstances, including long hospital stays and we work closely with therapists and medical professionals to ensure support is joined-up and consistent. Toucan families also have access to a dedicated Family Support Worker through Willow Dene School.

Families are an integral part of our community. Time spent in class allows families to meet one another, share experiences and receive support. We also offer individual family sessions and home visits, helping us tailor activities and strategies that can be continued at home. This includes communication supports, routines and practical play ideas to support learning and development.

We celebrate each child's achievements with families, using observations, photos and conversations to highlight progress and plan next steps.

Enabling Environments and Positive Relationships

Toucan offers rich and motivating play experiences that build on each child's strengths and interests, helping them develop to their full potential. Each child is supported by a key adult, providing a sense of security and trust with someone beyond their family.

We want every child to feel comfortable, secure and loved. Our staff use a calm and gentle approach, supporting children as they gradually gain independence, form friendships, and learn to enjoy, explore, and play. By offering play experiences at the right developmental level, with just the right amount of support and consideration for each child's preferences and learning style, we create an environment where children feel safe, confident, and able to make meaningful progress.

A child attending Toucan is offered 2 full days each week from 8:15-3:45. This enables them to access a full day of provision and to mitigate against any travel that the family needs to do. The longer days allow families to have some respite from their care demands.

Toucan has an entrance separate from the school and is a self-contained unit including a play area, outside play space, toilet area and storage areas for big equipment and toys.

Children attending Toucan are also able to access a sensory room, ball pool, sensory garden, magic carpet and warm water pool which are all part of Willow Dene and on site. These experiences enrich each child's experience and enhance learning.

A unique child

In Toucan, we recognise that when a child feels comfortable and well, they are best able to focus on the rich learning experiences we provide. This can be particularly challenging for children who are unwell, experience pain or have difficulties with feeding or sleeping. Such challenges can have a profound impact on both the child and their family, often causing high levels of stress and concern.

We work closely with families to support them as they navigate these issues. This may include liaising with medical professionals, attending appointments, monitoring medication, using specialist equipment and working alongside therapists. We also participate in on-site clinics, such as those for feeding and dietetics. In Toucan, aspects of a child's daily life that may once have felt overwhelming, such as specialist feeding or administering medication, are shared and supported within a caring, collaborative environment.

Listening and giving time are at the heart of what we do. Our children are very young, and families are often still in the early stages of understanding and coming to terms with their child's needs. Many families have experienced long hospital stays, and the demands of 24-hour care can be exhausting. For some, the first year to 18 months of their child's life may have been especially turbulent, with the main focus on stabilising their child's health and medical needs.

In Toucan, we celebrate and share every child's enjoyment and achievements. These special moments are captured through conversations, observations, photos, videos, home contact books, and home visits. As we get to know each child, we work with families to build continuity between home and school, sharing practical ideas such as creating a play area at home or using communication supports like touch cues, objects of reference, signing or picture symbols. We often help families put together practical resources, such as packs of objects of reference, and demonstrate how to use them to support communication and understanding.

Safeguarding and Welfare

Toucan offers a high adult-to-child ratio to ensure both safety and meaningful support for learning. During some sessions, two adults work with a child, allowing one to engage directly while the other observes closely. This careful observation helps us understand each child's responses and plan their next steps effectively. When video is used, it enables us to review and discuss the child's interactions in more detail, ensuring our planning is informed and responsive. We recognise that children's progress can be subtle, and that they often need many opportunities to practise and consolidate new skills.

Safeguarding and welfare are our highest priorities. Toucan operates within the established safeguarding policies of Willow Dene School and follows the government's statutory guidance. Staff training is updated annually.

Learning and Development

We use the Early Learning Goals with particular focus on the prime areas

- Personal, Social and Emotional development
- Communication and Language
- Physical Development

Because many of our children have very complex learning needs the goals at the earliest levels have been looked at in more detail to recognise smaller steps of progress. The characteristics of effective early learning help us to consider how individual children learn.

- Playing and exploring
- Active learning
- Creating and thinking critically

The specific areas enhance and enrich learning experiences

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the world
- Expressive arts and design

As a team, we reflect carefully, together with families and therapists, to consider what approaches and experiences will have the greatest positive impact on each child's learning and development. For some children, this may mean providing frequent, visually stimulating activities designed to develop skills such as fixing and tracking. Strengthening visual awareness and control can benefit many other areas of learning and engagement. For another child, the focus might be on exploring specialist equipment that supports comfortable sitting and helps with postural control. Improved positioning can enhance head control, relaxation, and the ability to use their hands purposefully.

We recognise the importance of giving children ample time to respond, process, and show us what they are able to do. By being patient and observant, we can truly understand each child's unique abilities and provide the right support at the right time. Feedback with families is ongoing. A written summary of a child's progress is written for families. This may also form part of the child's EHC plan if appropriate. Where possible, links are made with the child's health visitor.

We provide support for families as their child prepares to move on to their next setting. This may include visiting the new setting alongside families and ensuring that clear, detailed information is shared to support a smooth transition. We also warmly welcome visits from staff in receiving settings so that they can get to know the child, observe their routines, and understand how best to meet their needs.