



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

# Standards, Quality and Improvement Plan for Cowgate under 5s Centre

*"We want to do what we want to do and we want it to be fair"  
(Heidi, Lorcan and Fraser)*

We do not inherit the world from our parents; we borrow it from our children.  
*(Native American Saying)*

Standards and Quality Report for session: 2016-2017  
Improvement Plan for session: 2017-2018

'If we are constantly astonished at the child's perceptiveness, it means we do not take them seriously' (Janusz Korczak, Joseph, 1999).

## Context of the Setting

**Include some or all of the following:** centre vision, value and aims; local contextual issues; factors affecting children's achievements (E.g. staffing changes/issues)

<b>Locality: South-East</b>		
<b>Level of teacher input: 17.5 hours per week, term time only.</b>		
<b>Total number of children 3-5 = 54 (10/7/2017)</b>	<b>Total number of children 0-3 = 33 (10/07/2017)</b>	

Brief Introduction to Cowgate under 5s Setting:

Cowgate offers a flexible all year round experience to children (aged 6 weeks to 5 years) and their families.

Research suggests infants as young as one hour old are capable of **percetive** [perceptive?] thought (Meltzoff, 2006) therefore we position all our children as conceptually rich and capable of higher thinking.

We are positioned in the South-East of Edinburgh, some children are local but many children come from further afield. There is provision for 57 children. The children can attend full days, part week or full week.

At Cowgate we recognise that childhoods vary greatly as they are reconstructed and renegotiated by agents across the world, however critical to our Froebelian philosophy, we always begin with the 'child'. Our work, therefore, is *with* children, rather than *for* children. Our Froebelian principles include:

- ▶ learning succeeds best when undertaken by a searching and self-active mind;
- ▶ freedom from rote learning opens the door to understanding;
- ▶ discipline is a non-issue in a well-conceived educational programme;
- ▶ that freedom for children to explore, choose and question can result in responsible actions and it is not in opposition to order and harmony;
- ▶ all learning has to start from where the learner is;
- ▶ a sound knowledge of children is a pre-requisite for successful teaching.

Froebel's philosophical contribution adds tools and concepts relevant when 'living with our children' and working alongside them them as we live our daily lives.

'If we are constantly astonished at the child's perceptiveness, it means we do not take them seriously' (Janusz Korczak, Joseph, 1999).

Visitors to Cowgate often comment on the fresh vigorous, free and yet orderly spirit which, visitors argue, pervades the setting. Comments from visitors also include observations of the love and respect in which children and practitioners hold for each other. In agreement with the visitors findings, Cowgate is a moral space in terms of the distribution of resources, freedoms, respect and control between generations and cultures.

Cowgate is considered a place where a shared repertoire of cultural patterns is constructed and jointly reconfigured, and one that can challenge the idea of fixed nationalities and unitary selves.

When evaluating our philosophical pedagogy Cowgate practitioners were asked to comment on what being a Cowgate pedagogue meant to them as they reflected on their daily lives; the following is a selection of those quotes:

*“When reflecting on our practice at Cowgate I think of a community that is rich, heterogenous and embraces diversity. This is reflected in every aspect of life at the centre as the children are given the opportunity to make decisions and choices. As practitioners at Cowgate we support individual diversity and allow it to grow. Children are given opportunities for learning with activities that stimulate, challenge and make them reflect. It is up to the individual child whether and how to take part in them. The freedom children are given empowers them as individuals to learn from every decision made (accomplishments as well as mistakes) and to cherish their personal character and individuality.*

*Another aspect of our philosophy that I highly value is the importance given to a holistic way of learning. Literacy, numeracy, environmental education, culture and languages, together with other aspects of education are interwoven in everyday life. Children learn from every experience they take part in as well as from the environment and the community they are surrounded by. As practitioners, I think our role is to guide them in discovering and making connections but also being able to step back and give them the space to make discoveries by themselves.*

*Reading the Ten Principles of Early Childhood Education by Tina Bruce made me reflect on many aspects of our practice. Most of all, it made me reflect on the importance of having a dialogue with the children. I think it is essential that as practitioners we listen to the children’s voices and opinions. This to me means asking them open ended questions, challenge my thinking as a practitioner and a human being, and offer the children freedom to imagine, make up, pretend, not answer or express themselves physically and emotionally. When I dialogue with the children in every aspect of our life together at Cowgate, my personal and academic background, particularly my interest in reading picture books emerges. I believe children when reading are enabled to become makers of meaning to explore, freely guided by words and images, to explore and discuss culture, language, emotions and feelings” (Early Years Practitioner, Cowgate).*

*“Childhood is a precious time in each individual persons life. I believe, as practitioners, it is our role to value and celebrate this period, by ensuring our children have rich opportunities to freely discover the natural world around them.*

*Children should have time and space to play, driving their own learning through exploration and discover, away from adult expectations and pressures of ‘preparations for later life’ or the ‘next stage’. Children live in the moment and it is our role to protect this. By providing a safe, secure, warm and loving environment for our children, whereby each individual is viewed as a ‘whole person’, our children can grow and develop organically in their own unique way.*

*Community is an important part of my values and I believe children and adults can learn from one another, in a harmonious, shared space.*

*As a lover of outdoors, I greatly value the impact all outdoor experiences can have on our holistic development. Encouraging children to experiment with risk, in the natural world, is also an important factor, which can empower our children to take on new challenges, helping to build resilient, creative and free beings” (Early Years Practitioner, Cowgate, 10 January 2017).*

*“For me, the most important thing about working with children is the creation and maintenance of a safe, happy, harmonious and stimulating environment. Learning should stem from the interests of the children and staff need to be responsive, flexible and creative. All other aspects such as curriculum and assesement are of secondary importance. This approach depends on a dedicated and principled staff who are the most important*

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ingredient guided by a strong principled leadership. The health and wellbeing of our children and staff is the most important contributor to our harmonious environment. Without it there can be little effective and meaningful learning with development also being hindered. With the very young children we are often the main care giver so it is crucial that our relationship with parents is strong. Regular personal contact **following** a thorough transition period during which the child and parents are given a picture of life at cowgate and are well prepared to take advantage of its possibilities. This, I believe, is crucial in maintaining the harmonious environment previously mentioned" (Early Years Practitioner, Cowgate).

"I believe Cowgate's philosophy celebrates each individual children and adults. Providing a safe, calm, welcoming and harmonious environment encouraging everyone to be themselves.

Our Froebelian principles underpins our practice daily, enabling our children to choose how they spend their day at Cowgate. Through sensitive interaction and observation staff are able to understand each individual child and build relationships with them and their families.

Planning and providing space and experiences to encourage individual interests and learning to unfold.

All staff bring individual skills and qualities and through trust in our colleagues as skilled practitioners everyone plays a part in Cowgate's harmonious environment and rich learning experiences for our children" (Early Years Practitioners, Cowgate, 10 January, 2017).

"As an early years practitioner I value childhood as the most precious period in a child's life and recognise the integrity of childhood in its own right.

I value the child as a person who has feelings, thoughts, ideas and who has a variety of needs, e.g., physical, mental, moral and spiritual.

I believe that children should be in the centre and it is important to love, respect and listen to them. The adults should 'let the child be the child' and adults should give children the opportunity to holistic development and to be independent and unique.

Play has a very important place in childhood. Free flow play gives children opportunities to manage their thoughts, ideas and feelings. The freedom of movement and self-activity enable children to learn from doing and first hand experiences.

Based on observations from my setting I can observe children's freedom of choice. The children take responsibility to organise their time during the day by choosing different experiences which are freely available. Experiences are child-led, and choice is important. This knowledge is important to me as a practitioner because I am able to listen to children and subsequently better understand them.

The significant role of the practitioner is observation, to support and extend children's interests" (Early Years Practitioner, 10 January 2017).

#### "Unity

I value bringing people together, and this can be seen in my work at the centre;

- Opening up of the two rooms for our youngest children, not only brought together two separate groups of children but integrated two staff teams
- Valuing siblings being together on a daily basis but also remembering Magnus and Amadine who moved to sala [the big room] (missing out the middle room completely) because they were telling us that's where they wanted to be.
- Historically thinking about the coffee times I have hosted for parents with younger siblings (need to do this again).
- Hosting knit and natter for staff in the evenings.
- Organising our last curriculum evening and another this year.

#### Trust

I trust children as the experts in their own life, I value 'watching' and 'listening' to children as they go about their day. I learn from them about how I need to be, what they need from me as a manager of the 0-3 space. This is how the bullet points above came to be.

#### Freedom

'If we are constantly astonished at the child's perceptiveness, it means we do not take them seriously' (Janusz Korczak, Joseph, 1999).

*I believe I value freedom of voice and thought be that of child or adult, we may not always agree with all we come in contact with but we can still value and respect each other's contributions*

***'I have learning it is possible to work in a team that value and respect each others' practice although they may always agree' (Megan Paton, Modern Apprentice)''.***

*(SEYO, January 2017).*

*"While thinknig about my own practice and personal pedagogy, with an aim to build common values and ideas to build common values and ideas to raise the confidence of practitioners at Cowgate, I have been drawn to times in the past where I reflected upon this. The first time was in 2013 as part of the Froebel in Childhood Practice certificate. I considered this again in 2014 for the 'Meet the Team' part of Cowgate's newsletter. Opening my Reflective Journal, which began in 2012, revealed quotes that I had written on the inside cover:*

***"To climb a tree for the boy is to discover a new world"... "If we could remember our joy when in childhood we looked out beyond the cramping limits of our immediate surroundings, we should not be so insensitive to call out, 'come down, you will fall'" (Froebel, in Lilley, 1967:126).***

***"All children have the right to relax and play and join a wide range of activities" (UNCRC, 1989, Article 31).***

***"Children can't be protected from every risk associated with Play, nor should they be, for a key part of growing up is learning how to avoid or minimise hurts and accidents" (Tam Baillie [www.sccyp.org.uk/downloads](http://www.sccyp.org.uk/downloads)).***

***"What threatens the quality of life of children in Western cities is an excess of 'order' rather than an excess of 'chaos'" (Baldo Blinkert (German Sociologist), 2004, [www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/14\\_2/note1.pdf](http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/14_2/note1.pdf))***

***"Through play...he adds to his knowledge of the world...No experimental scientist has a greater thirst for new facts than an ordinary healthy active child" (Susan Isaacs (1929), in Pound, 2006:33).***

*I answered the questions posed to me in 'Meet the Team' for Cowgate's newsletter in 2014:*

- 1. What part of the Cowgate ethos do you feel most passionate about? Understanding the importance of play for a child's learning and development. I believe that Cowgate is unique in the way that it respects and trusts children to be directors of their own learning, giving them freedom for play to flow naturally between outdoors and indoors and throughout different areas of the centre.***
- 2. What's your top handy tip for treating children as creative and productive people? Recognising that the process of creating something during play, is often more rich and rewarding than the 'product'.***

*Reflecting back on my views, beliefs and philosophy, I am reminded that play was of great importance to me as a new practitioner. I believe it is just as important to me today, 3 years later. Tina Bruce (2011:24) said that for Froebel, play is the 'child's most spiritual activity'. I agree with this and, therefore, feel it is my job as a practitioner to protect play.*

*While competing a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Early Education and Childcare (2011/2012) I conducted an investigation into how outdoor*

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learning supports children to become confident individuals. I became interested in learning about pioneering theorists who embraced the importance of outdoor learning or play, in particular Froebel, and Margaret McMillan (1860- 1931) and how they have helped influence current early years practice, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), A Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), and Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). This marked the start of my Froebelian journey. Along the way, I have learned so much from being with the Cowgate community, particularly while supporting Teresa and our children at Stickland. I now know, for example, of the importance of experiencing different terrains as a young child for developing their vestibular system. I, therefore, encourage our children to play outside all year round, in all weathers.

When children are given responsibility and the freedom to become autonomous learners through play, they have opportunities for experimentation, to learn about risk, safety, creativity, problem solving and dealing with conflict. Therefore, I view the practitioner's role as one of a sensitive adult who engages in dialogue with our **childre**, listening to each child and employing a questioning approach to establish what they already know. This resonates with the image of the educator, as that of one who is flexible, reflexive and knowledgeable, supportive and has the child's interests at the centre, as outlined in *Building the Ambition* (2014: 27-75). Froebel said that observing play helps the adult to 'Begin where the learner is' (Bruce, 2011:34). Starting with what our children know supports them to persevere, promotes resilience, and strengthens their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. **Iaim** to improve my observations of our children and provide opportunities for each child to extend their learning, in a way that is meaningful for them.

*Each child is unique and a competent and active learner  
whose potential needs to be encouraged and supported.  
Each child is a curious, capable and intelligent individual.  
The child is a co-creator of knowledge who needs and wants  
interaction with other children and adults  
(The image of the child, Building the Ambition, 2014:23).*

I recognise our children as belonging to a family and a community. I aim to support Froebelian practice in an environment which *promotes interdependence as well as independence, community as well as individuality and responsibility as well as freedom*, as part of Cowgate's Harmonious Living curriculum. I believe it is essential for all children to be active members of their community. They must be visible within their community, have their voices heard and take up space on the pavement, walking at their own speed or in a buggy. I am passionate about my local community. Cowgate is part of that community. UNCRC, Article 29 states: *Education must develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage a child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.* I wish to encourage a mutual respect between our children and adults across all genders, ethnicities, nationalities, religion, social status, abilities, age and celebrate diversity. It is critical that our children are supported to make choices that cause no intentional harm to others, emotionally or physically, because they have a right to be protected from conflict, cruelty and exploitation. And because children have the right to expect a safe, healthy and clean environment (Article 24). It is my responsibility as a practitioner to support our children to protect and maintain it ([www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/)). Perhaps this is what Froebel meant by 'freedom with guidance'?

Froebel believed 'that the child needs help in sharing his or her knowledge through using paint, clay, music, dance, drama, written work, conversation, mathematics and many other means' (Bruce, 2011:36). It is part of my personal pedagogical endeavour to facilitate more musical opportunities for our children. I know that musical experiences can be spontaneous and happen anywhere. Composing new songs with children stimulates their **imaginatiob** and promotes language skills. I believe that sharing, playing instruments, dancing alone or with a group is a primal expression through which people can connect with nature, earth and humanity (Early Years Practitioner, January 2017, reviewed July 2017).

### **An analysis of the practitioner narratives reveal:**

Cowgate under 5s centre is a rich, diverse, polyglot, heteroglossic community. All the practitioners expressed a belief that a rich context for early learning rests on the relationships of our community; the social act as it occurs between children and children, children and adults, adult and other adults. This view is derived from the National Guidance on Early Learning and Childcare that advocates 'Each child is unique and a competent and active learner whose potential needs to be encouraged and supported. Each child is a curious, capable and intelligent individual' (Building the Ambition, BTA, 2014:29). All the practitioners made visible that in their view each child is a co-creator of knowledge who needs and wants interaction with other children and adults. In a similar vein to the BTA (2014) at Cowgate we place emphasis on the spirit and personality of the child.

### **Significant factors specifically affecting children's achievement in 2016-2017:**

#### **'Stickland' – our nature kindergarten**

Today, there is a great resurgence on outdoor play; amongst other things, this is in support of a desire for the children of today to experience what adults recount from their outdoor experiences when they were children. Cowgate has actively developed our nature kindergarten work over the past eight years, this experience has resulted in amazing achievements in terms of intergenerational bonds of trust, pride in work, soaring imagination and risk taking. We have wholly fulfilled this aim throughout our development, and will plan to continue to do so 2017/2018.

Of significance, this year (2017), Teresa (Bolger) our outdoors champion, negotiated our use of Bonaly Outdoor setting (named Stickland by the children) for a further five years. There is no doubt that this negotiation, which has extended the time we can use this space, has improved outcomes for our children. For example, there is the intensive transferring, expanding and refining of knowledge, skill and discovery. The opportunities the children experience on this site may be too many to add to a work of this length, but one example may be that we celebrate that our children climb trees (in real terms and metaphorically); and learn to hang precariously in the space between infinite abstract thought and finite nature, between the advantages of the aspiring heights of science and technology and the dangers they can bring; while all the time the child is consciously aware of the adult closeby who offers freedom with guidance.

Of importance, Teresa (and Donna Begg) have noted their awareness the challenges of our society, in terms of declining physical ability, increasing mental health issues, climate change and a disconnect with the natural environment caused by children having fewer opportunities to play outdoors and explore the local environment. A recent survey of our families revealed 87% of our families live in flats. This achievement, renegotiating our space at Stickland, will provide a daily opportunity for our children to spend up to 6 hours uninterrupted play in nature.

In the nature kindergarten, Teresa will often share children's experiences of affordance, or embodiment – bodies and relationships are partly inextricable, and inevitably Teresa (and Stickland colleagues) observe, hear, imagine and relate to the children's mind-body experiences.

Our 'picnic party' (named by the children) that took place at Stickland was a great success, the parents had this to say:

*"So many thanks for the lovely picnic party last Friday: a happy, happy day and so good to have the time to talk with other parents rather than rushing past as is so often the case at the beginning of the day."*

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The main topic of conversation between parents and grandparents was **ofcourse** how lucky all our children have been to benefit from the wonderful space at Stickland and your gentle and wise guidance of them there” (Parent, Cowgate Under 5s Centre).

“it was so lovely to see the place when Fraser creates so many of his stories! The freedom to roam and the confidence the children have to explore is amazing. Stickland has been a really special part of his childhood; he loves the outdoors, the freedom to roam. And Teresa is a very special person in her patience and gentle encouragement...” (Parent, Cowgate Under 5s Centre).

### Training

Two more members of staff, Katie (Bowman) and Liz (Auld), have been trained in ‘Forest School Training’. This has enabled these two practitioners to extend and build on their knowledge and improve our children’s cultural and environmental awareness. Katie and Liz have reported transformational impacts on the children (and adults, e.g., Scott) and the culture of Cowgate as a result. For example, we have developed partnerships with external organisations which have supported our historical and geographical awareness of the local environment; we have been involved in projects that have enhanced creativity beyond the arts; these experiences have built upon the children’s inherent curiosity; the children have learned about growing food, which has influenced healthier food choices, and so on. The Forest School experiences are planned as a programme of frequent, continuous and progressive experiences that build on prior learning and are fully integrated into the curriculum. This training has resulted in higher educational attainment of our children as a result of much more knowledgeable practitioners.

### Acknowledgement of Our Work

We have also been nominated for the Nancy Ovens for Play Award. The Nancy Ovens trust is a Charity that works with support from the Scottish Government to recognise, develop and emphasise the importance of Play in the development of children. It makes the Annual Scottish Play Awards that recognises best practice in Play in four key areas, Play at Home, Play at Nursery, Play in the Community and Positive Support for Play. We will receive a visitor from the trust on 4 August 2017, and thereafter we will know if we have been successful.

### Website

We successfully launched our new website (May 2017), [www.cowgateunder5scentre.co.uk](http://www.cowgateunder5scentre.co.uk). (Much thanks must go to Sarah (Burton) for this accomplishment). This is now a much more interactive site, for example, we now invite parents and practitioners to regularly blog, and we have a Cowgate twitter account.

## Standards and Quality Report

### Leadership and Management

<p><b>Themes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Self-evaluation for self-improvement</li> <li>1.2 Leadership of learning</li> <li><b>1.3 Leadership of change</b></li> <li>1.4 Leadership and management of staff</li> <li>1.5 Management of resources to promote equity</li> </ul>	<p><b>National Improvement Framework (NIF) Priorities</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.</li> <li>2. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.</li> <li>3. Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing.</li> <li>4. Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people</li> </ol>	 <p style="text-align: right;"><b>NIF Drivers</b></p>
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**How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?**

Please ensure you report on Q11.3 and give a brief outline of the progress/impact of any priority from last session relevant to this section.

*'It is through narrative that we create and re-create selfhood, and self is a product of our telling and re-telling. We are, from the start, expressions of our culture. Culture is replete with alternative narratives about what the self is or might be' (Bruner, 2002:86).*

Over the past year we have focused on our observations of children. As a team we had struggled with and puzzled over the dilemmas and tensions of *tracking* children's learning. *Tracking* children's learning went against our beliefs and practice that children constructed their own opportunities to learn, made their own connections from one place to another and recognised the learning journey they were on themselves and did not necessarily need adults to point this out to them (Scott Craig, EYP, May, 2017); furthermore that children were able to explore their understandings in a range of increasingly complex ways.

One of our major concerns was that we wanted to capture difficult- to –measure skills and dispositions such as kindness and responsibility and dialogue, as well as agency, emotional development, curiosity and the resilience to persevere with difficult tasks. The difficult-to-measure dispositions, we argued, benefited, not only for the individual child but of the collective well-being of the Cowgate community. In our recording we were also keen to include the construction and editing of children's identities and off new possibilities for durable, relocatable dispositions that inscribe the things to do or not to do.

Furthermore, one of our fundamental issues concerned the increased institutionalised recording of children's achievements in the curricula areas that focused on predetermined and standardised outcomes and the, subsequent, consequences for assessment practice. We were keen to research alternative possibilities that captured the child's dispositional and relational aspects of their learning. We began exploring different ways to record children's learning.

Critically, we were interested in the role of narrative observations where adults and children telling and re-telling stories of learning and competence, reflecting on the past and planning for the future (the children had been doing this in Stickland (our nature kindergarten) for some time, we wanted to bring this into the Cowgate setting.

Over the past year we have therefore, and bearing in mind knowledge is never whole or complete and is always open to revision, we have:

- Introduced narrative observation techniques
- All practitioners have attended training (appendix 3)
- And we have applied for research funding to pursue a different system for collecting observations (full proposal appendix 4 – summary offered below):

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Project summary:

“The Life Stories project is a small piece of action research, to be undertaken by practitioners at the Cowgate Under 5s Centre, a Froebelian nursery in Edinburgh...The research seeks to address a problem that has arisen at the nursery, but which has wide relevance to the early childhood sector. A public investment into Scottish early learning and childcare (ELC) increases, so does the requirement to observe, assess, and ‘track’ young children’s learning against curricular outcomes. Cowgate Under 5s is currently using an online “learning journal” tool, which replaced the previous, paper-based system of documentation. Our proposed research project would investigate the views of children, families, and staff about the current system, and test ways to bring it into harmony with Froebelian principles.

Some key issues are: the online learning journal system compartmentalises curriculum areas. Children are assessed against simplistic ‘red, amber, and green’ levels of learning. These standardised tracking measures leave no room for a holistic view of development. Most of the documentation in the online journals is being done *about* children, not *with* children. Children do not have free access to the online learning journals, and are rarely consulted about what is being added to the journals by adults.

The requirement for some form of ‘tracking’ is not going away. Therefore, we feel it is urgent to assess our current practice, and scope potential for developing an alternative, in keeping with Froebelian principles. We envision the learning from this project will be relevant and useful for the broader early childhood sector, and have written our knowledge exchange and impact activities accordingly.”

In summary – our journey to critically question our practice has resulted in us challenging the current system of observation; and has encouraged us to create our own, by including the children (and their families) voices in the process.

**Next Steps: (these will link to what goes into your Improvement Plan for 2017-18)**

- Be more critically aware of or assumptions, which may inform but may also, distort our observations.
- Answer the question ‘What do children, parents and staff think is important in how we document children’s experiences at nursery?’
- Experiment creatively with documentation, grounded in Froebelian principles.
- To engage in knowledge exchange and dialogue about the learning from the project, in both academic and practice networks, locally, nationally and internationally.

**Learning Provision**

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<p><b>Themes</b></p> <p>2.1 Safeguarding and child protection</p> <p>2.2 Curriculum</p> <p><b>2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment</b></p> <p>2.4 Personalised support</p> <p>2.5 Family learning</p> <p>2.6 Transitions</p> <p>2.7 Partnerships</p>	<p><b>National Improvement Framework (NIF) Priorities</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.</li> <li>2. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.</li> <li>3. Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing.</li> <li>4. Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people</li> </ol>	 <p><b>NIF Drivers</b></p>
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**How good is the quality of care and learning we offer?**

Please ensure you report on QI 2.3 and give a brief outline of the progress/impact of any priority from last session relevant to this section.

High quality education and care is critical for young children (0-3) (as well as critical for older children) however, often our youngest children can be overlooked and misappropriated in terms of learning, teaching and assessment. To answer the question 'How good is the quality of care and learning we offer?' we have chosen to report on our youngest children.

The following is presented in three parts, background, intersubjective, implicit and embodied knowledge; children becoming increasing vocal; infant transitions.

*Background*

The birth-three practitioners offer a responsive curriculum that celebrates children's strengths and interests.

*Intersubjective, implicit and embodied knowledge*

We have long been concerned whether our youngest children's intersubjective and implicit and embodied knowledge was appreciated compared to more measurable academic knowledge communicated by words – especially at a time when measurements seem to be a growing issue in several parts of the educational and political debate. Recent research in neurology suggests, this is the most important age in the lifespan in relation to brain development, to learning and to emotional well-being.

At a recent training event (in-service day, May 2017) the birth – three practitioners commented that their primary pedagogical responsibility was to 'tune into' to the language (verbal and non-verbal) of children. In our birth – three space the practitioners highlighted non-verbal language initiations to be of significant pedagogical significance and a central source of intersubjectivity

As previously discussed, over the past year birth – three practitioners, who view it as a moral obligation to understand more about the youngest members of Cowgate society, have been exploring how they capture the progress and increasing complexity of our youngest members of the Cowgate community, and when they do gather observations, they have been asking themselves 'how do they make sense of what they are capturing?'; they have been recording children's dispositions as some of the children were non-verbal the practitioners were interested in notions of intersubjectivity and bodily communication. While observing the young children, the practitioners thought it important to capture the children as knowledgeable beings without them being able to communicate their understanding verbally. Therefore the practitioners engaged young children in learning aesthetic movements – for example Kate (Bowman) (EYP) and Scott (Craig) (EYP) have been involving the very young children in active outdoor experiences, discussed above (please see significant factors). Both Kate and Scott, skilfully, enabled the children to become aware of their own and each other's movements, these dimensions, it is argued by Kate and Scott, are of central importance in developing children's skills further.

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### *Children becoming increasing vocal*

Over the past year our children have been exposed to a wide range of musical experiences. One of the practitioners, Emma (Clarkson) has created / initiated many diverse (daily) encounters with music; building on children's interests and capabilities. Here, the children learn to listen, understand, appreciate, and play music – this is achieved through Emma's guidance and through the children's effort. Emma has (literally) enabled our youngest children to play a wide range of musical instruments of their choice. Consequently, it is not unusual to be greeted by a child, not quite two years old, playing a ukulele first thing in the morning. Emma has amply documented the extensive competency of our children in their process of musical elements and ability to perform in musical ways. For example, our children spontaneously exhibit music behaviours, using music in their play and communication, composing songs, and inventing musical notations. Music takes place both indoors and outdoors. In music (and other rich experiences) Emma responds sensitively to each child's expressions, e.g., Emma invites the children to select which key they wish to sing in. The children tend to respond by answering 'A' or 'D', as they competently discriminate between two notes. The children can also note the contour or pitches of melodies. They can comprehend rhythm. None of the respondents are yet three years old. Emma has sensitively added to the young children's experiences, deepening her knowledge of the little musician's capabilities as they progress. The music sessions, facilitated by Emma, are deeply social events in the lives of the children (and practitioners), these events are not viewed as an optional part of our curriculum but as an essential component. Emma, weekly, takes the children and their instruments to Dunbar's Close – supporting the children's visibility in the local community, and developing the young children's historical and geographical awareness of the local environment. What Emma does has clear links to literacy development as well as supporting children's development of historical knowledge in which the centre is located. We know that music experiences have the ability to facilitate language acquisition, reading readiness, and general intellectual development; we know the opportunities, that Emma is offering our children, enhances creativity, promotes social development, personality adjustment and self-worth (Thank you to Karen for providing the details of this).

Emma also supports children's language acquisition by offering 'mind-mapping' sessions, Emma invites the children to contribute to questions such as 'What does spring / summer/ autumn/ winter mean to you?' 'What does Christmas mean to you?' Here, in so doing Emma sustains a cultural climate which values children's opinion; Emma demonstrates a commitment to seeking the views of children, thereby creating a democratic playroom – which is respectful and inclusive of all the children. Emma uses imaginative thinking in response to the views and experiences of our youngest members – she shares the contributions from our youngest participants with other team members and other adults (e.g., parents) to ensure that the youngest members of the Cowgate community are heard (Thanks again to Karen for this addition).

### *Transitions*

Worldwide recognition of the significance of the early childhood years for later development and wellbeing and the importance of investing in high quality early childhood education has promoted a great deal of interest in transitions. How do we conceptualise a positive or effective transition? Is it a seamless transition, or is there some value in children experiencing the excitement and challenge of what transitions can bring? Would an effective transition be an invisible transition, where the boundaries are blurred? What are the strengths and weaknesses of such a position? Is an effective transition more likely to be one where children, families and educators and communities mark and recognise the changes that occur? How can we promote both continuity and change at times of transition? What evidence should we seek regarding the success or otherwise of particular strategies for transition? Should this evidence differ depending on the cultural context? Who should decide? These are some of the questions we have been asking ourselves with regards to how children transition.

Karen (SEYO) has taken on the role of 'Transition Champion' to ensure that the quality of transitions for birth – three children are effective; in so doing Karen makes certain that the youngest children in our community have key people who know the children well. This means that curriculum and interactions with the young children will continue to be responsive and relationships will continue to be warm and nurturing.

A priority for Karen (and Lian) is that the room teams are consistent; this assists in the children developing relationships of trust and creates a sense of belonging.

During 2016 / 2017 Karen has been working on the key person role - the key person is a feature throughout the centre. The key person is responsible for overseeing the child's settling, offering feedback to the family and documentation of the child's learning.

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Additionally, as transition champion, Karen has also taken responsibility for children moving between spaces, ensuring that this process moves at the speed of the child. Here there is an emphasis on flexibility and continuity.

### *International Infant Transition Project*

Lian and Lynn are also involved in a five year 'International Infant Transition Project'. We believe this is a very good topic to research considering the current early years landscape. There is incomplete knowledge available on the transition of young children (infants).

To date we have:

- Decide on our purposes, ideas and questions:

The overarching questions are:

1. What are the *intersubjective* experiences of infants in their transitions into and through ECEC? How do they go and transform, through relations and across space and time?
2. In what ways do *dialogues* co-construct the transition events-of-being in diverse cultural contexts?
3. What is the impact of these dialogues on the (perceived / espoused?) *identit[es]* of young [children]?

- We have explored how we are going to manage the project (e.g., how we will manage the project, manage our time,). We have sought permission from CEC and we have sought and achieved ethical approval.
- We have explored what other people have done about this – and discovered there is little (or no) research on infant transitions.
- We have decided on the mosaic approach as a methodological approach
- We have decided on a design frame.
- We have discussed using discourse analysis to analyse the data
- We have identified a child and family (due to commence placement October 2017);
- We have received training on how to code observations of infant (Finland, July 2017).

Progress of this project will continue to be reported in the SQIP on an annual basis.

### **Next Steps: (these will link to what goes into your Improvement Plan for 2017-18)**

- Build upon musical experiences
- Karen will create and disseminate a questionnaire to explore our current transition process, to explore how children themselves experience the

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transition, as well as families, i.e., the research will represent a chorus of voices (September 2017)

- Karen is also interested in gaining knowledge of parents' views about how young children transition from home to the centre.
- Lian and Lynn report on progress of the 'Infant Transition Research Project'.

## Success and Achievements

<p><b>Themes</b></p> <p><b>3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion</b></p> <p><b>3.2 Securing children’s progress</b></p> <p><b>3.3 Creativity and skills for life</b></p>	<p><b>National Improvement Framework (NIF) Priorities</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.</li> <li>2. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.</li> <li>3. Improvement in children and young people’s health and wellbeing.</li> <li>4. Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people</li> </ol>	 <p style="text-align: right;"><b>NIF Drivers</b></p>
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### How good are we at ensuring the best possible start for all our children?

Please ensure you report on QIs 3.1 and 3.2 and give a brief outline of the progress/impact of any priority from last session relevant to this section.

Well-being is currently noted in the National Improvement Framework as a priority, what is argued here is the well-being benefit to the child of playing outdoors. During our in-service day practitioners spoke of their conviction that outdoor learning offers something distinct and enriches the curriculum delivered indoors. Without a strong motivation for offering outdoor contexts the potential could be diminished. In order to sustain our outdoor experiences we need to ‘juggle’ our staffing, almost daily. Our team have shown great willingness and strong determination to overcome obstacles that have emerged from staffing limitations.

We have continually built on our outdoor experiences, whether it is in the nursery garden, forest school experiences or our (well-established) nature kindergarten. To improve our nursery garden we are currently exploring funding opportunities to re-landscape our nursery garden; we have fundraised through crocheting blankets to raise funds for forest school equipment and this year we have restored our yurt.

We believe children learn in a different way outdoors because of the experiential nature of learning, for example, you can bring nature indoors, but outdoors the experience for the child is more authentic and grounded in reality and therefore more meaningful; and for many children it is more enjoyable and engaging. Therefore, learning *in* nature and not simply *about* nature offers children practical, hands-on opportunities that support how children acquire knowledge in terms of cognition. Our children arrive at the setting each morning, but are always given a choice on whether to play indoors / outdoors, go for a local trip, go to forest School / Stickland – children therefore learn very quickly that there is life beyond the setting. The children in our outdoor spaces set their own agenda, climb, cook, paddle, reflect, contemplate etc. Practitioners are aware of the children’s emotional mediated personal responses to nature; each child is unique in the way they respond to it.

We later gathered quotes from the children. Children spoke of and demonstrated their enthusiasm in and for the outdoors:

ENTER QUOTES HERE FROM THE CHILDREN

Teresa (our outdoor champion) often talks of our children at the nature kindergarten ‘mapping the site’ – the children have particular social relations with the landscape, they know it well as it transcends time and space, despite that the landscape is a 26 acre wild site that is constantly changing, the children know it, respect it and understand it as it changes and alters through the seasons. In this ever changing landscape children can be conceptually challenged as children have to rethink their conception of something.

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Through careful observation the practitioners report on the children's embodiment, i.e., the children's bodies often inform the adults about what the child is learning, as the child engages with nature. Reported benefits from practitioners include: richer imaginative play, increased physical activity, calmer more focused play and positive social interactions. The observed positive social interactions can develop a sense of community participation and set our children on a path of strong participation and civic responsibility, we claim this as we observe more able children, who have lots of experience of the site, looking out for less able children who have had less experience of the site. Children, therefore learn to develop interpersonal competencies, leadership skills, and self-confidence.

There is no doubt that our children's well-being is greatly enhanced by their outdoor experiences. However, we have two major concerns, one being in order to ensure the sustainability of Stickland we need to review our staffing, and the second concern is related to 'tracking' our children, if outdoor learning is truly to become a more integrated mode of learning in the early years there needs to be closer congruence between the purpose of education and the way in which success is evaluated.

**Next Steps: (these will link to what goes into your Improvement Plan for 2017-18)**

- Approach the SEYM to ask for a review of staffing in order to support 'Stickland'.
- Submit a successful application for funding to re-landscape the nursery garden.
- Challenge the purpose of outdoor education and the way in which success is evaluated (research project)

**Self Evaluation 2016 – 2017**

	<b>Quality Indicator</b> What is our capacity for continuous improvement?	<b>Centre Self – Evaluation 2016 – 17</b> (Using the six point scale)	<b>HMIe Inspection Date and Evaluations</b>	<b>Follow through (if applicable)</b>
1.3	Leadership Of Change	6	March 2013	N/A
2.3	Learning, Teaching And Assessment	6	March 2013	N/A
3.1	Ensuring Wellbeing, Equity And Inclusion	6	March 2013	N/A
3.2	Securing Children’s Progress	6	March 2013	N/A
	Centre’s chosen QI	1.1 (Improvements in Performance)		
	Centre’s chosen QI	2.1 (Children’s Experiences)		

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## 2017 – 2021 Centre Self Evaluation Working Plan for QI Engagement - Key Areas for Centre Improvement

QI		2017 - 2018	2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021	Comments
1.1	Self-Evaluation for Self-Improvement					
1.2	Leadership of Learning					
<b>1.3</b>	<b>Leadership of Change</b>	✓				
1.4	Leadership and Management of Practitioners					
1.5	Management of Resources To Promote Equity					
	<b>Leadership And Management Overall</b>					
2.1	Safeguarding and Child Protection					
2.2	Curriculum					
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Learning, Teaching and Assessment</b>	✓				
2.4	Personalised Support					
2.5	Family Learning					
2.6	Transitions					
2.7	Partnerships					
	<b>Learning Provision Overall</b>					
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Ensuring Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion</b>	✓				
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Securing Children’s Progress</b>	✓				
3.3	Developing Creativity and Skills for Life and Learning					
	<b>Successes and Achievements Overall</b>					

**Centre  
Improvement**

**Plan**

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## Leadership and Management

How good is our leadership and approach to improvement?

<p><b>Themes</b></p> <p><b>1.1 Self-evaluation for self-improvement</b></p> <p>1.2 Leadership of learning</p> <p><b>1.3 Leadership of change</b></p> <p>1.4 Leadership and management of staff</p> <p>1.5 Management of resources to promote equity</p>	<p><b>National Improvement Framework (NIF) Priorities</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.</li> <li>2. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.</li> <li>3. Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing.</li> <li>4. Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people</li> </ol>	 <p><b>NIF Drivers</b></p>
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- Answer the question 'What do children, parents and staff think is important in how we document children's experiences at nursery?'
- Experiment creatively with documentation, grounded in Froebelian principles.

**Overall Responsibility: Lynn McNair**

**Outcome and impact on learners:**

- adults, when capturing children's learning will retain the possibility for alteration and resist final analysis of the child. Thus the children will be interpreted as ambiguous and elusive.
- children will be actively involved in the process
- children will benefit from well organised accessible resources
- children will be successful learners
- children will become independent learners
- children will demonstrate high levels of self-esteem
- children's communication skills will become enhanced
- children will demonstrate that they are effective contributors
- children will be highly motivated and eager participants of their learning
- children will experience personalisation and choice in their learning
- children will demonstrate that they are successful, confident and responsible
- children will be able to make informed decisions about their learning
- children will consider themselves appropriately consulted and their opinions heard.

Tasks	By Whom	Timescale	Resources	Progress/Impact of task
Early Years Practitioners will write their observations in the first person to the child.	All staff	August 2017	Time, Ipad	
Research will gather children, parents and practitioner views on best ways to capture children's life stories.	Lynn – lead researcher	November 2017	Time	

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## Learning provision

How good is the quality of the care and learning we offer?

### Themes

- 2.1 Safeguarding and child protection
- 2.2 Curriculum
- 2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment**
- 2.4 Personalised support
- 2.5 Family learning
- 2.6 Transitions
- 2.7 Partnerships

### National Improvement Framework (NIF) Priorities

1. Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.
2. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.
3. Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing.
4. Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people



**NIF Drivers**

- Lian and Lynn report on progress of the 'Infant Transition Research Project'.

### Overall Responsibility: Lynn

#### Outcome and impact on learners:

- children will feel secure and supported
- children will communicate their thoughts, needs and ideas and choose who they wish to spend their time with
- children will further develop their autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency
- children will develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities
- children will learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect
- children will build secure attachments throughout the centre
- children will have a sense of belonging
- children will communicate their needs
- children will maintain respectful, trusting relationships with other children and practitioners
- children will demonstrate increasing awareness of the needs and rights of others
- children will increasingly co-operate and work collaboratively with others
- children will demonstrate an increased capacity of self-regulation
- children will approach new safe situations with confidence
- children will feel recognised and respected for who they are
- children will reflect on their actions and consider the consequences for others.

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Tasks	By Whom	Timescale	Resources	Progress/Impact of task
<p>Observations and coding (discussions)/ Uploading of data</p> <p>Data analysis</p>	<p>Lian (Emma)</p> <p>Lynn</p>	<p>Five year project, commences October.</p> <p>October -</p>	<p>Time, Practitioner Cover.</p>	

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## Successes and achievements

How good are we at ensuring the best possible outcomes for all our children?

### Themes

**3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion**

**3.2 Securing children's progress**

**3.3 Creativity and skills for life**

### National Improvement Framework (NIF) Priorities

1. Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.
2. Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.
3. Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing.
4. Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people



**NIF Drivers**

- **Priority:** Submit a successful application for funding to re-landscape the nursery garden.

### Overall Responsibility: Sarah

#### Outcome and impact on learners:

- children will be confident, motivated and enthusiastic learners
- children will be creative and use their imagination, to tell stories, explore and discover new things in the outdoors
- children will demonstrate high levels of stamina
- children will demonstrate high levels of resistance and will be able to sustain focus for extended periods of time to complete their chosen experience
- children will explore, infer, predict and hypothesise in order to develop an increased understanding of the interdependence between land, people, plants and animals
- children will communicate their thoughts, needs and ideas very articulately and take a lead in organising rules and roles in imaginary games
- children will be confident making marks and drawings using what they find in the environment
- children will use nature very well to develop mathematical concepts in a practical way
- children will recognise simple shapes and patterns in the natural environment
- children will show a growing appreciation and care for natural environments
- children will develop an awareness of the impact of human activity on environments and the interdependence of living things
- children will show a great deal of respect for living things
- children will learn and achieve well
- children will learn hygiene practices
- children will be familiar with health and safety issues and keeping the environment safe for all
- children will demonstrate excellent levels of independence in their play
- children will self-assess risks and be eager to challenge themselves

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- children will be confident in using the outdoors and effectively take forward their own ideas
- children will be sensitive to, and relish, weather and seasonal change.

Tasks	By Whom	Timescale	Resources	Progress/Impact of task
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather quotations</li> <li>• Gather perspectives from the Cowgate community.</li> <li>• Complete application</li> </ul>	<p>Sarah</p> <p>All staff</p> <p>Sarah</p>	<p>June –</p> <p>August –</p> <p>August / September</p>	<p>Time</p>	

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## National Improvement Drivers



### The six-point scale

Level 6	excellent	outstanding or sector leading
Level 5	very good	major strengths
Level 4	good	important strengths with areas for improvement
Level 3	satisfactory	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Level 2	weak	important weaknesses
Level 1	unsatisfactory	major weaknesses

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